

## **Romsey Methodist Church**

### **Risk Assessment in relation to Covid-19**

#### **Activity: Worship Services**

#### **including services of Holy Communion & Marriage**

Assessment by: Peter C Jackson & Gareth Hill

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Review date: 10<sup>th</sup> July 2021

### **General to all Sections**

#### **Introduction:**

The Coronavirus-19 is a highly infectious disease primarily affecting the respiratory system. The disease can be transmitted as an aerosol from human exhalation/inhalation or by physical contact with an infected surface. The disease can be transmitted prior to an infected person exhibiting symptoms. Surfaces can remain infected between 48 hours to 72 hours. It is understood that transmission of the virus likely occurs mainly indoors and in settings where there is close proximity between people.

For the purposes of preparing and sharing food and drink the government has issued guidance that the Coronavirus-19 is very unlikely to be transmitted through food or food packing provided normal food hygiene precautions are undertaken <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-food-businesses/guidance-for-food-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19> and <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/personal-hygiene>

#### **Description of activity**

The church wishes to re-establish regular service of worship including the periodic celebration of Holy Communion. The style of worship and length of service may be variable according to the requirements of the preacher. The services of worship may follow a live format of readings, prayers, sermon and pre-recorded music without singing. These types of service may be streamed live and/or recorded for those unable to attend the service. Alternatively, services of worship may consist of pre-recorded contributions, streaming services from other churches as well as contributions from the congregation which again will be recorded for those unable to attend the premises.

The services are open to anyone attending provided the number attending does not compromise a covid-19 secure environment. Services of worship will take place in the sanctuary or main hall and this risk assessment identifies specific mitigation measures for each location. The services may include all age groups. The arrangements will include worship in the hall for Year 6 of primary school age or younger. This Risk Assessment does not relate to Services for Funerals or Baptism. Specific services may be developed for the unique attendance of those who are clinically vulnerable, extremely clinically vulnerable, children or others who may not be and/or feel safe in larger and heterogeneous congregations.

Attendance by a congregation for worship will be restricted within the current restrictions which may change at relatively short notice. The regulations have now been framed with step changes not occurring before 17<sup>th</sup> May and 21<sup>st</sup> June.

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Those attending to develop and broadcast services of worship will comply with the arrangements set out in this risk assessment with or without the presence of a congregation.

Dependent upon subsequent reviews the celebration of Holy Communion will take place following a service of worship. The service of Holy Communion will be undertaken with the elements of bread and wine (grape juice) being served whilst members of the congregation are seated. Especial attention will be undertaken to ensure potential aerosol transmission of the virus is minimised both in the preparation, dedication and serving of the elements. Please see specific section of this document relating to Holy Communion.

The arrangements for marriages may vary according to the current regulations which detail specific steps to the adjustment of restrictions. Please see specific section within this document related to marriages.

#### Persons at risk:

The persons at risk are primarily the congregation, the Minister/preacher, church stewards and the cleaner.

#### Nature & likelihood of hazard:

The probability of infection is highly related to the current prevalence of the disease in the community. The probability of infection for those attending the service may be associated with contact infection and airborne transmission. Whilst the cleaner, working in isolation after the service, might be at higher risk from contact infection with the risk from infection from inhalation being very unlikely. The steward(s) at the entrance and exit are more likely to be at risk from infection by inhalation from participants arriving and leaving. The likelihood of the hazard affecting a person increases with the number and length of time people attending, together with the relative size of the space being occupied. Transmission of the disease may vary according to the prevalence and strain of the Covid-19 virus in the community.

#### Severity of hazard:

The severity of the infection primarily varies with age, gender, ethnicity, obesity and any underlying co-morbidity. The severity is increased with age; being male; being from a Black-Asian-Minority Ethnic group; being obese; having co-morbidities and for those people who are required to clinically shield. See [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/892085/disparities\\_review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/892085/disparities_review.pdf)

Children appear to be the least affected from the infection although they may transmit the disease and have relatively high levels of contact outside of attending worship.

The severity of the virus may be reduced or eliminated by a program of immunisation.

#### Level of risk:

Without further demographic or clinical information it is assumed that all persons on duty and attending the event are at the same level of high risk of infection without control measures, and that all mitigation measures apply to everyone, excepting children. All duty holders (paid and voluntary) shall have access to the risk assessment on the website and may decline to perform the duty if they believe it may be unsafe for them to do so. Participants attending the gathering will be able to access joining instructions which will inform the requirements of attendance.

#### Mitigation and control of risks:

Where possible individuals may mitigate significantly their risks by undertaking immunisation. This risk assessment is based on the assumption that individuals have not received or acquired immunisation.

