



# St John's Methodist Church Horwich

## Coronavirus (COVID -19)

### Church Premises Reopening Policy

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**Approved by:** The Church Council, as Managing Trustees

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# **St John's Methodist Church Horwich**

## **Coronavirus (COVID -19)**

### **Church Premises Reopening Policy**

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## 1.0 Introduction

- (i) From 4 July 2020, places for communal worship and community use have been allowed to reopen during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, subject to a number of measures being put into place to safeguard attendees from the risk of infection.
- (ii) Likewise, certain activities that have traditionally taken place at St John's are also now permitted, including baptisms, marriages, and funerals.
- (iii) Gatherings of more than 2 households are permitted in places of worship and their surrounding premises. However, for public health reasons, restrictions have been placed on the number of people who may attend at any one time. These limits are based on the maintenance of social distancing (2 metres apart) and on the current infection rate (R rate).
- (iv) The decision about when and how to reopen our premises will be made by the Church Council as Managing Trustees. **We are NOT compelled to re-open our building and will do so only when it is deemed safe to do so.** Nevertheless, in order to be prepared, a Re-opening Group has been tasked with ensuring that the building is COVID-19 secure and that all Public Health England and NHS rules have been put into place. This work has now been completed and the building is safe to re-open when the Managing Trustees deem it safe to do so, i.e. when the COVID-19 infection rate falls to a much safer level.
- (v) This COVID-19 policy document is supported by risk assessments and safe operating procedures for the relevant activities that the Church Council decides may take place in our church building and premises.
- (vi) Our intention is to re-open the our premises in a phased way; to restrict the use of rooms; and to limit the number and type of activities that may take place.
- (vii) **When the building is re-opened for worship**, the only spaces we will use are the -
  - carpark
  - foyer
  - chapel
  - disabled toilet (open to all attendees, subject to strict hygiene rules).

The vestry, kitchen, stage, sports hall, and Wesley Room will remain closed during Sunday worship (and other services). The stage will be set up as an **isolation room**, in case of a health-

related emergency. However, if a fire breaks out within the building, all **fire exits** will be used to evacuate the premises.

- (viii) Once, the building has re-opened for worship, requests to hire other rooms in our premises by 'outside' organisations will be considered, subject to the safeguards detailed in this document being put into place, completion of risk assessments and the implementation of safe operating procedures.
  
- (ix) It is important to note that whilst COVID-19 restrictions remain in place, the way St John's operated within the church's building before March 2020 will change in order to comply with government legislation and recommendations, and guidance issued by the Methodist Church UK. This will mean new ways of worshipping together and managing our premises. So, it is unlikely there will be return to 'how it used to be' for the foreseeable future.
  
- (x) We will continue to recommend that where meetings can take place without the need for face-to-face contact, they will continue to do so, either online or via telephone. Where our building needs to be used for physical meetings, these meetings will be managed within the social distancing guidance and hygiene principles set out below.

## **2.0 Purpose of this document**

- (i) Scientists believe that the COVID-19 virus can be transmitted by direct contact with infected people; indirectly, via contaminated objects and surfaces; and through close contact with infected people (e.g. when an infected person coughs, sneezes, speaks or sings). It is known that the virus can survive up to 72 hours on hard surfaces (such as metal and plastic).
  
- (ii) Our COVID-19 policy document has been produced to detail the general arrangements of St John's Managing Trustees to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of anyone who visits our premises, including worshippers, employees and volunteers; to minimise the risk of spreading the virus; and to ensure hygiene standards for the various activities that may take place within our premises during the pandemic.
  
- (iii) This document outlines the general principles of managing the COVID-19 risk and the safety measures that St John's will put into place for the various activities that we host. Further detailed documents, including risk assessments and safe operating procedures have been developed separately in line with government and Methodist Church guidance.
  
- (iv) As Managing Trustees, we recognise that the health, safety, and wellbeing requirements of each of our activities must not be compromised. If an activity cannot be undertaken safely due

to a lack of suitably qualified personnel being available or the lack of adequate distancing measures being implemented, it will not take place.

### **3.0 Managing the risk of infection**

To manage the risk of infection and to safeguard all who visit our building the following measures have been or will be implemented.

#### **3.1 Room-use restriction**

- (i) St John's premises will reopen in a phased way. Our priority is to open the building for the purpose of communal worship and special services (e.g. funerals).
  
