

CHURCHES, COVID-19 AND COMMUNITIES

Experiences, Needs, and
Supporting Recovery

March 2021

The Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture
University of York

HOPE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

'I've lost count of the number of Church leaders and congregations from all denominations that have stepped up to support not only one another but also to support the whole local community, people of all faiths and none.'

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, March 2021

THE CONTEXT OF THIS REPORT

For centuries, churches, alongside other faith communities,¹ have provided what could be termed an everyday 'National Wellbeing Service.' This includes:

- providing and hosting 'cradle to grave' activities which provide social interaction and everyday support²
- enhancing physical and mental health by offering wellbeing activities, exercise classes and volunteering opportunities
- creating a spiritual heart for communities (including worship; spaces for reflection and prayer; pastoral care; marking life events)
- hosting community services such as Post Offices, health clinics, cafes, and village shops
- combating disadvantage and supporting 'levelling-up,' through afterschool education clubs, parenting classes, addiction support, debt counselling, homelessness support, etc.
- offering buildings which promote belonging, provide safe places of beauty, peace and comfort, offer access to shared heritage and culture, contribute to tourism and local economies

In addition, churches have a centuries-old record of providing 'Emergency Care' in times of local and national crisis - through longstanding care networks; a deep reservoir of local knowledge, contacts and trusted partnership working; and buildings which often provide the only available public space to host foodbanks or other services, or offer safe spaces in which individuals and communities can address grief and anxiety, commemorate loss, and find perspective, comfort, and hope.

The particular challenges posed by COVID-19 to these well-established patterns of response to community need, have been two-fold:

¹ This report focuses on the role and response of Christian churches. Reports and surveys which relate to other faith communities can be found in Appendix 2.2.2.

² The Church of England alone was hosting 35,000 social care projects pre-COVID. See Church of England 2019 'Statistics for Mission' return.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/2019StatisticsForMission.pdf>

- the pandemic has threatened all sectors of the population and all areas of the country, creating a vast amount of additional need, including among those not previously considered especially vulnerable
- at the same time the restrictions associated with containing the virus have prevented churches (and other faith communities) from delivering much of the everyday and emergency support they would normally provide.

The early phases of the pandemic required very rapid decisions when little was known about COVID-19 and subsequent waves of infection have meant that policy and guidance have constantly had to evolve in response. However, the imperatives of virus control and the need to protect lives have also had the unwanted consequence of suspending social interactions and normal mechanisms of mutual support in ways which have themselves caused significant and widespread damage to mental, physical, and economic wellbeing. In this context, ensuring the future capacity of churches to engage with and support communities, both during the pandemic and in rebuilding and recovery, is of considerable importance.

During the early months of the pandemic, anecdotal evidence appeared to suggest that the effects of closure of church buildings, suspension of normal community activities, and restrictions on churches' ability to operate in 'crisis mode', were being deeply felt. Many church leaders and members also expressed frustration at the limitations on their ability to serve needy communities. The 'COVID, Churches & Communities' research project was therefore set up in August 2020 by the Centre for the Study of Christianity & Culture (University of York), with Historic England, the Church of England, the Association of English Cathedrals, the National Churches Trust, and the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance,³ to gather, analyse, and report on grassroots responses to closures and restrictions across the country.⁴

This report represents views gathered from over 5,500 survey responses and interviews with church leaders, members, non-members, and experts in relevant fields. It provides insights into individual and community experience and need on the ground during Autumn 2020 and February-March 2021; assesses developing responses by churches, including new partnerships with other bodies; and looks forward to the contribution churches, their buildings, and their networks, can make to recovery.

CONSULTATION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The project's aim is to provide detailed data from a wide range of respondents to support national and local policy and decision-making in the face of COVID-19, specifically to:

- Examine the impact of closing church buildings and restrictions on activities provided or hosted by churches on the lives and wellbeing of individuals and communities

³ Supported by funding from Historic England; Research England Quality-related Research Strategic Priorities Fund; the Economic and Social Research Council; the Association of English Cathedrals; and the Kirby Laing Foundation.

⁴ Details of the Research Team and Advisory Group can be found in Appendix 1.

- Explore how churches have been able to respond creatively to COVID-19 challenges and adapt their provision to meet new circumstances and needs
- Assess the potential of church buildings and networks to support recovery and societal resilience in the future
- Identify the key resources needed to mobilise these assets fully

Surveys and semi-structured interviews were undertaken from September to December 2020, and from February to March 2021. Over 5,500 people responded to the surveys, providing multi-layered insights into the evolving impact of lockdowns and other restrictions at grassroots level. Respondents were invited to self-identify broadly as 'Church Leaders', 'Church Members', and 'General Public'. This differentiation is helpful in identifying particular perspectives on the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, but it is also necessary to remember that *all three* groups are members of the wider community, with common needs for support and provision. To ensure this aspect is taken into consideration, these groups are referred to as 'Church Leaders,' 'Members,' and 'Non-Members'⁵ in this report.

The large body of qualitative data gathered and analysed gives voice to the primary deliverers and recipients of the wide-ranging work of churches across the nation: Church Leaders, Church Members, and, very importantly, those who do not identify as 'Members,' but nevertheless rely on and greatly value access to church buildings and networks of activity.

The surveys and interviews provide grassroots insights which are illuminating, and often moving, as individuals detail the impact on their lives of COVID-19 and the loss of core support structures; the challenges they now face; and the key factors that will help their communities recover. Data has been contextualised by interviews with experts in key fields such as Public Health and Bereavement and national church leaders, and the collation of related reports from an extensive range of church and secular organisations.

This research has been undertaken against the background of a very rapidly changing situation. Nevertheless, clear themes have emerged which are reinforced by conclusions drawn by other researchers in related specialist areas. The analysis presented here illustrates the essential contribution places of worship make to societal wellbeing and community cohesion in normal times and during crises.⁶ It highlights the potential of churches to make a major contribution to national recovery; outlines the support which will be needed for this to happen; and makes important recommendations for future action at national and local level.

KEY FINDINGS

This section collates the research data and conclusions under three headings, focussing on churches and their communities in relation to provision of:

⁵ See Appendix 1: Methodology.

⁶ This finding is supported by the conclusions of the APPG *Keeping the Faith Report* that, 'Faith groups and faith-based organisations are integral to the immediate civil society response to the pandemic. Local authorities regard them as integral and essential to the COVID-19 response.'

- social care
- well-being, place-making and heritage
- support for people suffering grief and loss

Churches and communities: provision of social care

The closure of church buildings, and restrictions on church-based activities, have clearly had a serious impact on individual and societal wellbeing. Churches play a vital role as community hubs, bringing people together for a wide range of interactions and social care provision. They offer 'cradle to grave' activities - from early years support (such as parenting classes, toddler groups, and pre-school nurseries), to youth clubs, and support for older adults through coffee mornings, lunch clubs, exercise classes, etc. Such activities promote wellbeing and play a vital role in reducing isolation. The impact of their removal has been profound.

Church buildings offer spaces which bring multiple organisations together, providing access to a broad spectrum of everyday and specialist support. Churches also play a key role in combatting major disadvantage and promoting levelling up. They have a long record of supporting the most vulnerable in society and provide refuges where those experiencing poverty, homelessness, debt, disability, mental illness and addiction can safely seek support.

During COVID-19 restrictions, many churches showed great creativity in finding new ways to meet the additional needs triggered by the pandemic. They have partnered with other organisations and agencies to host foodbanks and provide local help to those struggling with increasing isolation, anxiety, financial stress, and the pain of bereavement. They have sought to maintain contact with the vulnerable through socially distanced visits and phone calls, and to move other activities online where possible. Churches and cathedrals have also hosted testing and vaccination centres.

'Our church has developed a partnership with six others to form a Community Help Hub offering shopping, prescription collection, befriending, food and gift packs, meals for school kids, money courses, wellbeing courses, prayer ministry, listening, crisis response, and referrals to agencies.' Church Leader

The pandemic has demonstrated the speedy, locally relevant, entrepreneurial, and creative ways in which faith groups can respond as partners in an emergency.⁷ Nevertheless, survey respondents also make it clear that both access to church buildings and in-person contact and support must be swiftly restored and maintained if the rapidly-growing societal problems of loneliness and isolation and the adverse impact of the pandemic on mental and physical wellbeing are to be addressed.

⁷ 'The pandemic has given rise to a significant increase in the numbers and depth of relations between local authorities and faith communities. The often hidden or unnoticed contributions that faith groups make to the resilience of local communities have become much more visible. Local authorities say they have discovered a new appreciation of the agility, flexibility and professionalism of faith groups and faith-based organisations in their responses to the pandemic.' APPG *Keeping the Faith Report*.

'Keep churches open at all costs. Don't abandon us when we need you most.' Non-Member

'Online is not the same as face to face when trying to combat loneliness.'
Church Leader

'Our mental wellness group hasn't been able to meet ... A group for people with developing Alzheimer's hasn't met.' Church Leader

Alongside other faith groups, churches have proven capacity to aid national recovery through long-term networks and hubs of social care in every community.⁸ They have built longstanding relationships and public trust and are experienced in meeting complex needs through both 'light touch' and specialist support. Church Leaders and Members are now articulating a clear commitment to addressing the increased needs triggered across society by COVID-19, through expanded provision and partnership working:

'Desire for connection and social contacts are going to be huge. So we are thinking of some form of community cafe space ... as a business or community enterprise.'

'Create partnerships with other organisations to offer community support e.g. debt advice, to stimulate activities with social benefit and inclusivity.'

'Drop-ins for folk who are lonely, bereaved, unemployed or experiencing mental illness.'

To mobilise these extensive assets fully, churches and other places of worship need greater recognition from both national and local government of their key roles as already established community hubs. Dedicated financial support will be required to ensure buildings have necessary facilities and are COVID-safe. Clearer, more easily applicable guidance is essential to allow buildings and activities to be re-opened with confidence and to remain resilient in the event of further waves of virus transmission. Further training and support for leaders and volunteers will also be needed.

Churches and communities: buildings, wellbeing, place-making, and heritage

Church buildings have multiple functions in promoting individual and community wellbeing. Access to worship (including weekly services, festivals, and the marking

⁸ ... from medieval times until the industrial era the Christian churches were the safety net for most of society. Many of our public services - our modern health, education and probation systems in particular - have their origins in Christian institutions. Today, faith communities in general remain an enormous resource for society ... Their values, their concern for the spiritual wellbeing of individuals and society, provide a motivation and commitment that often exceeds that of paid professionals. They have deep roots in local communities and are there for the long-term. Indeed they often have big buildings in the heart of communities, including the poorest, and they operate both nationally and at the hyperlocal level. The networks of a faith community, the relationships within a congregation or faith group, are a source of huge resilience and opportunities for the people they seek to help.' *Levelling up our communities: proposals for a new social covenant*, A report for government by Danny Kruger MP, September 2020, p. 35.

<https://www.dannykruger.org.uk/new-social-covenant>

of life events through baptisms, weddings, and funerals), is much valued both by members and non-members.

Church buildings are also greatly prized as places of solace and sanctuary by the communities in which they sit. Many are sites of shared heritage, offering inspiration and beauty through architecture and craftsmanship, playing an important role in local tourist economies, and providing access to much-needed green spaces in their churchyards and burial grounds. Churches are often the main or only public building in their community, hosting social and cultural events which build community cohesion.

Survey data and interviews reveal that locking or restricting access to churches during the pandemic caused great distress and anger, particularly amongst non-members who felt shut out of churches in their hour of need. Respondents report a resultant increase in anxiety and loneliness.

'Quiet reflection and comfort at a time of crisis was the most important reason for me to use church buildings - but they were locked.'

Non-Member

'As an extremely vulnerable person, it would have been comforting to sit alone safely in the church.' Non-Member

'I have been through domestic abuse and [the church] is the only place I feel safe.' Non-Member

Many churches responded to closure with creative ways to move services and other interaction online, growing virtual congregations and developing new skills in reaching out to communities through social media. Some churches also found ways to engage with remote visitors via virtual tours. However, these initiatives have also highlighted the digital inequalities which separate individuals and communities. In some rural areas, little or no access to Wi-Fi has hampered moves to online provision and church members elsewhere have also struggled to access online platforms, due to digital poverty among user groups. These factors are also perceived to exclude non-members.

Churches have huge potential to contribute to national recovery at the local level by offering individuals and communities free access to special places which can enhance wellbeing and belonging, rebuild community cohesion and contribute to local tourism. However, to fulfil this potential, they must have the means to maintain buildings and develop the facilities required for local communities and visitors. Churches will also need specialist support and training to help them develop a mixed provision of online and in-person worship and visitor engagement, and to generate income to sustain these initiatives.

Churches and communities: supporting grief and loss

COVID-19 has exposed the whole nation to an experience of individual loss and collective trauma which is unprecedented in its nature. The sheer number of deaths in such a short time has placed huge pressures on health professionals, causing significant stress - and distress. It has also prevented families from visiting and/or caring for the dying, frequently resulting in an enduring sense of pain and guilt.

