

Guidance on holding services in non-consecrated buildings during a difficult winter and high energy prices

We all know that there is real concern about the cost of heating church buildings over the coming months. We understand those concerns and want to help where we can. However worship in the consecrated church building, or Parish worship centre, matters and the starting point must be if at all possible that this is maintained throughout the coming months.

A reminder that Canon B40 states:

No minister shall celebrate the Holy Communion elsewhere than in a consecrated building within his cure or other building licensed for the purpose, except he have permission so to do from the bishop of the diocese: Provided that at all times he may celebrate the Holy Communion as provided by Canon B 37 in any private house wherein there is any person sick, or dying, or so impotent that he cannot go to church.

This applies specifically to Holy Communion services. There is much greater freedom around Services of the Word although the principles of the Canon should be considered in relation to these as well.

The Canon means that if a service of Holy Communion were to be held in a parish hall, permission must first be obtained from me as the Diocesan Bishop. Some churches have already asked me for such permission, and I anticipate more may follow. Given the likely cost of heating and the demography of many of our congregations, it would be difficult for me to refuse such requests. We are still engaging in conversations nationally but meanwhile I will use the following criteria:

- I cannot give a diocese-wide permission, so each church will have to make their own direct request.
- Unless the consecrated building is in a dangerous condition, all occasional offices should be held in the consecrated building which should be heated.
- Requests must come jointly from the incumbent and the PCC/DCC and a proper resolution will be required following local consultation and discussion.
- Consideration should be given to the effect of turning off heating on the fabric of the building – guidance may be sought from the DAC.
- Permission will be time limited: No permission will be given for such usage to happen before Monday 28th November (day after Advent Sunday) and it will cease on Tuesday 21st February 2023 (the day before Ash Wednesday).
- Permission is permission, not obligation. If the winter is mild and the consecrated building can be kept reasonably warm, it should be preferred to a non-consecrated option.
- The alternative venue should be suitable for worship, with consideration given to accessibility, furniture, lighting, acoustics and aesthetics. A risk assessment should be agreed. Where possible, live-streaming should continue.

- Attention should be given to insurance, both of the buildings and of accoutrements being carried from the church building to the alternative venue. If the policy document is not clear, the insurer should be consulted.
- Any item on the church inventory should not be removed from the church or church complex without temporary permission granted by the Archdeacon.
- Care should be taken over communicating with the local community, in order to preempt any objections, to reassure people that this is a temporary measure and not an attempt to abandon a consecrated building and also to inform those who might stay away from a cold church that worship is continuing.
- Clear information about the alternative arrangements must be posted on the Church Noticeboards, websites, Facebook pages etc.
- Where there is more than one church building in a parish, or in a multi-parish benefice consideration can be given to requesting permission for the use of only 1 building for a period of time.

You can begin seeking my permission from now on, but please ensure it is coming with a PCC/DCC resolution after consultation as I will simply have to say 'No' if it simply comes from the incumbent.

I hope you will see this as a reasonable way forward.

Additionally I can add that as a Diocese we have received £448,000 from the national church to assist parishes with extra heating costs and this will be distributed in the coming weeks. All parishes will receive support and we hope to be able particularly to support those parishes running Warm Welcome spaces and hubs. Further details will come from the Diocesan Secretary once this is finalised. No money from this grant is being retained centrally. Hopefully this will reduce the numbers looking for the permission just outlined.

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