- (ii) **When the building re-opens for worship we will only use the -**
  - carpark
  - foyer
  - chapel
  - disabled toilet - and the corridors leading to it.
  
- (v) The vestry, kitchen, stage, sports hall and Wesley Room will remain closed during worship and other services. The stage will be used as an isolation room in case of a medical emergency. All fire doors will be used in the case of an emergency evacuation.
  
- (v) Requests to hire other rooms in our premises by 'outside' organisations will be considered, subject to compliance with this policy document.

#### **3.2 Capacity restrictions**

- (i) The number of people permitted to enter the church building at any one time will be limited, so that safety measures and social distancing can be maintained.
  
- (ii) The size and circumstance (including ventilation) of the chapel and other rooms determines the maximum number of people that can be accommodated, whilst also maintaining safe social distancing.

- (iii) For **communal worship in the chapel** the maximum number of people that can be seated is **15 + 5** stewards in the foyer. For this reason, those wishing to take part in communal worship are asked to book their seat in the chapel by the Friday prior to Sunday worship.
  
- (vi) For **funerals**, the maximum number of people allowed to attend is **30**. However, we may not be able to accommodate 30 people safely. For this reason, prior to the funeral service, the church must be given the names of those attending who belong to the same household, so that the seating can be arranged to accommodate as many mourners as possible (up to a maximum of 30). We realise that this is a sensitive issue and will do all we can to avoid further distress BUT we must keep mourners and church personnel safe.
  
- (vii) N.B. A household means people living under the same roof, who may or may not be relatives, i.e. a single person, a couple, parents and children, housemates, etc. A household does NOT include visitors who normally live elsewhere, even if they are members of the same family.**
  
- (viii) For activities in the sports hall the number of people that can be accommodated at 2 metres apart is **15**.
  
- (ix) For activities in the **Wesley Room** and **stage room** the maximum number of people who can be seated 2 metres apart is **6**.

### **3.3 Booking system for worship services and access to the building**

- (i) Due to capacity restrictions imposed by the need for social distancing, we will adopt a booking system for those wishing to attend communal worship services.
  
- (ii) At present, access to our building by **key holders** is restricted to 3 named persons: Ian Charlton, Geoff Danks and Helen Stuart. As and when the building is re-opened to outside hirers, other named key holders will be permitted to open and lock the building, providing all health and safety regulations are followed.

### **3.4 NHS Test and trace**

- (i) Before entry to our building, we will take the names and emergency contact details of all worshippers and visitors. This register will be kept for 21 days and then will be destroyed.
- (ii) If it becomes necessary, we will assist the NHS in tracing any individual who has visited our premises in the previous 21 days, using the registers we have taken.
- (iii) Before collecting the names and emergency contact details of people entering our building we will ask for the visitor's consent. *However, for the health and well-being of all, if someone withholds consent, they will not be allowed to enter the building.*

### **3.5 Social distancing**

- (i) Wherever possible, we will adhere to social distancing between households of at least 2 metres (or 1 metre with actions taken to reduce the risk of transmission, where 2 metres is not viable). Where appropriate, the floor will be marked out and signs will be displayed to help people maintain social distancing.
- (ii) Seating will be arranged to adhere to the social distancing rules. In some situations when members of the same household are present, we will re-arrange seating so that they can sit together. There will be no face to face seating in the building.
- (iii) Queue management will be used by stewards to control the flow of individuals from different households in and out of the premises in a socially distanced manner, reducing the risk of congestion or contact; and a socially distanced queuing system will be put into place, if necessary.
- (iv) On arrival, attendees will be greeted by a steward waiting outside the church building, whilst another will take names and contact details before admitting them. Once inside the building attendees will be guided to their seats by stewards. This will be done promptly to minimise contact and reduce the spread of infection. At the end of the service, worshippers will be advised how to leave the building in a socially distanced and safe manner.

- (v) Attendees will be encouraged to limit their interactions and conversations with anyone outside their own household.
- (vi) Those leading worship or group meetings will remind all those present about the importance of social distancing, face coverings and hand hygiene.
- (vii) During services exit and re-entry to the chapel (e.g. to go to the toilet) will be managed by the stewards on duty. Appropriate floor markings and signage will be in place, with restrictions on access to closed rooms.
- (viii) A booking system will be in place to help manage numbers, particularly for services where demand will be high. Booking systems will also be implemented by social group co-ordinators and hirers of our premises.
- (ix) During the lockdown period St John's Methodist Church Horwich in conjunction with the Bolton Methodist Circuit has provided worship and other events online. These activities will be continued after our building reopens so that individuals who are self-isolating or who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 will still be able to access worship and fellowship.