Restrictions have also impacted severely on the normal rituals associated with death and bereavement and separated the grieving from the networks of support and comfort which normally help them to rebuild their lives.

'I need the church as a physical space to focus on processing grief/feelings from COVID.' Non-Member

'Unable to see brother before he died & unable to attend a service. Still have his ashes to inter.' Non-Member

Churches and crematoria have sought to alleviate the sense of deprivation by harnessing online tools to livestream funeral services, alongside limited in-person attendance. Nevertheless, the very severe restrictions imposed on physical attendance at funerals have meant that families have often had to choose which members should attend; have been unable to comfort one another; and have frequently felt a continuing sense of guilt that they have been unable to commemorate loved ones appropriately.

'We had to leave many members of our extended family standing outside during the service and we couldn't safely meet afterwards.' Non-Member

A recent report cites a bereaved sister saying, '[The] funeral was small and [I] still feel we haven't properly said goodbye ... [it] feels as though her life has gone and [she has] not been fully recognised for the person she was.'⁹

These factors, together with lack of access to church buildings as spaces for processing grief and finding comfort, have contributed to the emergence of a 'pandemic'¹⁰ of unresolved and unsupported grief and loss, the effects of which will take years to heal. The shock of the scale of deaths, many of otherwise healthy people, has been compounded by other experiences of loss, as people have seen their incomes, businesses, homes, education, and hopes for the future, taken away.

The consequent widespread levels of anxiety, together with the potential for the increased incidence of 'complex' and 'unsupported' grief to trigger long-term mental health issues, have serious implications for wellbeing and the ability of individuals to continue to function successfully within their families, social contexts, and work environments. It is likely that the full effects of the pandemic on mental health will not be seen until the immediate crisis is over. The impact on the mental health of young and old causes great individual suffering; it could also have significant social and economic implications, if depression and ongoing anxiety prevent people from fully resuming their roles within their families and society at large.

Open spaces, especially churchyards and burial grounds, have found renewed significance as spaces for quiet reflection and prayer. When permitted, churches have offered simple but effective tools such as memory trees, with ribbons, baubles or labels, offering individuals and communities a place to remember lost loved ones. The need for human contact and in-person support has never been more apparent,

⁹ Harrop E., Farnell D., Longo M., Goss S., Sutton E., Seddon K., Nelson A., Byrne A., Selman L.E. 'Supporting people bereaved during COVID-19: Study Report 1, 27 November 2020.' Cardiff University and the University of Bristol, p.3. <https://www.covidbereavement.com/post/supporting-people-bereaved-during-covid-19-study-report-1-27-november-2020>

¹⁰ 'A Nation in mourning.' <https://www.coop.co.uk/funeralcare/nationinmourning>

and there will be increased demand for rituals to remember those who been lost and opportunities for individuals and families to work through their grief. It is vital that churches should be allowed to expand such provision within buildings and in outside spaces, in order to support mental and emotional recovery and future wellbeing.

This research has shown the extent to which churches are frequently sought out by those seeking informal comfort and solace as well as more structured support and counselling. To meet this increased and urgent need, it is imperative that the time-critical role of funerals and associated mourning rituals in the grieving process are specifically addressed by Government and Public Health experts and ways found to balance the need to provide better access to these with the need to avoid virus transmission. Once again, clearer and more enabling guidance is needed to ensure churches can remain open to fulfil these vital functions. Church leaders and members will also require additional training in bereavement support as they complement the work of other professionals in the fields of healthcare and counselling.

CONCLUSION

The first phase of the pandemic required very swift decisions when little was known about COVID-19, or the length of time for which restrictions might be needed. Survey responses, including a significant degree of feedback from the general public, reflect deep frustration and anger about closure of churches, the loss of key 'cradle to grave' social provision, the resultant lack of safe, comforting spaces, and the damaging effects on the bereaved of the restrictions on funerals and pastoral support.

Subsequent periods of restriction and lockdown have meant ongoing challenges in terms of balancing the requirement to prevent virus transmission with the growing risks to mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health if increasingly needy communities continued to be deprived of the national network of support normally provided by places of worship.

Throughout the pandemic, uncertainty on the ground about the meaning and interpretation of guidance, anxieties about risk assessment and potential liability, and the existence of a strongly risk-averse culture, have hampered the ability of churches to offer spaces and activities which could have helped to address need and restore wellbeing. These issues must be addressed urgently to maximise the capacity of churches to support recovery.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS¹¹

Keeping churches open and maintaining their contribution to wellbeing, community cohesion, social care, and heritage tourism, is vital for both emergency support and long-term recovery.

Recognition of the multi-faceted contribution made to society by churches

1. Greater recognition is needed from government, local authorities, and policy and decision-makers, of the contribution made by church buildings and associated green

¹¹ Further details on these recommendations are set out, beginning on page 96 of this report.

spaces to the wellbeing of the whole community, both during a pandemic and under normal circumstances. Funding and other support measures need to address and balance the multiple roles of church buildings as places of worship and spirituality, spaces of shared heritage, and community hubs

2. Closing church buildings and suspending activities have substantial negative effects and should be a last resort. Every effort should be made to keep buildings open to support emergency social care, mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing, and other community benefits.

Supporting churches in their contribution to community wellbeing and recovery

3. It is critical that churches have the financial means to make and keep them fit for purpose in a context of increasing need.
4. Churches and other places of worship need authoritative up-to-date guidance on Covid-19 which local communities can confidently interpret and implement for their own situation. Government guidance therefore needs to be informed by wider consultation with practitioners and transmitted to and through denominations in a timely, simple, and easily applied form.
5. Churches need better training and support for enhanced partnership working.
6. More flexibility according to each particular situation is needed in the regulations for provision of weddings and funerals and keeping churches open for private grieving. Expanded support for the sick, dying, and bereaved should include allowing church ministers to operate as key workers in the community and greater investment in hospital chaplaincy to support patients and NHS staff.
7. Summer 2021 must be used for consultation with grassroots practitioners; clarification and simplification of policy and guidance; and establishing more effective channels of information dissemination; so churches can fully support recovery and wellbeing, even in the event of further waves of virus transmission.

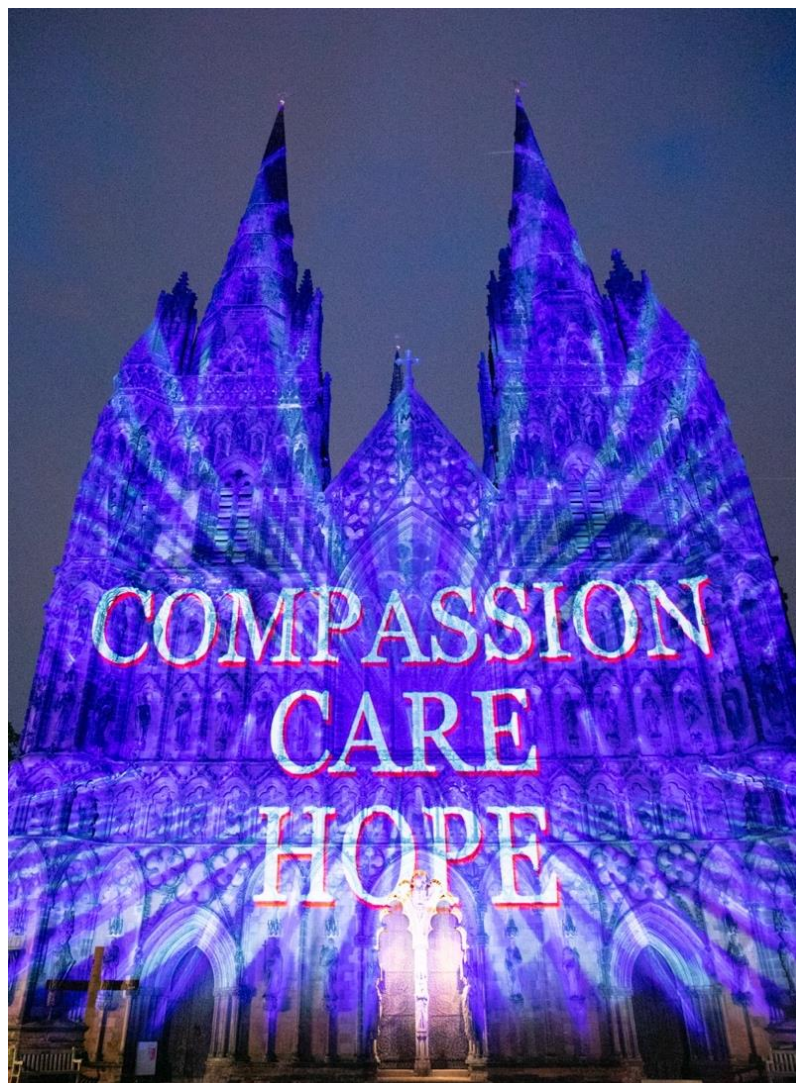
I come to this role fully aware of the massive contribution that listed places of worship make to their communities and indeed to the nation as a whole. From large towns to rural communities, they provide a strong sense of place and history and it is not surprising that many people form strong attachments to them.

They are primarily places of worship and yet they also provide refuge during tough times. They are also centres of community activities and support hosting meetings and events. They are often the first to co-ordinate charity relief and can often provide meaningful contacts for the lonely and isolated. This has all been especially true during the coronavirus pandemic. Time and again, we have seen listed places of worship and the people who run them making a massive

difference, from making phone calls and keeping in contact with vulnerable people, to hosting blood donation and testing and vaccination centres, to helping with child support, to shopping for food and medicine for those who are shielding. The work you have done under the such challenging conditions has been astounding.

And I think this has highlighted to everyone, the continuing value of faith and the unique buildings to our national life.'

Caroline Dinenage MP
Minister of State for Digital and Culture, DCMS.¹²



**FIGURE 1 - LICHFIELD CATHEDRAL
(CREATED BY LUXMURALIS AT LICHFIELD CATHEDRAL)**

¹² Part of a pre-recorded speech given to the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance's Big Update on 10th March 2021.

Social Care Community Hubs Wellbeing Need Isolation Anxiety

A Space to Mark Life Events

A Space for Comfort

A Space for Compassion & Support

A Space for Conversation

A Space for Culture

A Space to Explore Heritage

A Space for Worship

A Space for Fun

A Space for Everyone

"Church coffee mornings were a highlight of my isolated existence"
Non - Member

"Old folk have to balance the risk of coming out with the horror of another day alone"
Church Member

"I've struggled with mental health & loneliness. I have needed somewhere to go, but I can't access it"
Church Member

"The church was running a course to support new parents...I no longer have this support"
Non - Member

75% of Non-Members wanted churches as places of quiet reflection & comfort

79% of all respondents identified social isolation as a key issue in their community



Creativity

Growing Need

Extended Provision

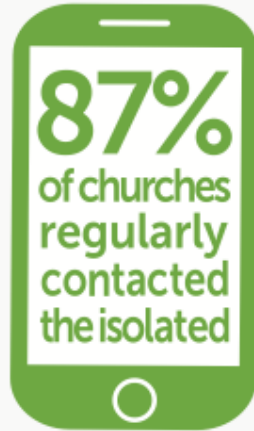
Recognition

Guidance

Funding



91%
of churches
offered online
engagement



"We've provided takeaway meals for homeless people & others & food parcels for individuals and families."
Church Leader



Churches Can Help Recovery Through Providing:

Community Partnerships Learning Hubs
Family Support Performance Spaces
Social Enterprise Spaces Drop-in Centres
Depression & Addiction Support Safe Spaces
Social Groups Heritage Centres Debt Advice
Job Centres Grief Support



Support & Recognition
as key community
hubs and centres of
wellbeing



Dedicated Funding
for building repairs
& improved
facilities



Clearer Guidance
up-to-date,
evidence based &
user friendly



Increased Training
for enhanced
partnership
working



59%
of Church
Leaders stressed
the need for
financial support
for buildings



SECTION 1

CHURCHES AND COMMUNITIES: Provision of Social Care

‘[Churches] are centres of community activities and support hosting meetings and events. They are often the first to co-ordinate charity relief and can often provide meaningful contacts for the lonely and isolated. This has all been especially true during the coronavirus pandemic.’

Caroline Dinenage MP

Minister of State for Digital and Culture, DCMS.¹³

‘Our church buildings used to be a hive of activity throughout the week, serving the best part of 1000 people of all ages in different ways.’¹⁴
Church Leader (Survey 2)

‘Our church hall, rebuilt as a community centre, has a Library, Toddler Group, Messy Church, Exercise Groups, Lunch Club, Citizens Advice, Job Club etc. We normally run a drop-in Coffee Morning, a Knit & Natter Group, a ‘Happy Café,’ an Open Church two mornings a week, and host concerts, nearly new sales etc.’
Member (Survey 2)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

A major ‘side effect’ of COVID-19 has been the reluctant suspension of much of the extensive nationwide network of activities and social care usually offered by churches and cathedrals,¹⁵ and the resultant significant damage to individual lives and local communities. Since March 2020, social distancing and other COVID-19 safety measures have meant that a huge amount of church-based community engagement and social outreach work could not continue, had to be reduced in scope, or needed to be undertaken in different ways. Evidence from surveys and interviews shows clearly how vital these activities were to the wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities, and how deeply their loss or reduction has been felt. It also shows the deep frustration felt by church leaders and congregations at being unable to serve communities as they would have wished.

