

Risk Assessment for the holding of Communion Services At Hanney Chapel

Version History

- 1. Initial baseline assessment 28th July 2020**
- 2. Revised due to updated guidelines regarding face coverings**

Assessment Date	7th August 2020
Valid From	8th August 2020
Review Period	Annual (or when governmental guidance changes)
Approved By	Hanney Elders & Deacons

SCOPE

This document is supplementary to the existing “Risk Assessment for Holding Services at Hanney Chapel during the COVID-19 Pandemic” and is written specifically to address the current issues of physically holding a communion service where the elements of bread and wine are consumed and taking into account the wearing of face coverings.

GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES

As the guidelines [1] continue to be developed in line with the changing nature of the hazard posed by the COVID-19 coronavirus, it has become possible to consider including communion, as part of a physical service even though the latest guidelines [2] mandate the use of face coverings inside a place of worship (though some exemptions apply such as to the service leader).

Specifically, in relation to “food and drink” it is stated that:

- Where food or drink (‘consumables’) are essential to the act of worship, they can be used, however the sharing of food should be avoided, as should the use of communal vessels.
- If it is necessary to handle consumables as a part of a faith practice, those giving and receiving food items should wash their hands thoroughly before and after consumption, or wear gloves.
- The person distributing the consumable should release it, into the hand only, in such a way to avoid any contact between them and those receiving it, or wear gloves. If accidental contact does occur, both people should cleanse their hands immediately.
- Other actions taken to reduce the risk of transmission should also be considered, for example, foodstuffs should be prewrapped, and a system should be in place to prevent individuals from coming into contact with consumables and any dishes and/ or cutlery other than their own (for example the use of shared bowls).
- Speaking, singing and chanting should not happen across uncovered consumables (other than consumables to be used by the celebrant alone). Instead consumables should be securely covered, and prior to the receptacle being opened, it should be cleaned, hands should be washed or gloves worn.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The normal practice of communion is for the preacher to physically break a loaf of bread into several sections and for those to be served up for people to pinch out a small piece for themselves. Under the terms of living with COVID-19 restrictions this practice cannot be allowed because of the likely risk of cross-contamination one with another.

It is clear from the above statements in the guidelines that following thorough washing of hands (or whilst wearing gloves) it is permitted for the bread to be handled and that it would then technically be permitted for someone to distribute the broken bread - so long as no contact is made by different people handling the same piece.

In these circumstances, quite close contact would almost certainly ensue between the giver and receiver, and other guidance elsewhere would indicate that face coverings would then be required due to being in a one metre plus (1m+) regime.

However, the wearing of any PPE by either the preacher or the one distributing the elements would not be desirable. At this stage, it is believed to be preferable then, to still fully maintain the guidance of having 2m social distancing as that is one of the major ways of minimising the spread of the virus.

MITIGATION OF RISKS

The ultimate mitigation is not to hold communion services at all, but, if this is not acceptable, the following process is believed to be a feasible and viably safe methodology of holding a communion service where the "sharing" of one loaf is dictated from Scripture.

Essentially,

- Following strict food hygiene and safety training, someone wearing a face mask and apron (and either wearing gloves or thoroughly washing their hands) will safely prepare individual portions of bread having pre-cut them from a part of the loaf that the preacher will use during the service.
- The small cut portions can be prepared in advance and kept in an air-tight sealed container (e.g. a lidded box or cling-film wrap), or, prepared immediately prior to the communion service.
- In either case, a sufficient number (by household) of these portions, along with plastic disposable communion cups of grape juice, will be placed on a small paper plate on, or near to, the recipients' allocated seat.
- This action mitigates against having people go to a single table to collect the elements with the risk of members of different households accidentally touching the same items.
- During the communion service the preacher is then free to break the remainder of the loaf (as per Scriptural instruction) and to have the congregation join in with their individually supplied portions.
- Similarly, the preacher and congregation can drink from their individual cups.
- It is permitted to temporarily remove a face covering in order to consume the bread and wine.
- To avoid washing up of any potentially contaminated containers, every celebrant is required to take the paper plate and the communion cups away with them for disposal at home.

REFERENCES

- [1] Safe use of a place of worship <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-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july>
- [2] Face coverings <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>