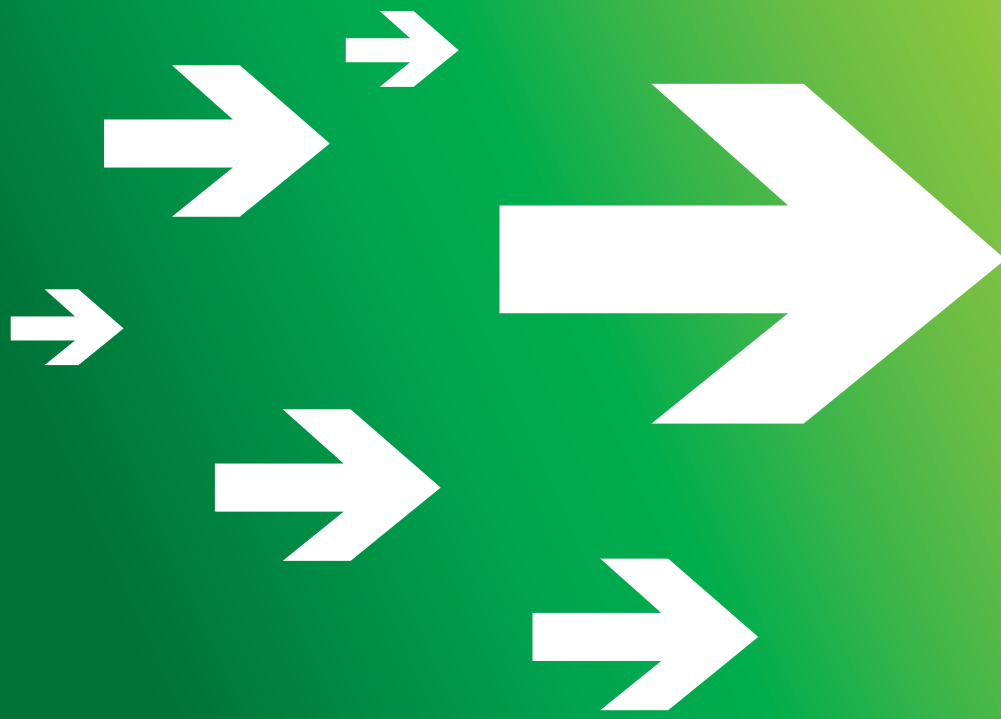
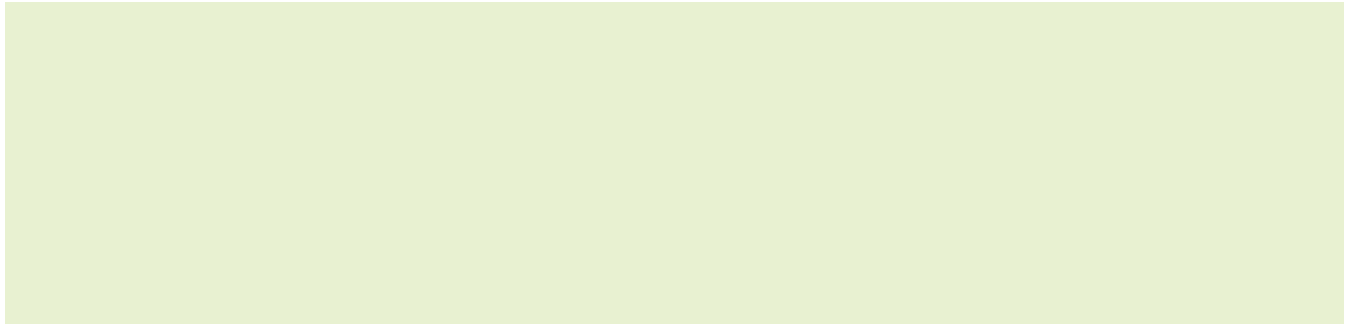