**All persons attending, whether immunised or not, shall comply with all aspects of this risk assessment and relevant accompanying joining instructions.**

The measures taken conform to the regulations <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2021/364/made/data.pdf>

- i) The arrangements will comply with government guidance and guidance from the Methodist Church UK:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-2-december>  
and  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships>  
and  
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/coronavirus-guidance-for-property/>  
and  
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/18298/guide-for-holy-communion-10820.pdf>  
The Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Methodist Circuit has adopted the option and has the policy of serving only one kind (ie bread or wafer)
- ii) Those attending the service of worship have an obligation to comply with legal requirements and respect the decision of the managing trustees to ensure compliance whilst on the premises.
- iii) **Government legislation.** The premises have been designated as being in an area where guidance on the restrictions <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do> apply.
- iv) Whilst attending the premises for worship you **must not** meet or mingle with friends, family or others unless they are part of your household or support bubble.  
(<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-support-bubble-with-another-household>). The requirement for social distancing does not apply to members of the same household or support bubble.
- v) For services of marriage there are additional requirements and some exemptions. Please see specific section for marriages.
- vi) **Government guidance.** Whilst engaging in an activity on the premises, all parties should adhere to social distancing guidelines at all times. This means people should be 2 metres apart, or more than 1 metre apart as well as taking extra steps to stay safe (such as wearing a face coverings) to reduce the risk of transmission. The requirement for social distancing does not apply to members of the same household or support bubble.
- vii) **Government legislation.** It is a legal requirement to wear a face covering whilst on the premises excepting for children, valid health reasons or consuming element(s) for communion. Surgical masks may be available at the entry for those without a suitable face covering on arrival. A face covering is a material which safely covers the nose and mouth and must securely fit round the side of the face. More information can be found in <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own#:~:text=Face%20coverings%20are%20not%20required,you%20leave%20your%20seating%20area>.
- viii) **Whilst restrictions apply, the Leadership Team will regularly review the prevalence of the disease in the community and decide upon the number of persons able to attend a service of worship.** This will include those responsible for the development and broadcasting of

- services. The limiting number will be applied to the booking arrangement to attend the premises.
- ix) When registering at the door to attend the service of worship, the lead person making the booking shall indicate the number of persons in the Household & Support Bubble which shall comply with (iii).
  - x) The seating in both the sanctuary and main hall shall be arranged with at least 2 metres between the chair(s) of each household. With low prevalence the Leadership Team may initiate a 1metre + seating arrangement. Those persons living in the same household and support bubble may reduce the separation of chairs to less than a metre. The grouping of chairs shall be such that a sufficient distance can be maintained when worshippers are joining or leaving their seats.
  - xi) Depending upon the number of households (& support bubbles) attending and available seating arrangements, the likely number of persons attending shall be determined (see vii above) in the sanctuary, and in the main hall overflowing into the small hall depending upon seating arrangements.
  - xii) Worship for children of primary school year 6 or younger may be supervised by their parents/carers in the main hall, whilst worship for others is conducted in the sanctuary. Those attending each gathering must remain distinct for the duration of being on the premises.
  - xiii) Only stewards should move and/or arrange chairs in the sanctuary or main hall.
  - xiv) Those wishing to come to the service should be mindful and advised not to attend if they are feeling unwell or have symptoms that may relate to Covid-19.
  - xv) A person who is self-isolating **must not attend** as required by legislation. A person self-isolating should be directed to the streamed service on the website (<https://www.romseymethodist.church/>) or viewed on YouTube.
  - xvi) Those attending the premises will be reminded to minimise the touching of surfaces or objects.
  - xvii) Those persons attending as a household/support bubble should inform a church steward so that appropriate seating arrangements can be made.
  - xviii) All persons on duty (Church Stewards, Minister, video/audio member, etc) must use the personal protective equipment provided (ie surgical masks) and if appropriate disposable gloves.
  - xix) It is a requirement that those addressing the congregation at any time during the service maintain at least the *social distance* to the nearest member of the congregation. Those addressing the congregation may remove their face covering temporarily.
  - xx) Everyone attending the premises will comply with the signage and other instructions in order to minimise the risk of infection and/or the transmission of the virus.
  - xxi) Children must remain under the care and supervision of a parent/carer.
  - xxii) Personal greetings such as handshaking, hugs, etc are discouraged excepting for persons from the same household.
  - xxiii) Entry and exit to the premises will be made using the front entrance of the premises for those attending worship in the sanctuary. Those attending worship in the hall will use the side entrance via the footpath at the side of the building. Whichever entrance & exit is used then *social distancing* between individuals/households must be maintained.
  - xxiv) Entry to and exit from the building will be controlled by a Church Steward.
  - xxv) All doors relating to internal thoroughfares will remain open so as to minimise door handles being touched whilst facilitating ventilation, and thereby reducing the transmission of the virus.