### **3.6 Hygiene and face coverings**

- (i) On entering and leaving our premises, we will encourage everyone to use hand sanitiser, supplies of which have been placed strategically.
- (ii) Anyone entering our premises MUST wear a face covering, preferably a mask or (at the very least) a visor. The congregation will be informed of this rule before we reopen the building and worshippers are expected to provide their own mask or visor. In an emergency when a visitor arrives without a face covering, we will provide a 3-ply face mask or visor from a small stock kept in the building.
- (iii) Hand sanitising gel, face coverings, visors, gloves, paper handkerchiefs and paper towels have been purchased and are available for use by worshippers and visitors.

(iv) A full set of PPE and a cleaning pack to deal with biohazards have also been purchased and are stored in the building ready for use in an emergency.

(iv) Signs and posters have been placed around the building to reinforce good hygiene practices. These include:

- NHS hand-washing techniques
- Wash / sanitise your hands frequently
- How to wear a face covering.
- Avoid touching your face
- Catch it. Bin it. Kill it.

### **3.7 Use of shared items**

(i) Worship will be conducted without the use of shared items e.g. hymn books, bibles, or prayer books. Bibles have been removed to the vestry, which will be kept locked. Hymn books and prayer books have been returned to the bookshelves in the foyer and placed behind plastic sheeting, which has been clearly marked with hazard tape.

(ii) If due to medical or educational needs, a worshipper requires the use of printed devotional material such as a hymn book, s/he will be asked to:

- bring their own copy to worship,
- ensure that their copy is touched by no-one else
- take their copy home after the service.

(iii) In circumstances where a visitor has not brought their own book, s/he may be lent a clean book from our stores:

- this will be given out by a steward (who has sanitised his/her hands)
- the book must be returned to the steward who loaned it out (who will wear gloves)
- books will be quarantined for 72 hours, before and after use.

(iv) Items which cannot be easily cleaned will also be subject to the 72 hours quarantine after use.

(v) Individuals will be prevented from touching objects that are normally handled communally. The removal of such items to storage has already taken place. Where this was not possible, barriers and/or clear signage have been put in place to prevent the use of such items.

- (vi) Visitors will be encouraged to avoid touching property belonging to others. Personal items such as coats, should be placed on the back of the visitor's seat. (For this reason, coat stands have been removed to storage.)

### **3.8 Food and drink**

- (i) Where food or drink ('consumables') are essential to the act of worship (e.g. for Holy Communion), they can be used. However, the sharing of food and the use of communal vessels will be avoided.
- (ii) If it is considered necessary to handle consumables as a part of an act of worship, those giving and receiving food items will have washed / sanitised their hands thoroughly before and after consumption and they will wear gloves.
- (iii) Speaking, singing, and chanting will be avoided over uncovered consumables (other than consumables to be used by the celebrant alone). Instead, consumables will be securely covered, and prior to the receptacle being opened, it will be cleaned, hands will be washed / sanitised and gloves will be worn.
- (iv) The kitchen has been closed and will remain out of bounds during the pandemic. No food or drink will be served on the premises either before or after worship or at any other times.
- (v) Regular worshippers and visitors to our building have been advised to bring their own supply of bottled water if they need a drink for medical reasons. These personal supplies must not be shared with anyone and all bottles, whether empty or full, must be taken home.
- (vi) A small supply of bottled water has been purchased for use in an emergency. This has been stored hygienically ready for distribution by a steward on duty. The steward will wear a face-covering and will wash or sanitise his/her hands before handling the sealed bottles.

### **3.9 Singing, chanting and use of musical instruments**

- (i) In accordance with current guidance, there will be no group singing or chanting during worship. This is because there is a possible additional risk of transmission in environments where individuals are singing or chanting as a group. The risk is present even if social distancing is being observed and face coverings are worn. Singing and chanting increases the risk of COVID19 transmission in airborne droplets.
- (ii) Where singing or chanting is considered essential to any of our services, one individual only will be permitted to sing or chant, but this will be behind a Perspex screen or similar. The screen will further prevent transmission and will be cleaned with anti-viral products.
- (iii) As music plays a big part in Methodist worship, we will use the necessary audio-visual technology to provide pre-recorded music and film, as an alternative to live singing.
- (v) Musical instruments can be played (providing they are not blown into) and players observe the social distancing rules.
- (vi) The organ and piano may be played and will be cleaned thoroughly before and after use.
- (vii) Anti-viral wipes will be provided to keep instruments clean.