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|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Summary .....   | 5         |
| <b>Part 1</b> Surveying the Landscape .....             | 6         |
| Facing an uncertain future .....                        | 6         |
| <br>  |           |
| <b>Part 2</b> Preparing to step out from lockdown ..... | 7         |
| Who makes the decision to re-open? .....                | 7         |
| Who should come to our church buildings? .....          | 8         |
| To open for worship, or not to open? .....              | 9         |
| Planning the use of space .....                         | <b>10</b> |
| Dealing with th   |           |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Junior Church vs All-age/Intergenerational .....            | 16 |
| Worshipping and undertaking other activities outdoors ..... | 16 |
| Resuming other church activities .....                      | 17 |
| Church activities in the church building .....              | 17 |
| Resuming lettings .....                                     | 17 |

This document updates and replace “Ready for the New Normal.” It has been prepared by the Synod Moderators to ref ect the changes about to take place as coronavirus lockdown restrictions are eased and it becomes possible for places of worship to re-open. To do this, we MUST plan our course of action.

Before any church may re-open for private prayer, public worship and other activities, you MUST:

- Carry out a Covid-19 Risk Assessment (the URC have produced an updated template to help you do this.)
- Develop cleaning, hand-washing and hygiene procedures
- Maintain appropriate physical distancing measures for the foreseeable future
- Put in place measures to manage virus transmission risks especially where 2 metre distancing cannot be maintained, and where reduced distancing is allowed by government regulation.

Take steps to show your duty of care to ministers, elders, employees, volunteers, members, associates and members of the wider public. We cannot police everyone’s actions but we can take responsibility for our own. For those that remain at greater risk

We know something now of the impact that Coronavirus has had on our churches, that is the people who are our churches. We know too that some have been able to weather the storm better than others. Some congregations have been hit hard by the loss of loved ones.

We have a significant proportion in our fellowships who will need to exercise significant care against the virus for a long time to come, because the risks they face if they were to become infected are greater than for others who might catch the disease. Be careful to think about how our actions might have a significant impact on those who are more vulnerable.

Almost all of our churches are anxious about how they will continue to pay the bills, after many months of reduced income from letting income and in many cases members' giving.

Where key members of our fellowships have died or will be unable to pick up the same level of involvement, we know that a number of churches that were already feeling that they were at the edge may find that they will have to face the reality of closing.


It is important that we acknowledge all of these challenges and threats, and deal with them honestly. Many of these situations will bring us into hard conversations that we would each rather avoid. Because the world has changed, we cannot avoid them, and it is going to be healthier for everyone concerned to face up to this. Do ask for help!

Your Synod officers may well be able to help you with understanding your next steps

share in the ministry of pastoral care. We have seen how people have responded with

with government requirements. Where churches are in a group or share ministry with others, it is likely that different congregations will be ready to open at different times. There can be no suggestion that, "because another church served by our minister is re-opening, then so must (or may) we," or "She has started doing services for them so she can start them for us too." The risks and mitigations associated with each local church must be assessed separately.

For some of our number, any decision to delay re-opening will cause additional distress and may have an adverse effect on their mental health. This will make them more vulnerable in safeguarding terms, and Elders and others need to understand how to support people in this position. It will help to consult as widely as possible with your church community about a timetable for re-opening safely so that you can understand the felt needs of everyone and make an informed choice. Be careful, though, not simply to listen to the loudest voices, whether they are urging restraint or pushing for the earliest possible re-opening. Weigh the full range of opinion as you evaluate risk and support. Pay particular attention to the pastoral care of those who might be fearful or unable to resume face-to-face gatherings, or who feel they are getting "left behind" if the church starts to meet again without them.

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Since "New Normal" was published, greater clarity has emerged about those who should be "shielded," and those who needed to be especially careful because they are at increased risk from Coronavirus. Shielding requirements will be eased for everyone in the coming weeks, but increases in the infection rate

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Are there those for whom current advice means they should not be mixing in large groups? Do

One church is exploring the likelihood that the pre-recorded and streamed service will remain the main act of worship, and those that wish to and are able to, will be able to gather in the church building when they re-open and share in that online service as a group.