- xxvi) Before and after the service ventilation to the sanctuary and main/small hall will be maximised by a combination of the use of air purifiers, opening doors and windows.
- xxvii) The Stewards will control the ventilation in the sanctuary or main hall during the service. The degree of ventilation required will be relative to the number of people attending and the ambient temperature. The ceiling fan will be used to increase the movement of air in the sanctuary and other forced ventilation and filtration may be used in the sanctuary or main hall. External doors may be closed provided air purification and filtration is operating.
- xxviii) Everyone attending the church building will wash their hands or use a hand sanitiser upon entry.
- xxix) All persons, including those on duty, entering the building will be invited to have attendance and contact details registered in order to facilitate tracing should that be necessary as part of a public health requirement. Those attending may use an NHS app and scan the NHS Test & Trace QR code to register attendance in the building: <https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/nhs-covid-19/> A separate record will be maintained for those worshipping in the two separate gatherings (ie in the sanctuary and hall).
- xxx) Those Church Stewards on duty, after using sanitiser, will wear protective gloves whilst setting up arrangements for the service.
- xxxi) A Church Steward may make enquiry should the health of a person entering the church building be a concern. No person will be admitted to the building if they are Covid-19 symptomatic.
- xxxii) Personal items should not be left in the building without the permission of a Church Steward.
- xxxiii) Items belonging to the church should not be removed without the permission of a Church Steward.
- xxxiv) When handwashing is undertaken in the toilets the electric hand dryer or paper hand towels should be used for drying hands: the latter being disposed in the bin provided. Material hand towels have been removed to avoid contact transmission.
- xxxv) As well as washing hands sanitisers are provided in toilets for users.
- xxxvi) Sanitising wipes are provided in toilets so that users may clean handles, switches, etc after use. The wipes are to be disposed within the bins provided.
- xxxvii) Wherever possible everyone attending the building should be self-sufficient with tissues, pens, refreshments, etc. Care must be undertaken not to touch, handle, replace or share objects (eg pens, pencils, books, etc) that might aid the transmission of the virus. Those attending will be encouraged to bring a refreshment, although glasses of water may be available from a Church Steward at any time.
- xxxviii) Refreshments will not be served.
- xxxix) A sanitiser will be available for use at each exit of the building.
- xl) Should a person feel unwell or demonstrate symptoms of Covid-19 then they should be isolated in the Wesley Room with a Church Steward attending and ensuring a surgical mask and protective gloves are worn. The unwell person should remain in the Wesley Room until it is safe to exit the building without further contact of others. The Wesley Room and other areas where the person was sitting will be sanitised. A note against the name of the person should be made on the registration sheet. In the event of a more complex condition emergency services should be contacted.
- xli) Collections and donations of cash or cheques will not be undertaken.
- xl ii) It is highly desirable that the audio-visual operators seated at the desk should be socially distanced by 1 metre and wearing face coverings.
- xl iii) The audio-visual operators will sanitise all microphones and other equipment prior to use.
- xl iv) The audio-visual operators must wear protective gloves when the Minister returns the microphone and immediately sanitise the headpiece in particular.

- xlv) The Sound/Video operators should sanitise the operating desk without detriment to the equipment.
- xlvi) Any musical instrument played during worship must be cleaned before and after use. It is suggested that wind instruments used by the congregation are avoided.
- xlvii) The choice of music should not encourage singing, as communal singing is not allowed. Where a song is considered essential for worship, up to 3 persons, without wearing masks, may partake with a minimum of twice the social distance between those singing and others present, or by the use of a screen. Those persons singing, unless from the same household/social bubble, must maintain the social distance between one another.
- xlviii) Spoken responses in the service shall be undertaken in a quiet manner.
- xliv) The Minister/Preacher should use a microphone to avoid having to use a raised voice and should remain on the platform whilst conducting the service in the sanctuary. When the service is conducted in the main hall the preacher and those undertaking readings or prayers should remain at least 2 metres from the nearest worshipper.
  - l) Whenever members of the congregation contribute to the service care must be taken to ensure the same person should use the lectern and microphone for readings and/or prayers.
  - li) Hymn books will not be distributed. Where hymns are used the words will be projected on a screen. Bibles will not normally be distributed as all readings will be displayed upon the screen. In the circumstance where a hymn book or Bible is distributed then the item(s) shall be quarantined for at least 48 hours in a secure location.
  - lii) Children of primary school year groups 1-6 will be supervised by their parents/carers in the hall. They may use craft/drawing materials on the tables provided as part of the worship. In this circumstance the main hall shall be limited to 15 persons. All adults shall remain at the *social distance* from one another and continue to wear *face coverings*. Adults and children will regularly wash their hands.
  - liii) All craft and drawings should be taken home and the table(s) sanitised. Other items may be disposed of or quarantined in a secure location depending upon continued usefulness.
  - liv) The Wesley Room is set aside for use by the Minister unless an unwell person has is using the room.
  - lv) The service should be concluded in a reasonable time, and normally within 45 minutes.
  - lvi) Worship participants, outside their own household and support bubble, will maintain *social distancing* as they leave the premises.
  - lvii) Those members of the congregation requiring the outside lift to vacate the building should contact a Church Steward who will ensure the lift is sanitised after each and every use.
  - lviii) At the end of the service the sanctuary and/or hall will be ventilated thoroughly. All chairs should remain in position for at least 48 hours and if possible 72 hours to avoid unnecessary handling and possible transmission of the virus. If it is envisaged that the sanctuary will be used within 48 hours, then appropriate sanitisation of surfaces and other points of contact should be undertaken by the cleaner.
  - lix) Waste disposal will comply with <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-disposing-of-waste>
  - lx) At the end of the service all disposable *face coverings* or personal protective equipment used by Church Stewards and Minister must be disposed in the bin within the office.
  - lxi) Face coverings and PPE, such as gloves, may be disposed in 'black bag' waste' only (ie not recycling waste) and need not be double bagged or quarantined for 72 hours unless the waste is suspected to be associated with an infected person (eg a person taken ill).
  - lxii) The Cleaner will perform hygienic cleaning (ie sanitising toilets, wash basins, door handles, etc) as soon as practicable after the event and before the building is used for other purposes.
  - lxiii) In the event of fire, all fire safety measures take precedence.