¹³ Part of a pre-recorded speech given to the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance’s Big Update on 10th March 2021.

¹⁴ Quotations from survey and interview respondents are in blue.

¹⁵ Research published in October 2020 on social and economic benefits provided by churches estimates the overall annual social and economic value of church buildings as at least £12.4 billion, and the wellbeing value to the people who benefit from social and community services as £8.3 billion. <https://www.houseofgood.nationalchurchestrust.org/>

Respondents to the surveys and interviews carried out by this research project clearly identify the wide-ranging impact on social, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing, of the loss of the following kinds of provision normally offered by churches:

- Groups and support for early years, children, young people, and their parents (includes toddler groups, pre-school nurseries/playgroups, parenting classes, after school programs, educational/homework clubs, youth clubs, mentoring schemes, and uniformed groups)
- Care and support for older adults, such as coffee mornings, lunch clubs, creative activities, dementia groups, and opportunities for volunteering
- Support for physical and mental health, including exercise classes, gyms for people with disabilities, health/GP clinics, addiction support, and wellbeing centres/courses
- Hosting of community services such as foodbanks, Post Offices, Citizens Advice, community shops, cafés, markets, health clinics, debt counselling, homelessness support, job clubs etc
- Public spaces for community cultural, and social events

Responses also highlighted two other key areas: the loss of opportunities to visit, explore and enjoy shared heritage and the lack of access to safe spaces offering beauty, peace, refuge, and comfort. These topics are examined in Sections 2 and 3.

The effects of the forced withdrawal of tens of thousands of existing local social support projects, based in places of worship,¹⁶ have been exacerbated by the new pressures created by the pandemic, especially in terms of mental and physical health, bereavement, interrupted education, lack of parenting support, job losses, financial problems, isolation, etc. These have not only severely affected those who were already vulnerable but have also created additional needs for support across the whole population, as many individuals and families experience unprecedented and unanticipated challenges, pressures, and levels of anxiety. Here we outline data on current need; creative responses; the potential of churches to aid national recovery; and the support which will be required.

1.2 NEED

The most recent 'COVID-19, Churches and Communities' project survey (conducted Feb 1 - March 7, 2021)¹⁷ shows 90% of Church Leaders, 77% of Church Members, and 71% of those identifying as 'General Public,'¹⁸ selecting 'support for those

¹⁶ Data from the Church of England 2019 'Statistics for Mission' return: 77% of churches involved in one or more forms of social action; churches involved in 35,000 social action projects (churches ran over 15,000 projects themselves, other initiatives were hosted by churches, carried out in partnership, or supported by volunteers or donations). Churches were particularly involved in running or supporting food banks, hospitality for older people, and parent and toddler groups. <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/2019StatisticsForMission.pdf>

¹⁷ From here called 'Survey 2.' 'Survey 1' refers to the survey conducted from September-December 2020.

¹⁸ From here referred to as 'Non-Members.'

struggling with social isolation/loneliness' as one of the greatest needs in their community, with between 40% and 50% of all groups rating mental health issues as an area of major need ('Mental health needs have rocketed'). Other headline needs include financial pressures; support for children of all ages; bereavement and grieving; inability to share in marking key life events; and access to in-person worship and to church buildings as spaces of spiritual reflection, comfort, and hope (see Figure 3).

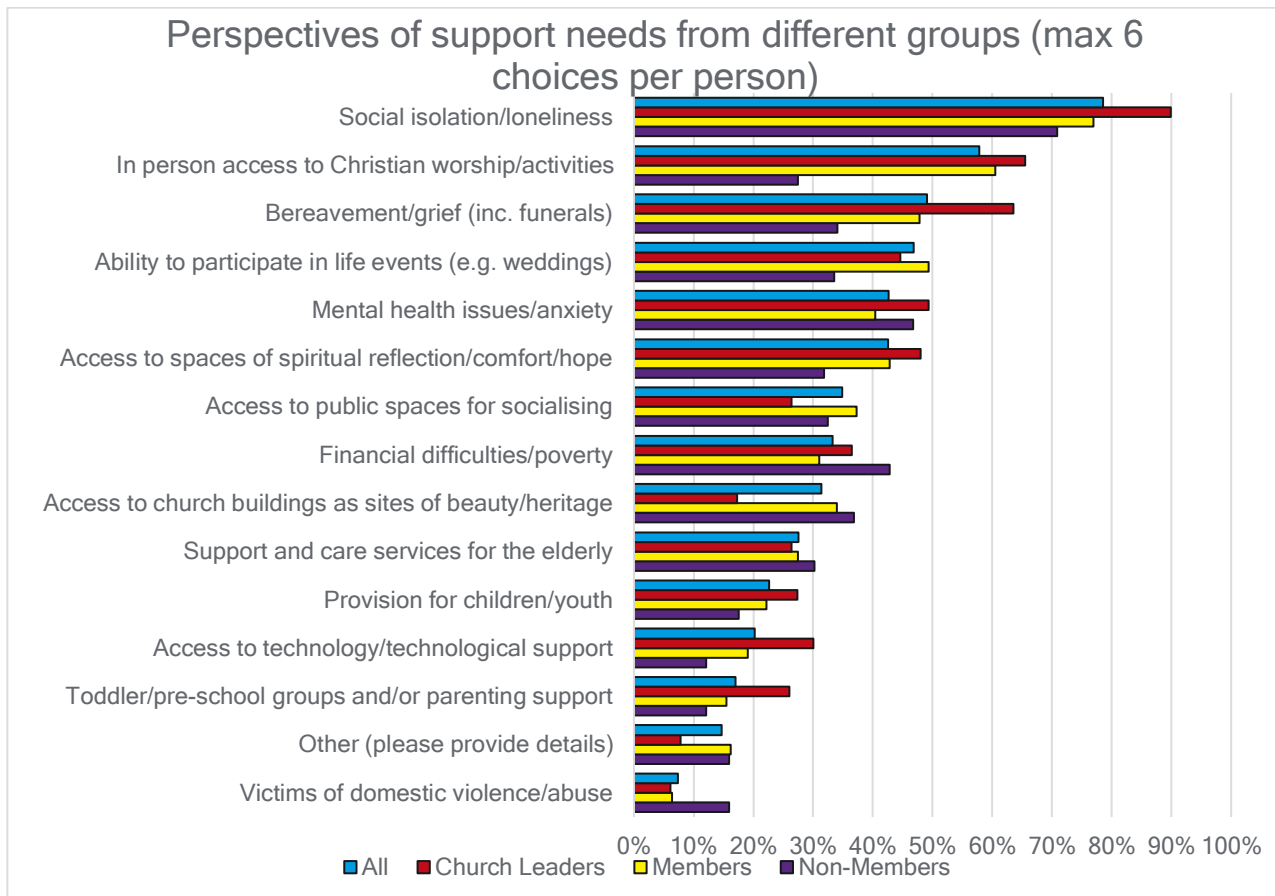


FIGURE 3 - MAIN SUPPORT NEEDS IN COMMUNITIES IDENTIFIED BY DIFFERENT GROUPS (SURVEY 2).

1.2.1 The impact of the loss of church-based 'cradle to grave' activities

Qualitative data from both Surveys One and Two (see examples below) reveals the wide range of human experience underlying these statistics. There is clear evidence that social isolation and lack of opportunity to engage in beneficial activities are productive of very serious consequences for mental and physical well-being, development of key life skills, and processing of trauma, in people of all ages and social backgrounds.

Isolation has affected the socialisation of very young children: *'Being unable to attend our usual toddler group ... has left us disconnected from our friends and community.'* Non-Member (Survey 1)

'The kids are markedly less sociable now ... super shy when seeing people, even family.' Non-Member (Survey 1)

'I'm on maternity leave with my first baby. I've found it really tough being isolated at home with nowhere to go during the day.' Non-Member (Interview)

*'Families with young children have especially felt isolated and alone, worried about juggling home schooling and working. They feel insecure about their parenting and **not having a place to go to chat with others has added to their anxiety and worry.**'*

Church Leader (Survey 2).

'The church was running a parenting course to support new parents in the issues of raising toddlers. This was abruptly stopped and I no longer have access to this support.'
Non-Member (Interview)

'Online is not the same as face to face when trying to combat loneliness - teenagers and young people have struggled most with online provision.' Church Leader (Survey 2)

'I have struggled with mental health and loneliness. I have needed somewhere to go but I cannot access it.' Member (Survey 2)

'Those with learning disabilities find it difficult to understand. They miss the fellowship, friendship, feeling of being part of the Christian community.' Member (Survey 2)

'Our church building opens as a cafe 24/7 and the loss of that has affected our community as it provides a place for people to meet.'
Church Leader (Survey 2)

'The reduction of these services [activities for children and young people; Wellbeing centre; Café; Fitness/aerobics classes] has negatively impacted on people's well-being - especially those with existing mental health difficulties ... some now need medical intervention.'
Church Leader (Survey 1)

'The closure of the church and hall meant I have been unable to hold my weekly ladies' aerobics class. This has had a huge impact. Being unable to exercise in a group where they feel safe, happy, and not judged can impact on mental health; for some, my class is the only opportunity every week to get out and socialise with others. One previously struggled with a back problem. Since my classes stopped, her back pain has returned, forcing her to take time off work (she works for the NHS).'
Non-Member (Interview)

Older people and those living alone *'have suffered hugely from being unable to meet'*. Church Leader (Survey 2)

'Our old folk have to balance the risk of coming out with the horror of another day alone.' Member (Survey 2)

'Church coffee mornings were a highlight of my isolated existence.'
Non-Member (Survey 1)

'Social gatherings are very important for the elderly, for their mental health and physical health. The effort to get ready, go out, meet up etc may be a major part of an elderly person's physical exercise each week.'
Member (Survey 2)

'An older member of our Church who lives alone became seriously mentally ill during the first lockdown and continues to be so ... until then [he] was a very active member.' Member (Survey 2)

'The closure of the church building meant that we were unable to welcome those people, who need a quiet place for prayer and reflection. These are often people, of all ages, who are grieving over the death of someone who has left a huge gap in their lives.' Member (Survey 2)

*'Since the start of the pandemic I have helped oversee an upscaled foodbank with hot meal distribution. I oversee about 60 volunteers currently in that. I man a freephone community helpline, details of which were delivered to every door of the parish. Our church has started a befriending telephone support service and opened a house for the homeless. We have delivered gifts to care homes and GP surgeries and provided online support for youth [...] **The needs are overwhelming.**'* Member (Survey 2).

The indispensable role of church buildings as hubs providing wide-ranging social care, and hosting vital community activities pre-COVID, is evident across rural, town, suburban, and urban settings. Long-established local knowledge and relationships enable churches and cathedrals to function both as a catalyst to action and facilitator of partnerships. One of the biggest contributions churches make to a community is as a provider of space/spaces (especially if they are the only public space in a neighbourhood) which can be used for church-run activities, hired to local groups, and provide community hubs for bringing multiple organisations and agencies together, especially in a crisis.

Churches are also experienced in flexible, responsive working. They offer a very broad spectrum of levels of support, from working in partnership with other organisations to provide structured expert advice, to more informal 'light touch' responsive support, such as community cafés. This enables them to reach some of the most vulnerable, including those who don't always feel able or ready to seek help through statutory agencies.

'Anybody can come into our community café, but, in reality, what we found was that our regulars were people with mental ill health or, in one case, a young man with learning difficulties. And so, we'd see them daily. There would be daily conversations and it was a way of checking [on them] and obviously that's not been able to happen.'

Church Leader (Interview)

1.2.2 Combating major disadvantage

Inability to access in-person provision has an especially damaging effect on those needing significant support with addiction, debt, homelessness, and poverty and other major issues. Churches have always had an important role in reaching out to the most vulnerable in society. Detailed analysis in the recent 'House of Good' report estimates that churches house food banks providing £7bn worth of services, provide addiction services to the value of £127m, mental health services worth £900m, and £400m in youth services every year.¹⁹ Our research data illustrates the difficulties of maintaining these services, especially since many cannot be delivered effectively online as it is not possible to replicate in-person social interaction, or cater for

¹⁹ <https://www.houseofgood.nationalchurchestrust.org/>

audiences who cannot afford or negotiate digital access. In interviews, churches which normally provide these types of services on a significant scale expressed great concern about the severe impact of the removal of this provision on individuals:

'We have not seen most of the users of the support groups. This is particularly true of NA (Narcotics Anonymous) mainly because a lot of them have very chaotic lives. Many of them are not able to participate in meetings on Zoom. I am quite sure that many of those have relapsed.'