Another church has been able to provide low-cost computer tablets to a number of people who do not have computers and broadband connection at home so that they can







Take a walk around the building and make sure that it all still looks secure. If there is evidence of a break-in, exercise caution and consider whether the police should be called. In any case, notify your insurance company and Trust Officer.





can you issue gloves (disposable or “marigolds”) for washing up? Don’t put biscuits on a plate for a succession of fingers to touch, and definitely don’t put them back into a tin for



Because of the risk of virus transmission, passing the plate along rows cannot be your practice for the foreseeable future. Encourage bank standing orders/transfers. Consider a basket at the back of church for people to leave their gifts as they enter (but be mindful of security.) Consider investing in a contactless machine for giving by card. Anyone handling cash should wear gloves for counting and banking. Remember to include those gifts offered through bank transfers in the prayer of dedication. See the guidance leaflet "[\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_](#)" from URC Communications for greater detail.



For churches blessed with children amongst their number, don't assume that your leaders/workers will be ready to resume their previous activities. How will you protect both child and adult from transmitting the virus? Is the room large enough to allow appropriate distancing for the children?







The Basis of Union requires the Church Meeting to meet “at least once per quarter” (Basis 2.(1)). However, the charity regulators (Charity Commission in England and Wales, OSCR in Scotland and equivalents in the island jurisdictions), and the URC, accept that during the pandemic members’ meetings like this cannot take place. Followguid







How did the restrictions affect your engagement with the community around us? What was the story for your buildings and was there a different story for the engagement of members with neighbours and

those in need? What have you learned about the way you connect with people who

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Another positive outcome of the lockdown was the improvements in our environment as traffic reduced dramatically. With hindsight, will we see this just as a blip – an interruption to business as normal that we are longing to get past? Or might we find ways to tread more lightly on God’s earth? Zoom and other video-conferencing platforms surely cannot replace face-to-face meetings forever. The non-verbal clues are often missing and the free-flow exchange of ideas is more difficult in online encounters. As so many have learned how to meet online, though, we should be looking for opportunities to avoid the greenhouse gas emissions and congestion of physical travel, as well as the costliness in time. In terms of good governance, if we want to use video conferencing in the councils of our church then we must ensure that all participants can see and hear each other. The challenge of holding a Church Meeting by Zoom, for example, is therefore immediately obvious. But it may be possible to use technology to facilitate Elders’ meetings in some places, or committee and task groups. If a number of people are able to physically gather and some participants join the meeting, we can still

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obviously takes a regular commitment for a church member to open doors to let tenants in, but it does provide better security rather than issuing keys to outside bodies, as well as giving opportunities to strengthen relationships, develop communication and build community. If that isn't the right way forwards for your church, is there something you can do to improve the welcome that user groups experience, rather than cold rooms and a set of colder notices about stacking chairs, turning lights off and leaving the room clean? How will you support and value the groups coming into your building, rather than simply collecting money from them? You might even have church members that would like to join the user groups for exercise, education or friendship – when was the last time that was discussed in your church meeting or notice sheet?

Recognising the financial dependence on letting income, are there user groups that have been problematic and for whom this provides an opportunity to end or re-negotiate their use? Have you got an up-to-date written agreement, with clear terms and conditions of use for every user group? Do not simply re-admit all previous users into the building without checking with the Synod Office for an appropriate standardised form of agreement that give the local church and the trustees of the building an appropriate level of protection. Are there issues of physical security and safeguarding that need to be reviewed and updated? Do the user groups carry their own public liability as they should? Do they operate their own health and safety and safeguarding policies, or are they aware of, and compliant with, the church's policies? Our new normal must be built around doing things well. That does not mean that we submerge ourselves in an avalanche of bureaucracy. It does mean that we do \_\_\_ things to the glory of God, and that means cutting corners must not be part of our new way of working.