### **3.10 Baptisms/Funerals/Weddings**

- (i) We will consider any request for a baptism, funeral, or wedding service to be held in our church building; and as always, this will take place at the discretion of our presbyter.
- (ii) Baptism, wedding, and funeral services will be held subject to the requirements of this policy.
- (iii) A specific risk assessment will be completed prior to each baptism, wedding, or funeral service.
- (iv) Guidelines set by the UK Government and the Methodist Church will be followed, e.g. regarding the maximum number of people allowed to be present.

### **3.11 Collections / Giving**

- (i) We will continue to use and encourage online or postal giving, which are the safest way of handling donations during the pandemic.
- (ii) We recognise that the above means of gift giving is not an option for everyone and that some worshippers will wish to bring cash to church. However, as opposed to a plate being passed around the congregation, worshippers will be asked to place their gifts in the receptacle provided, which will be regularly cleaned.
- (iii) The steward in charge of banking the collection will wear protective gloves whilst handling the offertory and cash will be placed in deposit bags, as usual. The steward is advised to take care when removing their protective gloves and to wash / sanitise their hands thoroughly.
- (iv) Banks are regarded as essential premises and remain open during lockdown. However, whilst banking the offertory, stewards should take care of their health by obeying all safety instructions outside and within the bank.

### **3.12 Junior Church**

- (i) At the present Junior Church will not meet when services are taking place.
- (i) As present, no decision has been made as to when Junior Church will convene. When such a decision is made, it will be informed by a full risk assessment and in line with Government guidance for out-of-school settings or other guidance.
- (ii) Children can attend worship but must be supervised by a parent / guardian. On entering and exiting the building children and their parents / guardians will be encouraged to wash their hands in line with adult personal hygiene rules or to use hand sanitizer.
- (iii) The regulations state that face coverings must be worn by adults attending worship, but not by children under the age of 11.
- (iv) Please let us know if you wish to bring a baby into church in a buggy. This is so that we can make space for the buggy and keep you and the baby safe.

### **3.13 Cleaning of the church building**

- (i) Although scientific research into how long the virus can live on different surfaces is on-going, we have been advised that it may survive for up to 72 hours. Therefore, before and after each act of worship or other use of the building we will ensure that all surfaces and objects, especially those most frequently touched e.g. door handles, are cleaned using antiviral procedures and products. Public Health England guidelines for cleaning have been printed out and displayed on the cleaning cupboard door.
- (ii) Other cleaning measures deployed will be in accordance with specific Government guidance.
- (v) We will monitor our cleaning procedures and, if necessary, provide enhanced cleaning in compliance with Government guidance.
- (iii) We have developed cleaning procedures and safe operating procedures for specific activities within our premises e.g. use of the audio and visual equipment

### **3.14 Toilet facilities**

- (i) Our toilet for the disabled (next to the Wesley Room) will be kept open and managed to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus.
- (ii) We have displayed signs and posters to build awareness of good hygiene practices, i.e.
  - NHS hand-washing techniques,
  - frequent hand-washing or sanitising hands
  - avoid touching your face
  - cough or sneeze into a tissue which is binned safely, or into your arm if a tissue is not available.
- (iii) We have deployed social distancing markings in the corridors leading to the toilet.
- (iv) The stewards will enforce a “One In, One Out” entry to the toilet (whilst avoiding the creation of additional bottlenecks). The exception to this being. Where a young child is accompanied by a parent/guardian or a disabled person is accompanied by a caregiver.
- (v) To enable good hand hygiene, we will have provided hand sanitizer on the entry to the toilets. Suitable hand-washing facilities are already provided, including hot and cold running water, soap and paper towels for hand drying.

- (vi) Following specific Government guidance, we will set clear use and cleaning regimes for the toilet. We will ensure that the toilet is cleaned before and after each service or use of our premises.
- (vi) A visible cleaning schedule will be displayed and it will be kept up to date.
- (vii) The toilet will be kept well ventilated when our premises are open for use.
- (viii) Used paper towels will be properly bagged and disposed of in a hygienic manner.