Church Leader (Interview)

'We normally provide a service from Monday to Friday, 9am – 3pm where people just drop in and have free tea and coffee and a sense of family, a real sense of community. There was always somebody to chat to or something going on. Suddenly, all this had to stop ... We do a lot of things online but for the most vulnerable that excludes them, because they would normally go to the library or come here to use internet broadband facilities. They just don't have access or the financial ability to do any of that stuff. Not even smartphones. So they become more and more isolated. We have tried to keep some form of contact, but it's a bit hit and miss. For one thing, they'll have issues like drug or alcohol addiction, or just anxiety or fear ... For one or two that I've been extremely concerned about, it could take weeks to get hold of them, including getting police involved, just to check they're okay.'

Church Leader (Survey 1)

'What we weren't able to do is to gather people together in some of the support groups that were meeting beforehand. Partly because some of those people were in very extremely vulnerable categories. Others, because they have to be moderated by a psychiatrist and/or a group therapist. Finding spaces, in which we could do that and keep people COVID-safe in a building never designed to be used for those things, has been very difficult. So ... our extreme mental unwellness group hasn't met again. And it's one that we can't do online. Not least because most of the people who come don't have access. An intermediate group for people with developing Alzheimer's, or people who were very isolated ... has not met again.' Church Leader (Interview)

'Debt advice hasn't been able to run in the same way and there hasn't been the same kind of contact with people. Normally, we have a drop in for tea and coffee and then they'd go off to their debt advice appointments. We saw the service of helping people manage their utility bills as absolutely vital for people around here, those with large families or even single, very vulnerable, people. We have a restricted fund for this purpose. We've made it an absolute priority to provide a service whereby they can bring their card or key (for the meter) to us and we go

to the shop and do it for them. But [now] it can only be just a chat in the carpark, socially distanced with a mask.' Church Leader (Interview)

The overriding message from those with significant experience of caring for the most vulnerable, and pursuing a levelling-up agenda, is that without suitably-equipped, COVID-secure buildings able to provide vital face-to-face human contact with skilled staff and volunteers, both structured programmes of social care and informal support

*'We have a weekly lunch club for older people and there is a **huge amount of loneliness** there. I think the majority of people don't necessarily come because they're hungry, **they come for the friendship and that might be the only time in the week they meet people.** So, our amazing team of volunteers have phoned people on a regular basis but **it's not the same.**'* Church Leader (Interview)

are seriously impaired or rendered ineffective. When patterns of engagement are disrupted, participants may suffer major deterioration, contact may be severed, and the benefits of relationships, knowledge of individuals, and previous investment in caring can be lost.

1.3 CREATIVE INITIATIVES

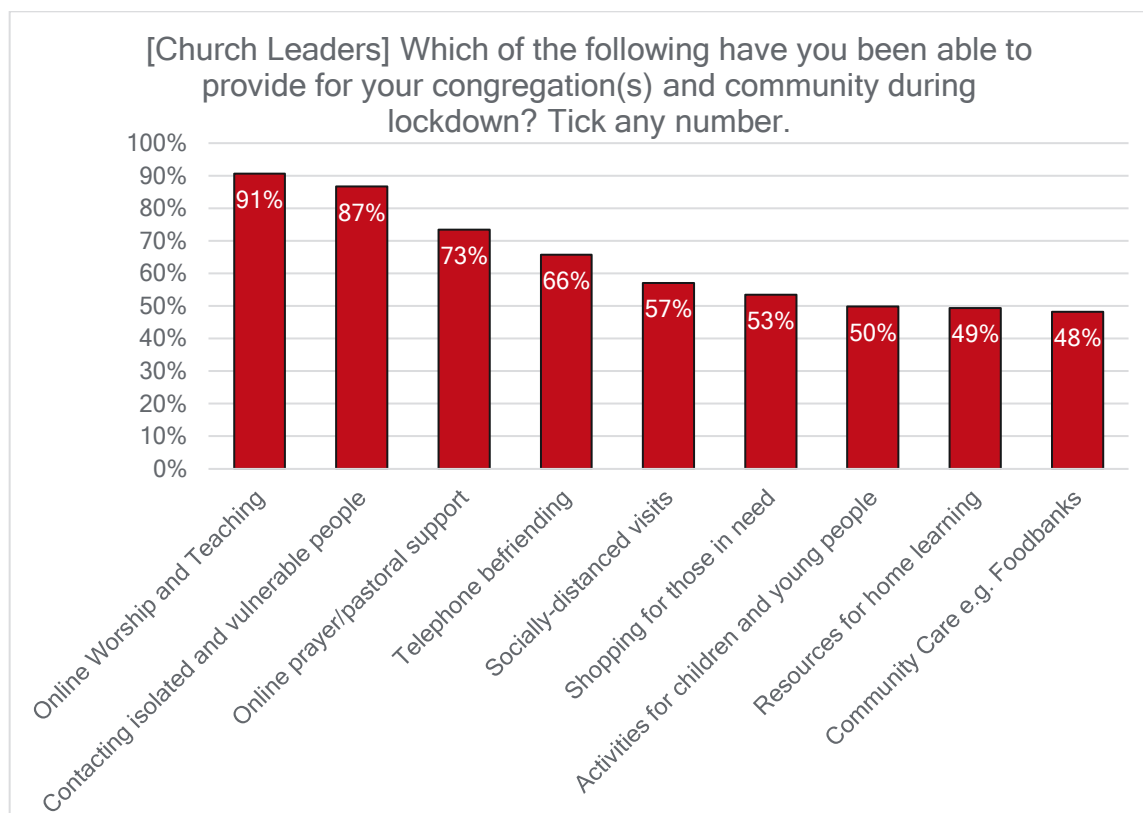


FIGURE 4 - PROVISION OFFERED BY CHURCH LEADERS DURING THE FIRST LOCKDOWN (SURVEY 1).

Despite COVID restrictions and the resultant suspension or disruption of so many social care activities, churches across the country have nevertheless devised creative initiatives to address previous or new areas of need through offering adapted or innovative services. In the process, they have frequently built stronger

partnerships with local communities and agencies. During the pandemic, churches have assumed a critical role in hosting and underpinning multi-organisation responses, such as the organisation of foodbanks and food deliveries, because they can offer access to buildings (albeit limited by COVID restrictions) and established volunteer networks (see Figure 4).

1.3.1 The characteristics of effective intervention

The qualitative data from both the 2020 and 2021 surveys (see examples below) reveals that effective interventions to address individual and community need can be both small and large scale, but must be shaped by local knowledge, relationships, and partnerships, areas in which churches have a major contribution to make.

In many cases, COVID-related initiatives have taken the form of very simple but effective forms of communication and provision, such as sending cards and gifts, delivering food safely, and telephoning the lonely and those unable to access online provision. Elsewhere, interventions have required new analysis of needs and the development of fresh approaches. COVID-19 has created additional needs, including job losses in areas very reliant on hospitality and tourism; it has also revealed underlying hardship in supposedly prosperous areas.

A rural church previously saw itself as part of quite an affluent village, but now is recognising underlying needs, starting its own Foodbank, and undertaking Christians Against Poverty training. 'Setting up the support network has meant we've worked out who the needy people are. And we're better able to look out for them. We are going to be having our own food bank. There are going to be more people that will need that sort of support. Three out of four adults from my next-door neighbours have lost their jobs. For a large chunk of the lockdown, they were without jobs. There will be others in the village like that.' Church Leader (Interview)

Volunteers from a seaside town church, including the vicar, are undertaking the Christians Against Poverty Money and Life Skills training so they can support those facing unemployment and financial problems. 'The Life Skills course (10 weeks) incorporates some of the money stuff but is also about helping people shop well and cook healthily. There's a section on relationships and not falling out with your neighbours etc. Lots of the families and the homeless people we see, their life's a bit of a mess in all sorts of ways.' Church Leader (Interview)

The key to effective solutions has been to match approaches and tools to local situations and to recognise that there is no 'one size fits all' type of provision or successful delivery method. Online groups and digital communication have had a significant role in community outreach, and skills and capacity in this area have expanded very considerably. These are elements which need to be carried forward. However, it is also clear from the data, not only that many people are unable to engage online because of 'digital poverty,' lack of experience, or disability, but that digital contact does not combat isolation in the same way as tangible in-person engagement, whether in the form of delivering shopping, cards, gifts or meals, or socially distanced visits.

'We have a proper catering kitchen [normally] used for the elderly. So we reached out to a local charity [run by] an amazing lady who goes off to New Covent Garden market every morning, gathers up all the food that otherwise would get chucked away, and makes meals out of it for vulnerable families. So, we said to her, "do you want the use of our kitchen?" ... she leapt at the chance ... Each week, the meals get taken to the schools and very carefully and with dignity handed out to vulnerable families.'

Church Leader (Interview)

'Takeaway meals for homeless people and others in great need; food parcels for individuals and families facing financial hardship.'

Church Leader (Survey 2)

'We have run pop-up youth and children's work & other church activities out of a shipping container, our food project changed to provide ingredient bags and YouTube cooking videos.'

Church Leader (Survey 2)

'We have set up a 'Baby Basics' centre to provide resources for new mothers in the community.' Church Leader (Survey 2)

'We've acted as a contact centre for parents who are only allowed supervised visits with children ... a new thing because children's centres and other avenues that they'd normally use are closed ... Again, a local care home needed a venue where they could train new staff.' Church Leader (Interview)

A central London church, close to two universities, set up a group for students in September 2020, as some of those students, new to London, *'came into a very vulnerable position in a world of locked down University-dom. A lot were separated by many hundreds of miles from parents or other support groups.'* The church has kept the group running through the second lockdown and beyond (with permission). *'They were coming for pastoral support and for care and for just being in a place that they felt was safe. Two of them, I think, were certainly at risk of suicide. So I was determined that we would carry on doing something for them.'*

Church Leader (Interview)

A few activities (such as foodbanks and health clinics situated in church buildings) were allowed to continue operating during the lockdown which began in March 2020; others gradually resumed in some places as guidance was amended over time.

'We're just about to start a baby and toddler group as this is now allowed by the government regulations ... A young mother ... was feeling very isolated and unable to go anywhere with her baby and her toddler ... it's a real struggle for mums with small babies, particularly if you're locked up in a small flat. So she asked the vicar 'if there is any way that my little NCT mother and toddler group could use the space, fully socially distanced (we'll bring our own toys, we'll wipe everything down).' We have undertaken a risk assessment and agreed to offer them two mornings a week on a trial basis.' Church Leader (Interview)

Two churches interviewed provide premises for GP surgeries which remained open, with the churches ensuring that the areas used by the surgeries were kept separate from the rest of the building and checking security and fire alarms.



FIGURE 5 - FOODBANK AT ST MONICA'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, PALMERS GREEN
(© MAZUR/CBCEW.ORG.UK)

1.3.2 Partnership initiatives and support for other frontline workers

Collaboration across denominations

'Our church has developed a partnership with 6 others to form a Community Help Hub offering shopping, prescription collection befriending, food and gift packs, meals for school kids, money courses, wellbeing courses, prayer ministry, listening, crisis response and referrals to agencies.'

Church Leader (Survey 2)

The *Church in Lockdown* report (Your Neighbour, 7 January 2021), summarises ways in which churches have mobilised to multiple needs triggered by the pandemic and have collaborated both locally and nationally. Since March 2020, the Your Neighbour network has co-ordinated over 1000 churches from more than 40 denominations in a COVID-19 response, in collaboration with the Government and the NHS. Outcomes cited include: '5 million meals have been provided to those in need by the church each month since the beginning of the pandemic; 90% of churches surveyed have supported the vulnerable during the pandemic; 71% of churches have delivered new services, many in areas of the community they have never been active in before.'²⁰

²⁰ <https://yournighbour.org/news/reports-summary> See also the multi-denominational 'Love your Neighbour' initiative: <https://www.loveyourneighbour.uk/>

Partnerships with other agencies and local authorities

The report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society, *'Keeping the Faith Partnerships between faith groups and local authorities,'* notes that local councils' understanding of and links with places of worship and faith groups have increased substantially during the pandemic.

*'Collaboration between local authorities and faith groups has dramatically increased in the pandemic. The imperative of providing support to vulnerable families has overcome decades of wariness. Of local authorities responding to the survey on which this report is based, undertaken by Goldsmiths, University of London, over the summer of 2020, 59% had been working with church-based food banks. 24% had been working with mosque-based food banks, 11% with food banks based in Sikh Gurdwaras and 10% with food banks based in Hindu temples.'*²¹

The pandemic has demonstrated the speedy, locally relevant, entrepreneurial, and sustainable ways in which faith groups can respond as partners in an emergency.²²

'Two members of staff have parish community focussed roles. They have led collaboration with the City Council, opened a food bank, a listening service, a befriending scheme, outdoor play, delivering craft kits. With other statutory and non-statutory agencies, [we] got a £50k+ grant from Lottery to open a new Community Hub.' Church Leader (Survey 2)

'Launched a school holiday food parcel scheme with referrals made by local schools; Launching a youth mentoring programme to get young people into education or employment; Launched a debt advice service; Continuing to partner with Safe Families to support families in crisis.' Church Leader (Survey 2)

'Sports work, lots of work with vulnerable young people - particularly those affected by knife crime and youth violence. Working with partner agencies including the police.' Church Leader (Survey 2)

'[We] increased networks with the local community especially local shop keepers, pop up markets, funeral directors and crematorium/cemetery staff. Actively made contact with them, dropped in chocolate, and arranged for a local cafe to prepare lunch and dinner packs for the local crem/cemetery staff and funeral directors which I delivered.'