## The Service of Holy Communion: the preparation, dedication and serving of the elements

- i) All aspects of the preceding general risk assessment apply. The hygienic preparation of the elements of bread and wine will be undertaken in the main kitchen by the Communion Steward.
- ii) The Communion Steward must be in good health and will sanitise their hands before wearing an unused surgical mask and gloves whilst preparing the elements.
- iii) The Minister should be in good health and also sanitise their hands before this service begins.
- iv) The wafers or the bread, which will be cut into convenient sized portions, must be placed onto two sanitised plates.
- v) The wine will be contained in individual cups and placed in trays.
- vi) The elements will be placed on the communion table and securely covered separately.
- vii) A loaf or portion of a loaf of bread together with a chalice of wine (grape juice) may also be placed separately on the communion table. These may be used as appropriate to the dedication of the bread and wine by the Minister but must not be served to the congregation.
- viii) The Minister, and Communion Steward, must wear an unused surgical face mask before uncovering the elements to be served to the congregation.
- ix) The Minister and Communion Steward must sanitise their hands before distributing the elements to the seated congregation, and should consider repeating this partway through the distribution.
- x) The Minister and Communion Steward assisting with distribution may drop the bread into the recipient's palm to avoid physical contact. If there is a need to speak then this should be undertaken softly whilst still wearing a surgical face mask.
- xi) The wine will be distributed in individual cups and the communicant invited to remove the cup from the tray.
- xii) Any blessings must be undertaken without physical contact.
- xiii) The Minister and Communion Steward will serve each other with bread and wine, or the Minister serves themselves if serving alone.
- xiv) Those members who have physical difficulties in accepting the elements may rely on the support of another member of their household or support bubble to assist.
- xv) All unused wafers or bread will be disposed, and the plates, cups will be collected at the end of the service and thoroughly washed whilst wearing gloves.

## Services of Marriage

- i) All aspects of the preceding general risk assessment apply. The following paragraphs give further detail of specific restrictions and exemptions applying to weddings. **Under current restrictions this risk assessment does not provide provision for a wedding reception in the building.** See specific guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships/covid-19-guidance-for-wedding-and-civil-partnership-receptions-and-celebrations>
- ii) The number of people attending a wedding is currently limited to 30 persons, including the couple, all guests of any age but excepting those persons on duty (ie the Minister and stewards).
- iii) Any guest or others involved in the ceremony must not attend if they are symptomatic of Covid-19 and should self-isolate. If either of the couple is symptomatic of Covid-19 they should contact the Minister and the ceremony rearranged.
- iv) Details, including contact information, of those persons attending shall be provided to the Minister and/or the Property Steward at least 48 hours in advance of the wedding ceremony. The details should identify those persons from the same household (and support bubble if applicable) so that seating can be suitably arranged and to ensure compliance with NHS Test and Trace requirements also.

- v) Limited decoration of the sanctuary is permitted in consultation with the Minister and/or Property Steward. All decorations should be removed following the service.
- vi) No gifts for the couple to be married shall be brought into the building.
- vii) The couple being married and the Minister are exempted (at their discretion) from wearing a face covering, and should make especial effort (if not wearing a face covering in the building) to maintain a social distance from others.
- viii) Orders of service are permitted and should be given and retained by individuals on entry and exit to the building.
- ix) The minimum number of people should be involved in the exchanging of ring(s).
- x) Guests must not mingle whilst in the building.

By registering those attending the building agree and will be required to follow the mitigation measures to ensure safety.