### **3.15 Vulnerable people**

- (i) As previously stated, this Policy aims to minimise the risk of spreading COVID-19 and to ensure a minimum standard for the various activities that may take place within our building during the outbreak.
- (ii) As Managing Trustees, we recognise that certain groups of people are at increased risk of severe disease from the virus, including those who are clinically vulnerable, those who are shielding, and people aged 70 or over. However, we are of the view that it will be up to those individuals to decide for themselves whether they wish to enter our premises and partake in worship and other activities. As Managing Trustees, we will help individuals make that decision by providing information about this policy, our risk assessments and procedures, any relevant legislation, and Government and Methodist Church guidance.

### **3.16 People who are symptomatic, i.e. display symptoms of COVID-19 infection**

**The main symptoms of coronavirus are:**

- **a high temperature – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)**
- **a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)**
- **a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste – this means you have noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal**

**Most people with coronavirus have at least 1 of these symptoms.**

- (i) When booking a place to attend worship in our church building a potential attendee will be asked the following questions:
- Do you have a high temperature?
  - Do you have a new and continuous cough?
  - Has your sense of taste or smell altered recently?
  - Have you lost your sense of taste and smell?
  - Do you live with someone who has symptoms that may be COVID-19?
  - Do you live with someone who is self-isolating due to possibly being infected?
  - Do you live with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19?
  - Have you returned from overseas in the past 14 days?

Anyone answering “yes” to any one of these questions will be asked NOT to attend worship.

- (ii) Before entering the church building each person will have his/her temperature taken, using an infra-red thermometer. Anyone with a high temperature will be barred from entry.
- (iii) Anyone who is COVID-19 symptomatic will be encouraged to self-isolate at home immediately with other members of their household.

### **3.17 Notices/signage**

All appropriate and necessary signage has been displayed throughout the building, as follows:

- COVID-19 precaution signs at the main entrance.
- Reminders about hand-hygiene, wearing a face-covering, and maintaining social distancing, have been displayed throughout the building.
- Where necessary and where one-way systems / safe walkways are required, these have been marked out on the floors.
- Posters showing NHS Hand-washing techniques are displayed above washbasins.
- Sign on kitchen doors reads:  
“Kitchen closed. Food and drink will NOT be served.”

- Signs on doors to rooms not in use reads: “Strictly No Entry (except in case of emergency evacuation.)”
- “Catch it. Bin it. Kill it!” posters are displayed strategically.

#### **4.0 Sharing our policy and procedures with others**

- (i) We will share this policy, our risk assessments and our safe operating procedures with our church members, volunteers, room hirers and potential visitors.
- (ii) We will share the information through our traditional means of communication e.g. e-mail, the church website, by post, by newsletter, notice boards, the audio-visual screen and by word of mouth. In addition, we will continue to make use of more recently introduced on-line means of communication e.g. Zoom.
- (iii) We have provided a dedicated COVID-19 notice board displaying policies and information. This will be provided as a website page and in hard copy format within the foyer of the St John’s Church building.
- (iv) Those wishing to hire the building will be required to:
  - read and agree to follow our COVID-19 Policy,
  - provide a copy of their risk assessment for activities at St John’s for approval or rejection by us,
  - have a third-party licence for activities at St John’s.

#### **5.0 Safeguarding**

- (i) The church’s safeguarding policies and procedures remain unchanged. All activities and risk assessments will ensure that these procedures remain in place.

#### **6.0 Building maintenance work**

- (i) At present, only 3 people are permitted to enter our church building, namely: Ian Charlton, Geoff Danks and Helen Stuart. Ian and Geoff do so separately at different times in the week to

carry out necessary procedures (such as flushing the toilets) and to check for any maintenance problems. Helen uses the photocopier inside the vestry in her role as St John's church secretary.

- (ii) We will ensure that all building and maintenance work will be carried out in conjunction with the government guidance entitled "Working Safely during COVID-19 in construction and other outdoor work" and "Working Safely during COVID-19 in other people's homes," along with Methodist Church and other appropriate government guidance.
- (iii) All contractors will be required to submit and agree risk assessments and working practices prior to any work being agreed upon or carried out.
- (iv) All maintenance work will be carried out when there is no one else within the building to allow the contractors to work in a safe environment and carry out their own social distancing requirements. (The exception being the presence of Ian Charlton or Geoff Danks.)
- (v) No maintenance work is to be carried out by church members who are in the "high risk" category. This again is to protect those members. Any works carried out by church members will be under strict control / risk assessments as required under this and our general health and safety policy.

### **The Church Council, as Managing Trustees**

#### **St John's Methodist Church Horwich**

**5 November 2020**

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