Church Leader (Survey 1)

²¹ https://www.faithandsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/APPG_CovidReport_Full_V4.pdf

²² The Cinnamon Network lists ways in which key church projects, including Christians Against Poverty, Street Angels, Living Loss, and Care Home Friends, have adapted to meet demand during the pandemic. <https://www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk/how-are-projects-helping-their-communities-in-lockdown/>

One rural Church Leader we spoke to set up a COVID response team, with **over 100 volunteers** offering shopping and other help in the first lockdown. The vicar arranged for people to pay the local CO-OP by card by phone and for pharmacists to deliver prescriptions to the over 60s, an offer shared by Facebook and newsletters **delivered weekly to over 1200 houses**. Newsletters also gave information about support for mental health, domestic abuse etc. This support network was initiated by the church in partnership with the Parish Council. The same network also offered to **cook and deliver a deluxe Christmas lunch takeaway**.

'[We made] regular telephone calls to the Care Homes in the parish offering support to staff and managers. Provision of 'surprises' such as ice cream in the summer, advent calendars, treats for the staff.'

Member (Survey 2)

'We put the call out to say if you know of an elderly person in the Battersea area who needs hot meals every day, then tell us and we will have them provided [... and] we have been delivering meals to about 390 people each week. They also get activity bags, phone calls, their birthday is celebrated and if they've got issues in their home they get sorted out.'

Church Leader (Interview)

Long-established trust in churches has proved a key component in facilitating wider partnerships:

'Our civic Parish Council was advised not to keep meeting and not to take on oversight of volunteers ... individual councillors

stepped up and organised a fabulous support network. The grant money is in our church bank account - we were seen as 'honest brokers' in a bit of a vacuum. Our church Facebook page was again seen as an 'honest broker' for publicising and celebrating some things. A Facebook appeal for volunteers to support neighbours attracted 150 offers in 3 days ... These volunteers were later recognised by the wider national network.'

Church Leader (Survey 1)

A Baptist church reports:

*'Trust has been our greatest asset in the midst of this crisis. The fact that we have been part of our community for decades, supporting families, running programmes, serving the vulnerable and partnering with local agencies, means that we are a safe place for people who are struggling and a dependable organisation that local leaders and policy makers can rely upon.'*²³

This recognition of the contribution of churches provides an important springboard for future partnership in rebuilding communities during the recovery phase.

²³Church in Lockdown report, p 3 (<https://yournighbour.org/the-church-in-lockdown>).

Churches and Cathedrals as Covid-19 testing and vaccination centres



FIGURE 6 - CANDLES SPELL OUT HOPE AT A VACCINE CLINIC IN SALISBURY CATHEDRAL (SHANE BRENNAN)

A number of churches and cathedrals have utilised the location and properties of their buildings to play a role as testing and vaccination centres in collaboration with the NHS and other bodies. The scale of buildings, the opportunities to section off discrete areas such as cathedral crypts, and the draughts and high ceilings which help to create well-ventilated spaces, have all proved useful. In November 2020, the Deans and Chapters of Lichfield, Blackburn, Gloucester, St Edmundsbury and Southwark Cathedrals were among the first to offer their buildings to their local health providers as a safe vaccination spaces. Guildford Cathedral had already been turned into a drive-through clinic in November to immunise 800 local people against influenza.

'[The vaccine is] a real glimmer of hope after a very dark year, and we are delighted to be able to offer the place as a nice, airy, socially distanced space in which this can take place.'

The Very Rev Adrian Dorber, Dean of Lichfield

'It is only right we offer our building as a safe and accessible space for this exciting inoculation plan and be prepared to serve the nation in these times of deep uncertainty and fear. [...] Our location is perfect – two minutes' walk from the train station, three minutes' walk from the bus station, and we have five car parks around us.'

The Very Revd Peter Howell-Jones, Dean of Blackburn

'50% of people in Luton do not have their own car but we were hearing of people being offered tests miles away. So, when a person in Luton has symptoms, but can't get a test locally, it's a real struggle. We knew

that this was something we had to do as an act of love for our community.'

Revd Andrea Leonard, Vicar of Christ Church, Luton

1.4 CHURCHES AND RECOVERY

The experience of the pandemic has provided a once in a lifetime opportunity for churches, communities, local and national government to reflect on the essential contribution of places of worship as centres for wellbeing and social care. These roles are now seen as even more vital in the light of the clear finding that loneliness and isolation are regarded as the greatest COVID-induced challenge confronting communities. Churches, chapels, and other places of worship have an indispensable role to play in the short, medium, and long-term recovery and re-building of communities and individual lives; using their capacity to identify and meet local needs flexibly and responsively on the ground. Key to this are the buildings often located at the physical centre of both urban and rural communities which act as vital hubs in distributing – and amplifying – social care provision. It is evident that the Church of England, which has a church/presence in every community across England, can make a particular contribution to national recovery

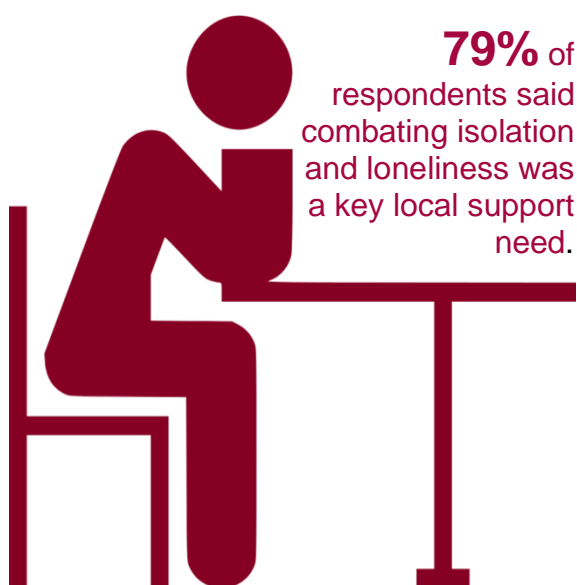


FIGURE 7 - DATA ON LONELINESS (SURVEY 2).

alongside other denominations and faith communities and their wide-ranging networks of relationships and connections.

Church leaders, members and other volunteers are aware not only that churches and other places of worship need to resume their crucial role as social hubs, but that activities will need to be expanded to meet the increased levels of need across society. The 'side effects' of the pandemic have been far-reaching. The negative impact on mental and physical health, through added pressures and delayed treatment;

on emotional wellbeing, through bereavement, increased anxiety, and significantly reduced social interaction; together with widespread uncertainties about job and financial security, have affected many previously considered secure and successful. Moreover, it is clear that the effects of traumatic sudden loss and unresolved grief, coupled with lack of access to normal support networks and activities, will not be swiftly resolved. Survey responses clearly articulate a desire to reopen buildings, reinstate activities safely – and offer more in the future to support the rebuilding of individual lives and community networks.



FIGURE 8 - DATA ON SOCIALISING (SURVEY 2).

'Levelling Up and Social Justice: the Church of England has a long-term interest in supporting communities in areas of deprivation. We target elements of our own internal funding towards this through our Lowest Income Communities Funding, through our work on urban estates and deprived towns, and through our social action work. Continuing this work is one of our greatest priorities. Government has acknowledged that the impact of Coronavirus has been disproportionate, hitting poorest communities hardest. We want to be a constant presence for those who are struggling the most, helping them in spiritual and practical ways.'²⁴

1.4.1 Churches as hubs of social care

Interviews with churches offering major community provision showed that most have applied successfully for Covid-19 funding that was made available to charities, social enterprises, and the voluntary sector, to support their activities. A number also reported gaining new volunteers and donations, as a result of local residents being impressed by what churches are achieving and recognising them as a channel through which to help.

'Especially at Christmas, we joined in with other initiatives. One of them was called 'Let nobody be left behind at Christmas', where everyone had the opportunity to refer somebody who was elderly or vulnerable, or a family to receive a hamper at Christmas and toys for children. And we were able to support over 200 families with pies, food hampers, some vouchers for gas and electricity to get them over the Christmas period. And we still had stuff left over because people were so generous.'

Church Leader (Interview)

Survey 2, conducted from February 1 - March 7, 2021, asked respondents to identify the key contributions churches could make to the national recovery, based on their experience before and during the pandemic.

*'The home for a range of services, including food banks, concerts, scouts and guides, choir, performance arts, counselling and mutual support, which use its buildings to serve the wider community of all faiths. **Not church in community, but church as community.**'* Member (Survey 2)

'A centre to which people can turn for support and advice in both the short and longer term' Non-Member (Survey 2)

'Financial aid for poor families; parenting classes; help for those suffering with mental health.' Member (Survey 2)

²⁴ Becky Clark, *National Church Institutions of the Church of England submission to the DCMS Select Committee Enquiry*, 19th June 2020.

'I would like the church to offer social facilities such as tea and chat sessions for everyone who needs them. This may have to wait until social distancing restrictions are lifted but there are so many people who have suffered from the effects of the pandemic that they need somewhere to go which they can trust and get informal support and encouragement. The church is well placed to offer this.'

Member (Survey 2)

*'Church services and community meetings, lunches as done in the past. Help groups for depression and addiction - **anything to restore village and community gatherings as core to the well-being of any village.***

Member (Survey 2)

'My personal vision for post COVID is to set up drop-ins for folk who are lonely, bereaved, unemployed or experiencing mental illness.'

Member (Survey 2)

'I would like to see support services for pregnant women and families; a place to gather socially-distanced for pregnancy and new babies; a place for children to study.' Member (Survey 2)

'Churches should be at the centre of any community and should be capable of hosting various community activities, as well as worship.'

Non-Member (Survey 2)

'Our church will offer a space for community activities once again, in its dual purpose as a place of worship and village hall. The biggest role we can play is to bring the community together when this is possible and, in the meantime, maintain a watch through the volunteer network to ensure everyone is being looked after and has the support they need.'

Member (Survey 2)

*'I would love to be able to use the church as a **hub for learning**, particularly offering a service to families and children. We are in a non-book culture and **accessing education through computers has been very difficult if not impossible** for quite a few of our families'* Church Leader (Survey 2)

Such 2021 survey responses indicate that a significantly enhanced vision of the role of churches has emerged in response to the impact of COVID-19. This encompasses further development of churches as community hubs, with a range of carefully focussed activities to tackle loneliness and isolation and meet other specific needs. The data emphasises the essential role of church buildings in these processes, as places where those in need can be welcomed, meet others, be listened to, articulate their problems and needs, and discover ways forward. These findings are supported by the National Churches Trust *State of the Churches Survey*, published in May 2020. Making contact with vulnerable and isolated people was the most important community service identified by the churches who responded, with two thirds of respondents believing that their buildings would become more important as a result of COVID-19 and its negative impact on the wellbeing, relationships and resources of individuals and communities.

'Once they are open again, churches are most looking forward to be able to provide togetherness/companionship, closely followed by religious

services, being able to gather together in the building again and restarting outreach and community activities.

Churches have played a major part in helping local people during the Covid-19 lockdown and have set up a wide range of new community support services and forms of worship. The top five new activities are making contact with isolated and vulnerable people, online worship, telephone befriending, shopping and/or delivery of shopping or essential supplies and online support groups.²⁵

Church buildings also host a range of small businesses and social enterprises, a model of mutual benefit which has even greater potential for expansion post-COVID. A recent initiative is the Plunkett Foundation's Campaign for the Promotion of Community Businesses²⁶ launched in January 2021, funded by the AllChurches Trust. This is designed to provide practical support and guidance for communities seeking to run small businesses located in places of worship.

1.4.2 Understanding and meeting complex social needs

COVID-19 and the series of lockdowns have magnified problems of loneliness and isolation, mental health and anxiety and exacerbated underlying inequalities. Churches evidence a deep understanding of local need, based on their long-standing presence within, and understanding of, particular places and communities. Individual and societal needs are frequently complex, requiring active listening to build trust and to help people understand and articulate the challenges they face, and ask for help. Churches are places where those with complex needs can access help without filling in forms, making appointments, or being referred by other health or social welfare professionals. Rather, people can be met 'where they are,' often at moments of personal or financial crisis in which churches are seen as places of emergency support or sanctuary. Skilled and well-trained clergy and volunteers are particularly adept at identifying complex needs and understanding how to support individuals in accessing a wide range of social and welfare provision.

'Many people want to be listened to at the moment. Again, I think the church is uniquely placed to offer attention as well as practical help.'

Member (Survey 2)

'Help for those who are lonely and vulnerable. Help for those who have lost loved ones. Support to help people see hope in the future.'

Member (Survey 2)

'Any practical support for struggling individuals...there are so many ...for example, unpaid carers not forgetting Young Carers, those folk of all ages who have 'fallen through the cracks' of any financial support

²⁵ <https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/news/churches-and-covid-19-opinion-poll>. See also Section 2 below.