Whatever changes we are making in our routines and practices, we will do well to communicate them. Having a well-maintained web site and/or active social media presence ought to be a significant priority for every church at this stage in the 21st century. If you are offering online worship and devotional material, be sure to highlight how it can be accessed. Explain what to expect in terms of the hygiene and distancing requirements.





As a community of Christian disciples, we are concerned about the safety of all those who contribute and take part in our shared life. Some are employed or paid stipends as office holders, many are volunteers, more are participants. We are expected to have particular responsibilities towards those we pay, but others may also value guidance about the choices involved in returning to activities in church buildings.

We are familiar with risks that have been around for a while, but COVID-19 is a new risk and we are still learning about who may be affected most. Already we know that certain groups of people are at greater risk than others. The Government has categorised some people into groups:

- the \_\_\_\_\_ . The guidance for people who fall into this group may be different in \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and other jurisdictions, but the serious consequences of catching COVID-19 are the same. We assume they will still be cautious about gathering indoors with people from a number of households.
- the \_\_\_\_\_ , which includes all people over 70 and those with underlying health conditions.

Other groups have also been identified as more evidence about the effects of the virus is gathered. We may not know which individuals will catch COVID-19, but we can use some of the information about the risk of complications to help with the conversations people will have about returning to gatherings. At the time of writing it is not clear whether surviving the virus gives immunity or for how long such immunity might last.

As well as trying to assess the risks of catching the virus and the appropriate action to take, we recognise that our attitude to risk varies: the risk that one person may be willing to take is too much for another. Living with someone who is at higher risk, affects the risks other household members are willing to take. When we are talking about gathering together, we need to be sensitive to these variations. When we are coping with new risks we may also be more sensitised to them in comparison to risks that we have coped with for many years. However, government policy is related to the general risk for the population which goes down as the number of the people with the virus goes down, whilst the potential impact of catching the virus for a vulnerable individual remains the same until there are additional treatments and a vaccine.

and ministers and volunteers have been involved in this work. The URC so far has echoed Government advice that ministers should work from home where possible. As restrictions change, it is time for ministers, volunteers and participants to consider their risks.

Catching the virus depends on the amount of virus you are exposed and for how long, and the risk of that happening during any activity depends on the circumstances. There is evidence about which groups are at risk of more serious consequences if they do have COVID-19 disease.

The assessment 'tool' below helps you to see how different risk factors may combine to give serious health complications should you catch the COVID-19 virus. It does not include the factors that may make you clinically extremely vulnerable, where you should be following the guidance for those who are 'shielding'. It includes the factors where there is significant statistical evidence but does not include any rarer conditions which you may have, so this only offers a starting point. You may want to discuss the results with your doctor or with those who have expectations about your involvement with church life.

This should be read alongside the URC's "Emerging into the 'New Normal'" which includes guidance about minimising risks in the church context, and other government or local advice about staying safe. We are not claiming medical expertise in sharing this way of scoring

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
|  | Angina, previous heart attack, stroke or cardiac intervention       | 1 |
|  | Heart Failure   | 2 |
|  | Asthma  | 1 |
|  | Non-asthma chronic pulmonary disease                                | 2 |
|  | Either of the above requiring oral corticosteroids in the last year | 1 |
|  | Active malignancy   | 3 |
|  | Malignancy in remission   | 1 |
|  | Active treated conditions   | 2 |
|  | Any indication  | 2 |
|  |   |   |

A \_\_\_\_\_, but you should still be following the guidance for staying safe.

A \_\_\_\_\_ and you should consider ways of reducing your risk by taking additional precautions or avoiding some activities.

A \_\_\_\_\_ and indicates that you should continue to work or participate in church life from your home.

The scoring is based on a an \_\_\_\_\_ from the \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