²⁶ <https://plunkett.co.uk/major-funding-boost-to-support-community-businesses-co-locating-in-churches/>

advertised..... Keeping people fed and warm, off the streets especially, is vital and will form a base of support in the longer-term.'

Member (Survey 2)

'I believe financial knowledge support, and also guidance/signposting for those suffering abuse, is an area which needs looking at but in terms of long term recovery, clearly a survey or appraisal of the communities needs at that time will be necessary.' Member (Survey 2)

'Help for those not supported adequately by other services, social, immigration, financial.' Non-Member (Survey 2)

Churches are also skilled at creating a 'virtuous circle' of volunteering between recipients and providers of social care. Volunteering not only functions as a two-way channel bringing benefit to those who give as well as those who receive; it also offers the possibility of personal growth and development as a consequence of help received. People may find themselves at any point in the circle of need and support depending on their stage in the lifecycle, their employment status, and their personal life experiences, including bereavement and loss.

'Since last March, we've definitely had an increase in people giving to our church as well as our Centre. Some are local people who have received help and then got on their feet and given back. And just people who have seen how it's helped others. They've got on board with bringing/dropping off food or things we were in need of, or they've seen what we've been up to on Facebook and wanted to get behind it. By going online as well, we've had a bigger audience. People have seen that on Sundays, we are doing morning prayers live from the Foodbank, because it's the only way we can fit it all in. And you know, it just touched their hearts - from different towns and villages - and they've donated.'

Church Leader (Interview)

'Some people have very generously just said, 'Here's a check for £1,000, I know things are really hard at the moment'. The fact that we are still doing things for homeless people, again has made people say, 'Keep having our money, we appreciate what you do.' We leafleted everyone in the parish – about 2,500 homes – just to offer help with prescriptions and shopping etc. and have gained quite a few interested people that way. People showing up and saying, 'Would you like us to buy you some UHT milk and tinned pies?'

'We had people coming to us saying, "Three years ago I was in a position where I didn't know how I was going to get through Christmas with my three kids. I was unemployed; I was vulnerable. I'm in a very different circumstance now and I'd really love to give back to another family".'

Church Leader (Interview)

Church Leader (Interview)

1.4.3 Partnership working

Our findings suggest a clear sense among church leaders and member that partnership working to deliver social care must be expanded to meet growing needs, especially those relating to mental and physical health, poverty, and wider wellbeing issues.

'I think a strong relationship between the church and the local GP surgeries and other service providers (especially mental health) will be key to the long-term recovery of the community.' Member (Survey 2)

'Create partnerships with other organisations to offer community support e.g. debt advice, to stimulate activities with social benefit and inclusivity.' Member (Survey 2)

'Christians Against Poverty, the job club, the foodbank, our local Christian counselling service and street pastors will all be very important in the months ahead as well as other volunteer roles and most of all keeping in touch with people 'on the edge' of church and those who are struggling.' Member (Survey 2)

'Being more actively involved with local authorities and voluntary organisations.' Member (Survey 2)

'We would love the church to be seen as a community hub for all sorts of support. We would really like to help with offering CAP courses, some sort of mental health support, and also a general advisory support BUT it has to be independent as we have realised that the mere mention of the council has people running a mile!' Member (Survey 2)

'Extend financial advice availability like CAP, pandemic safe spaces for all, advertised, with chaplaincy support including sector specific support-like hospitality staff, care staff...' Member (Survey 2)

*'We know people are setting up their own businesses or needing to work from home more often and need a workspace away from their cramped homes. So, we are thinking about setting up a sort of **working hub mainly for local social enterprises** to help them get on their feet. And **providing a community** where they can talk to each other and share ideas etc.'* Church Leader (Interview)

This emphasis on expanding partnerships aligns with the findings of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society's 'Keeping the Faith' report,²⁷ which highlights the positive experience of partnership working between local authorities and multiple faith groups, especially churches, during the pandemic.

The aspect [of working in partnership with faith groups] attracting the highest level of appreciation from statutory partners is faith groups' ability to add value to partnerships through their longstanding presence in local communities (88% of local authorities agreed that this characterised their

²⁷ https://www.faithandsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/APPG_CovidReport_Full_V4.pdf

experience of working with faith groups either ‘to a great extent’ or ‘to some extent’). Then come a cluster of similarly highly scored aspects and attributes (all just under 80%) which include improving access to hard to reach groups, providing a pool of volunteer resources, and acting as a source of local leadership.’²⁸

Partnerships connect church leaders and members with these wider networks of support, allowing them to play their full part in recovery. They can also offer valuable access to leveraging additional resource, including financial support and training.

“We work with a charity called SALT (Scarborough And Locals Together) which was basically set up by volunteers with a charity shop, and all of their donations go towards centres like ours. And we can put in a referral for somebody or ask for white goods, like a washing machine or a cooker or something that they’re really in need of. One of our services is ACTS435 which is run by the diocese as well. We can put requests on there for people who might be in need of school shoes or something like that. We work with housing associations, like Beyond Housing. We work with a local parish council, Scarborough Borough Council, the local police and more.” Church Leader (Interview)

1.5 FUTURE SUPPORT REQUIRED

What will churches require in terms of finance, additional facilities, guidance, training, and support in partnership development to ensure that they can maximise their contribution to community recovery.

The responses represented in Figure 9 below are taken from the February-March 2021 survey. They show an overwhelming consensus among church leaders, prioritising the following very closely linked issues:

- support from government for churches as community hubs
- financial support for the church buildings which host social care projects (maintenance; repairs; installation of toilets and kitchens where needed)
- and financial support for community projects, including staffing.

Other priorities emerging from this survey include the need for investment in IT, as well as training and improved guidance in the areas of community engagement, partnership working, volunteering, and health and safety.

²⁸ https://www.faihandsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/APPG_CovidReport_Full_V4.pdf Chapter 5
Analysis: the survey pp. 21- 24.

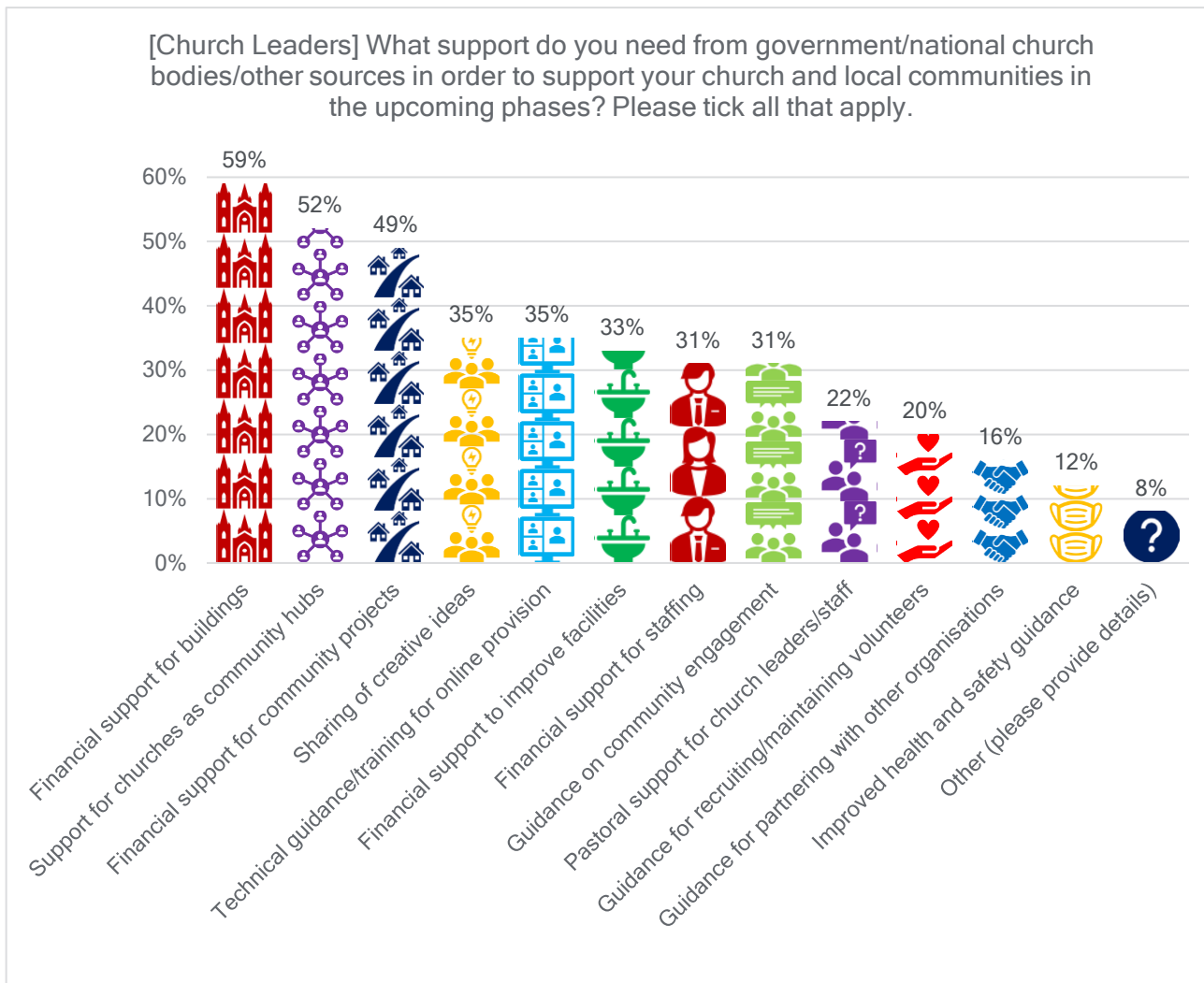


FIGURE 9 - PERCEPTIONS OF KEY CHURCH SUPPORT NEEDS FROM CHURCH LEADERS (SURVEY 2).

1.5.1 Recognition by national and local government of the importance of churches as community hubs

Survey and interview responses identify recognition of the past, present, and future importance of churches as pivotal hubs of community care, as central to unlocking the financial support and partnership development which are key to enabling churches to maximise their contribution to national recovery. The responses below are taken from Survey 2 (February-March, 2020).

‘There needs to be a recognition from statutory funding bodies that churches are providers of excellent care and community, and funding should not be withheld because they are religious bodies.’

Church Leader (Survey 2)

‘The Community Hub does not come cheap. We have it on a six-month lease which will expire soon and funds are needed to keep it going. It could so easily provide a one-stop-shop for all the questions etc that arise in an inner city council estate.’ Church Leader

‘Our church is part of a citywide unity movement (Gather Network) and we are rolling out the community hub model to other areas across the

town addressing issues of economic recovery and wellbeing for all.'
Church Leader

'It would be nice to see the government offering financial help to churches as they've been forced to close but ministers were designated as key workers so salaries had to be paid. No furlough or financial assistance with this.' Member

'My church has very limited funds and resources, so it feels wrong to ask anything more of them. The Government should provide funding to help places of worship operate, and this money could go towards outreach, food parcels, tech devices to enable the elderly to join in virtual activities, etc.' Member

[Churches being] recognised by Government for the community service they provide.' Member

1.5.2 Making and keeping buildings fit for purpose for social care

If they are to continue and indeed expand their role of providing spaces and facilities for community and social welfare activities, congregations require targeted financial support to maintain and, where necessary, repair their buildings. Many need support to enable them to install essential facilities such as kitchens or toilets, or to refurbish existing facilities to meet current standards. Others need to develop buildings, either by reordering interiors or by building extensions to create more flexible spaces and enable a wider range of activities.²⁹

'The future planning involves, removing pews and making the building more comfortable and suitable for the community to use for events meeting up as well as for worship.' Member (Survey 2)

*'A lot of things I already had as aims but the COVID pandemic has if anything made them more urgent. One of those is **the lack of community space, particularly indoor space, on the estate. We had already been drawing up plans for an extension, as I would love the church to develop a better cafe space which allows us to have a meeting place in the community** - somewhere people could go for a tea or coffee. I think that **desire for connection and social contacts are going to be huge.** So we are thinking of some form of community cafe space off the back of our Foodbank which might reach a different group of people. My ambition would be to set it up as more of a business, or community enterprise, and look at employing a couple of people.'* Church Leader (Interview)

Some churches wish to make their building carbon zero and more energy efficient. This, though offering environmental and financial benefits in the long term, will require additional expenditure in the short term. In addition, nearly three-quarters of

²⁹ The National Churches Trust *House of Good* Report (published October 2020) identifies lack of both suitable spaces and facilities as high on the list of barriers faced by churches wishing to host more community activities in their buildings even pre-COVID.

Church of England churches are listed and constitute an important part of the nation's cultural heritage. Repair and adaptation are therefore more complex and costly than in the case of unlisted buildings which increases the financial, administrative, and practical burden on their custodians.

The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance submission to the DCMS Select Committee Enquiry (July 2020) detailed the causes underlying COVID-19's negative impact on inspections, routine maintenance and repairs. The key factors identified were the general financial pressures on congregations due to loss of income (see below); the

*'[We need] funding appropriate to our needs that is **accessible without jumping through the myriads of hoops** dealing with 14-page applications and satisfying endless regulations!'*

Member (Survey 2)

re-targeting of funding by major grant-givers away from capital repairs, in order to meet the immediate social needs of the pandemic; and the suspension of many normal funding-raising events. Reduced income has led to a reduction in repair projects and maintenance activity and there is evidence of future capital projects being put on hold. This reinforces the need for a new repairs and maintenance grant programme targeted at places of worship as recommended in the Taylor Review.³⁰ Such a programme needs to take into account the fundamental connectedness of the wide-range of services which churches offer communities, including social care and access to shared heritage – and devising application processes which are appropriate in terms of criteria possible for non-heritage experts to complete.

It is also seen as vital that the Government retain the Listed Places of the Worship Grant Scheme (currently due to end on 31st March 2022) and continue it on a long term basis to give places of worship stability when planning capital building projects.

1.5.3 Financial support for church community and social care activities

Many churches punch far above their weight in terms of the support they offer the most vulnerable in their communities. This outreach is heavily dependent on the work of volunteers and very often underwritten by the church community's own giving and fundraising. As the Taylor Review Pilot Evaluation Report observed:

'There are also examples where activities were valuable to the local community in other ways, such as charitable work with vulnerable groups, but were not expected to yield any significant financial return to the listed places of worship involved. Indeed, in some cases providing those activities, especially to vulnerable groups, required the listed places of worship to commit volunteer time and money rather than increasing funds. It is not the case that more people using the building, or joining more activities, will necessarily produce more income.'³¹

³⁰ 'The Taylor Review: Sustainability of English Churches and Cathedrals' (December 2017) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/669667/Taylor_Review_Final.pdf Recommendations 5 and 8, pp. 33; 35.

³¹ Taylor Review Pilot Evaluation Report (October 2020) Paragraph 4.3.4 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-taylor-review-pilot-final-evaluation>

COVID-19 has severely affected the ability of churches to generate sufficient income to sustain provision of core community and social care.

The impact of COVID-19 on church finances and income streams

Our surveys, and those conducted by others, reveal consistent, deepening concern about church finances and the loss or serious reduction of income streams due to COVID-19. Contributing factors include:

- a. A major drop in congregational giving, as people have not been able to attend and give weekly. Churches have sought to encourage electronic giving, but this is not possible for all (particularly in deprived areas, where cash giving is more common). This impacts on the fixed expenses and building maintenance which form the background costs of social care delivery.

[Giving] 'held up better than one might have expected, but it has taken quite a hit because most of our folks do put their money in the plate physically week by week and ... they couldn't do it. We haven't been in a position to fix up electronic means. But I'm not actually sure that lots of our people would have taken advantage of electronic methods of payment anyway. That's not the world they live in.'

Church Leader (Interview)

'Many of our fixed costs have continued and we are getting no additional financial support. Maintenance costs money and our supporters ... are getting no benefit from a building they cannot use.' Member (Survey 2)

I have a little village church which was small and struggling anyway. Financially, this has just absolutely clobbered us. The small amount of money we would be regularly getting just hasn't been coming ... And we have virtually no reserves. I think we're sort of heading for closure anyway but this is really speeding things up.' Church Leader (Interview)

- b. A collapse in income from the hire of halls and rooms to the public, and rents from permanent tenants (such as nurseries). Even where churches charge low rates to community groups, hire fees usually form a substantial part of their income.

'We've lost a huge amount of money from our hall hiring although the NHS were paying at one stage for a sports company to lay on some activities for kids during the first lockdown.' Church Leader (Interview)

'Hiring out the church space is our only real source of income, in a business sense. One group we did charge rent to was Slimming World. And they've totally removed their groups ... So, to know that that's not coming back does make a difference to the future.'

Church Leader (Interview)

There is widespread anxiety that COVID-related restrictions on capacity will mean that community groups and other enterprises cease to be viable and both the income and community benefit will be lost permanently putting the long-term sustainability of churches at risk.

'For some groups, it's just not worth it. You can't get enough people, and therefore people running whatever it is, can't financially make it work. That's the problem with certain of our exercise classes.'

Church Leader (Interview)

'We've got a community choir run by a voice teacher who also offers singing lessons and he's not sure whether his business will be sustainable. He hires space from us.' Church Leader (Interview)

- c. The cancellation of a very high proportion of fund-raising events, especially those which usually take place during spring and summer.

'Our church is a big concert venue and all the concerts throughout the year have been cancelled ... The village Festival ... usually gives us a check for 1000 pounds. And the farmers market ... did pay a small amount for their stalls to be in church. And weddings of course, none of those have happened either.' Church Leader (Interview)

- d. Loss of income from tourist and local visitors, through one-off donations and the sale of items such as postcards, guidebooks, and other mementoes, affects both large and small parish churches, but has impacted particularly severely on cathedrals.
- e. A reduction in grants available for repairs and refurbishment of church buildings due to diversion of funding by many major funders to COVID-19 community support programmes.

Reduction in income and the future of church-based social care

Reduction in income means that staff, including cleaners, have had to be furloughed or made redundant, with inevitable consequences for provision of facilities and care.

'Serious financial impact on the building has meant staff redundancies and close examination of what we can afford to do.'

Church Leader (Survey 2)

'The fact that we had to make our cleaner redundant means we've got limitations on use. Normally the centre would be full and there would be at least 600 people coming through in a week at least and obviously we need to keep it clean it so that is going to be an issue - finding volunteers to take on roles until we regain sufficient income.'

Church Leader (Interview)

'We have reduced 2.5 jobs to one.' Church Leader (Interview)

The *Church in Lockdown* survey found that 99% of churches experienced organisational hardship due to loss of revenue post-lockdown.³² Village halls, which have a number of functions in common with churches, are eligible for a £10,000 grant to cover core expenses from the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund (RHLGF). *'The smaller ones can probably manage on that for a year, because it'll pay their bills*

³² <https://yourneighbour.org/the-church-in-lockdown>

to keep them going'.³³ Village halls are eligible because they have a rateable value similar to businesses,³⁴ but the vast majority of places of worship are completely exempt from business rates (under an arrangement quite separate from 80% charity relief). Thus, churches were not eligible for much of the support available to others (such as Small Business Grant Fund, the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund),³⁵ although there seems to have been a lack of clarity on the ground as to whether there was in practice scope for discretion.

'We applied for local council grants for supporting businesses. And we were turned down because we don't pay rates. That would have kept us going ... I have friends in other churches who've received it although they don't pay rates. Their council had discretion on how they allocated the funding.' Church Leader (Interview)

Some churches have applied successfully for grants to support particular social initiatives, but this type of funding does not contribute to building upkeep and other core costs. The additional costs of making and keeping church buildings COVID-safe, including paying for signage, additional furnishings, and protective equipment such as sanitizer, have inevitably increased financial pressures.

'It's a drain on small organisations. Yes, there is a lot of grant money sloshing about at one level but not for the small-scale practical things.'
Church Leader (Interview)

All the churches interviewed expressed fears for the future. Some are having to use reserves which puts the future of their buildings, and their potential to go on caring for communities, in jeopardy:

'We've paid our diocesan parish share, but by basically paying out of our reserves. We've got no reserves left whatever and realistically, it's next year that's going to be a big problem because there's just not going to be the money there.' Church Leader (Interview)

In other cases, they are facing shouldering additional burdens:

'There is still a real possibility that the separate trust which runs the community centre may not survive. But if it doesn't the church will take over and the PCC will take the responsibility so we will make it survive. It's too important to our mission and vision and it's the core of who we are as a local church.' Church Leader (Interview)

Survey responses and other data show that the majority of care-providing churches were viable, before the pandemic, but that many have been put under serious threat by Covid-19. However, their commitment to communities is, if anything, stronger, and expectations from communities have risen. They will need timely, targeted support to provide the enhanced provision needed by their communities. In the November 2020 Spending Review, the government launched a new Levelling Up Fund worth

³³ Interview with Deborah Clarke, Rural Evidence & Village Halls Manager, ACRE (18th November 2020).

³⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-business-support-grant-funding>

³⁵ HRBA submission to the DCMS Select Committee Enquiry, July 2020.

£4 billion for England (£0.8 billion for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). The *Fund for England* will invest in local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities and will support economic recovery. It will be open to all local areas in England and does include regenerating eyesores, upgrading town centres and community infrastructure, and local arts and culture. Bids will have to be submitted by the local authority, but Cathedrals and Major Churches in particular may be well placed to support these and benefit from them³⁶ but further funding will still be needed.

1.5.4 Support in recruiting, training, and managing volunteers

Volunteers are central to the delivery of church-led social care and other provision. Without them, much need would remain unmet. Data from surveys and interviews also underline the fact that volunteering is highly beneficial for those who contribute their time and expertise. For many, volunteering is a significant source of fulfilment and wellbeing, a context in which to experience social contact, stimulus, and skill development. However, many of those working as volunteers pre-COVID-19 belong to age groups considered particularly vulnerable to the virus and have been unable to participate for a considerable time. Respondents express a considerable sense of loss, frustration, and even the undermining of their own sense of worth and purpose because of being forced to step down.

‘For some, volunteering at the cathedral, represents their social life, and the nearest they have to a family. Understandably, volunteering has had to be suspended but, again this has led to greater isolation for many.’
Member (Survey 2)

‘It’s been really tough to still feel connected. All the activities I helped with are no longer running (Toddler Group; Music; Sunday School). I feel a bit lost.’ Member (Survey 1)

A high percentage of church volunteers are retired, and many are within groups considered especially vulnerable to COVID-19. Church social care projects are very dependent on volunteers and when many regular volunteers had to shield, it revealed how vital their contribution was.

‘Our foodbank is run by volunteers who are from lots of denominations. But at the moment, it’s myself and our curate who are running it in lockdown because our volunteers are shielding ... We have some volunteers who are very fit and active but are in a vulnerable age category.’
Church Leader (Interview)

A hospital chaplain interviewed in November 2020 noted that older hospital volunteers were very keen to return and even willing to risk infection because **‘they want their life to have meaning and if that meaning is taken away life loses its purpose.’**

Some volunteers may now need help to rebuild their confidence in order to return to their previous key roles; others may be unable to continue because of ill health or bereavement; or are simply taking the chance to step down.

³⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2020-documents/spending-review-2020>

'We are aware that some of our volunteers won't return because of particular personal reasons and I think this period has caused a reassessment for people.' Church Leader (Interview)

New volunteers will also need to be recruited to fill gaps in provision,³⁷ a fact which provides an opportunity to reflect on recruitment strategies and training. A positive indicator is that churches have found new sources of community volunteers during the pandemic, as people from all backgrounds have sought channels through which to support others.

'We had people just getting in touch with us saying I've seen your initiative; we would love to come and do some deliveries on Christmas Eve. So, we met 14 new delivery drivers that we've never met before who did a fantastic job.' Church Leader (Interview)

It is important that such newly formed community links and collaboration are not lost as COVID recedes but continue to be developed. Training and managing volunteers and developing community partnerships have not traditionally been skills which have featured highly in the training of church ministers, but they will be increasingly important in community rebuilding. In the *COVID-19, Christian Faith and Wellbeing* survey conducted in September-October 2020 by Exeter University with the Arthur Rank Centre (a national charity supporting rural churches and communities), 41.2% of respondents stated that the level at which they volunteered had increased as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic and 70% of those planned to continue in the future. Reasons provided for this increase included being furloughed and having more time available to help (e.g. at a food bank); developing a greater desire to be of use to the local community as a result of the crisis; and wanting to connect with neighbours, some of whom were perhaps previously unknown.³⁸

Churches need to be equipped to broaden the demographic of volunteers and to offer appropriate, effective training which includes the ability to offer care within a COVID-safe environment.

1.5.5. Training and support for church leaders and volunteers

Survey evidence provides a reminder that the church leaders and members who serve the wider community are also *part* of that community. They too have suffered the impact of COVID-19 in their own lives; as well as simultaneously carrying the demands of caring for others; the requirement for rapid development of new skills; the need to invest in new forms of community partnership; and anxiety about delivering community care in the face of reduced income and numbers of personnel. Ministers have also been faced with the task of conducting very large numbers of funerals and attempting to comfort bereaved families in very difficult and restricted circumstances.

³⁷ HE Heritage Sector Volunteer Survey launched 9th February 2021 to find out about the impact of COVID-19 on heritage organisations that need support from volunteers to keep the organisation sustainable. <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/volunteersurvey21/>

³⁸ <http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/research/centres/crpr/research/projects/archive/project/index.php?id=667>

A number of church leaders have already needed significant pastoral support and counselling and more will need support as the intense pressures begin to ease.

'More pastoral and mental health support for clergy.' Member (Survey 2)

'Practical support for the wellbeing of incumbent. We were asked this at the outset in a web chat with our Bishop. We said our biggest fear was the load on an already busy incumbent. Our incumbent subsequently became ill with the stress of all the load placed on them.'

Member (Survey 2)

'The strong sense of community has been harder to maintain. We were in an 'interregnum' when the lockdown was announced and we could not have a new parish priest until September - not usual for Catholics to be without a parish priest. As the Deacon in the parish, also in full-time key work, I found it very difficult to juggle all of the needs of the parish without the usual interactions with people who could provide help, assistance, and support for those in need.' Church Leader (Survey 2)

'I imagine that even when it is deemed safe to go to church many of our elderly folk will need some persuasion to return. We may need to retain our current contact arrangements well into the future.'

Member (Survey 2)

Church leaders and volunteers recognise that training and support is essential to delivering community support and social care. Survey respondents requested more training in community engagement and in recruiting and maintaining volunteers, as well as in working with partners. This is supported by the *Your Neighbour Church in Lockdown* Report which identified needs for training in working effectively with local authorities; developing partnerships with charities with expertise in supporting addiction, homelessness, fuel poverty, debt etc; accessing funding; evolving innovative digital/online ways of delivering social care and support and enhancing two-way communication with communities.³⁹

1.5.6 The challenges of communicating, interpreting, and applying guidance

'When churches were first allowed to re-open but not offer services, our church elected not to open because the burden of navigating the risks and paperwork involved was not supportable, especially as we are in an interregnum. If that burden could be made easier - and the emphasis be on supporting the individual churches, not putting more and more requirements onto them - that would really help'.

Member (Survey 1)

From March 2020, national, regional, and local church leaders had to adjust very rapidly to managing the new COVID-related risks which radically affected their task of caring for congregations and the wider community. In what has continued to be a

³⁹ <https://yourneighbour.org/the-church-in-lockdown>

constantly changing situation, the communication, interpretation, and application of guidance swiftly became a key issue.

Respondents from a wide variety of church contexts have expressed a number of common concerns and difficulties, which continue to cause uncertainty, and are perceived as hampering the contribution which churches wish to make:

- During the early months of the pandemic, the emphasis was on blanket guidance, rather than decision-making according to local context and capacity. The move towards more local responsibility and decision-making from Autumn 2020 onwards was widely welcomed.
- Early guidance was perceived as being focused on forbidding rather than facilitating activity. Although many restrictions were subsequently relaxed as more was learned about virus transmission, this was not always communicated to those on the ground and fear continued to inhibit action, with some buildings remaining closed throughout.
- Communication of rules and guidelines has often been seen as becoming more 'risk averse' as it has been cascaded down through the system from national to grassroots level. Different denominations took different routes.
- Although some guidance was regarded as 'advice' at national level, most people on the ground took it as mandatory and some church leaders feared disciplinary measures or legal action if they made the wrong decision. It may be that some degree of carefully-assessed and managed risk is acceptable in order to provide vital social care, rather than aiming for 100% safety which would probably require complete closure.
- Parish churches also often host a range of community services and activities (including shops, foodbanks, health provision, and pre-school nurseries) which frequently fall into a range of different categories, each with its own specific guidance. This complexity created a great deal of confusion and sometimes generated excessive caution.
- There was a lack of specific guidance addressing commonly-encountered issues which have a major impact on service provision: Was it safe to deliver letters or Christmas cards? What precautions were required when delivering shopping or other items to those in need? What are the minimum requirements for opening buildings safely (Are one-way systems essential? Do buildings need to be stewarded when open?). Does the 72-hour rule have to be imposed between separate uses of buildings irrespective of size and ventilation? These answers to these questions have still not been resolved. or understood at grassroots level.
- Guidance was often announced at the last minute, leaving inadequate time for implementation.
- Guidance on websites was not always updated (sometimes being months out of date) leading to uncertainty about whether leaders were working with the most up-to-date information.

Cathedrals, the flagships of the largest sector of national built heritage, making a major contribution to the social and economic wellbeing of their cities and regions,

face particular challenges in the application of COVID-related guidance. Because of their multiple identities as places of worship, heritage sites, venues for events and performances, providers of hospitality services and shops, they have been required to interpret guidance from a multiplicity of sources (including DCMS for visitor economy and performing arts; MHCLG for places of worship and multi-purpose community facilities; BEIS and DCMS for shops and restaurants and cafes; and Department of Education for out of school settings). There is frequently uncertainty about which set of guidance takes priority. Additional pressures are caused by last minute announcements and changes, and by inconsistencies, such as non-essential retail (including cathedral shops) being allowed to open sooner than cathedrals are allowed to welcome visitors. Cathedral music, a vital part of their role and appeal, has been a major problem. At present cathedrals are allowed either to have a professional choir *or* a congregation but not both at the same time. Where there is a congregation, the number of singers is limited to three (despite the fact that church music has four parts (soprano, alto/counter-tenor, tenor and bass). Voluntary cathedral choirs, where the back row is formed of volunteers rather than paid people, cannot sing at all. Choristers who attend the same school and are in a bubble can rehearse together, whereas choristers coming from different schools, or from the same school but different bubbles, cannot rehearse in person. Cathedrals have found navigating the complexity of the guidance challenging and very time consuming.⁴⁰

The changing guidance provided to churches by government and the different denominations across lockdowns 1-3 have highlighted important issues which need to be reviewed, creating valuable opportunities for learning and reflection. The decision to close churches in Lockdown 1 must be understood within a rapidly changing environment, where Public Health understanding and policy relating to the transmission of the disease, those considered most at risk, and methods of risk management were little understood. The rapid move to online provision of worship and spiritual resources had both positive and negative impacts on isolation and loneliness (further discussed in Section 2). However, the desire to keep communities safe led to a locking of doors and the cessation of faith and other community activities and social care provision which was deeply felt.

The revision of guidance on re-opening and maintaining private prayer and/or worship was welcomed in Lockdowns 2 and 3. Particularly helpful was the awareness that sensitivity to local circumstances could inform local decision making. However, our research reveals ongoing confusion and frustration with both the tone and complexity of guidance, highlighting the need for simpler and clearer instructions designed to facilitate rather than prohibit the provision of community and social care wherever possible. Also important will be the provision of templates to help churches communicate key information about access to buildings and the resumption of activities to the wider public, in ways which will rebuild confidence and encourage participation.

Late spring and summer 2021 will offer a vital period for formulating more precise guidance for churches on key issues which still remain unclear and for simplifying the channels of dissemination. This will be especially important to allow preparation for any future waves of COVID-19 or severe flu.

⁴⁰ Source: Association of English Cathedrals written submission, March 16, 2021.

1.6 LESSONS LEARNED

1.6.1 Church buildings are key to the delivery of social care

The enforced closure of churches, church halls and the multitude of activities which they host and facilitate has exposed the dependence of many in communities on both the everyday social networks for all ages and the wide-ranging social care provision which they sustain. The loss of these facilities has increased social isolation and loneliness and impacted negatively on mental and physical health. The importance of the role played by churches and their buildings in everyday wellbeing and emergency response across communities needs to be more widely acknowledged and supported.

'Do you know - it really is about buildings. For us, no building: no NHS (GP) surgery. No building: no hospital chapel. No building: no mental health support. No building: no school assemblies; no more gatherings; no more community space being offered.'

Church Leader (Interview)

1.6.2 A fresh acknowledgement of the fact that faith groups bring long-established networks and local knowledge which make them key partners with other agencies in meeting community needs

'The aspect [of working in partnership with faith groups] attracting the highest level of appreciation from statutory partners is faith groups' ability to add value to partnerships through their longstanding presence in local communities improving access to hard to reach groups, providing a pool of volunteer resources, and acting as a source of local leadership.'⁴¹

1.6.3 Problems in agreeing, disseminating, and applying COVID-19 guidance have often hindered churches from playing their full role in the community.

- The existence of multiple layers of interpretation and dissemination have often caused confusion and delayed action on the ground:

'One of the big learnings for us was not to act too quickly. The government would make an announcement and then everyone would go running around like headless chickens trying to figure out what that meant. And searching, searching, searching for the guidance. Often finding websites crashing.' Church Leader (Interview)

'There have been delays in getting clear guidance and we've had to just use our sort of common sense and guesswork really. We've approached it practically and worked out what we can do and worked out how we can do it.' Church Leader (Interview)

⁴¹ https://www.faithandsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/APPG_CovidReport_Full_V4.pdf

Chapter 5 Analysis: the survey pp. 21- 24.

- Guidance often passes through many channels before reaching grassroots level. Some respondents feel strongly that an extra level of caution tends to be added at each stage. As a result, guidance is sometimes seen as being more focussed on prohibition than permission:

'Nearly every communication that we have had and still have seems to encourage us not to open.' Church Leader (Interview)

- Churches vary so much that it has been found more helpful for the emphasis to be on local and advice, taking into account specific context and capacity within overall government guidelines and standard safety measures, rather than on blanket advice issued nationally:

'Our Bishops very sensibly said 'You are intelligent people. It's fairly obvious, the sorts of things you need to do. You make local decisions but do the sorts of things you think you need to do and if you don't know what to do, consult with people who do'.' Church Leader (Interview)

- Allowing outdated guidance to remain on websites and continue circulating without correction is very unhelpful and can cause inaction:

'The other problem I found is that there's lots of bits of guidance that are well out of date. It does get very confusing. Am I reading something from August or June?' Church Leader (Interview)

Most churches operate as multi-purpose buildings, with a wide range of community user groups and were therefore obliged to consult many different areas of COVID-19 guidance. This was not only very time-consuming but frequently confusing and sometimes made opening or using the building impossible.

SECTION 2

CHURCHES AND COMMUNITIES:

Church Buildings, Wellbeing, Place-Making, and Heritage

'From large towns to rural communities, [churches] provide a strong sense of place and history and it is not surprising that many people form strong attachments to them.'

Caroline Dinenage MP

Minister of State for Digital and Culture, DCMS.⁴²

'It doesn't matter whether you are religious or agnostic; a fully open church offers comfort and/or the prospect of comfort.'

Non-Member (Survey 2)

'Keep churches open at all costs. Don't abandon us when we need you most.'

Non-Member (Interview)

'Church buildings and services are a source of comfort and support for the public at large. Even those who do not worship regularly seek peace, solace and hope in a church building.'

Member (Survey 2)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Church buildings have multiple functions in promoting individual and community wellbeing. They are valued across communities as places which provide spaces for worship and fellowship for those of faith. But they also speak to a wider, individual and collective need for spiritual connection, which has been particularly highlighted during this pandemic. Cathedrals, churches and chapels are special places with numinous qualities, offering peace and quiet away from busy lives and social pressures. They are often perceived as safe spaces and refuges, offering comfort and perspective in times of personal anxiety and national crisis. They host rituals framing major life events and hold community stories and memories, connecting people to a deep-rooted sense of place and time. They offer residents and visitors an opportunity to explore shared history and heritage and to be inspired and uplifted by the beauty and craftsmanship of church art and architecture, from humble, simple chapels to soaring cathedrals which are local, regional and national treasures. Church buildings also function as public venues for cultural and social events which bring communities together and host concerts, performances and exhibitions that also engage and inspire. They are often the oldest, most continuously used public

⁴² Part of a pre-recorded speech given to the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance's Big Update on 10th March 2021.

building in a settlement, and represent the symbolic and physical heart of a community.

In March 2020, church buildings were closed, removing in-person access to worship and significantly reducing the opportunities for access to buildings as places of sanctuary and respite and spaces for wider community-building activities and events. Guidance and advice on the use of church buildings for worship, fundraising and other activities and heritage tourism, was issued by most denominations, to supplement that from the UK government. The guidance continued to undergo many changes throughout 2020-21 as further lockdowns were imposed. Whilst some buildings were able to re-open later in the year, many churches leaders felt they had little option but to close or partially close again, reflecting uncertainty about safety, risk assessments, insurance and liability which is still affecting decision-making on the ground.

Survey respondents identified the closing of church buildings as particularly impactful on spiritual and community wellbeing and social cohesion, including:

- Spiritual and broader wellbeing benefits from access to church and chapel buildings as sites of beauty, peace, comfort and refuge
- Access to regular worship and special services for congregations and the wider community
- Social benefits derived from large and group activities, including volunteering
- Community cohesion and other benefits accruing from the use of church buildings for community cafes, book clubs and other cultural and creative activities and events
- Opportunities to visit, explore, and enjoy the shared heritage found in churches
- Concerns about long-term impacts on maintenance and repair of church fabric and community-focused development projects

The effects of closing church buildings on the provision of social care have been discussed in Section 1, but the loss of access to places of worship has further exacerbated the impact of COVID on individual and community wellbeing. In Section 2 we explore this impact, considering perceived need, creative responses, the potential of church buildings to aid recovery and the possible support they require to do so.

2.2 NEED

*'Churches need to be open to offer the community
a safe, welcoming place and hope.'*
Non-Member (Interview)

The locking of churches in March 2020 had a profound effect on individuals and communities. 75% people who responded to The National Churches Trust's *State of the Churches: the impact of Covid-19* reported that the closing of buildings during

lockdown had a negative effect on their community.⁴³ A detailed consideration of the timeline of closures, published guidance and denominational responses and reactions is provided in Appendix 2.

The requirement for churches to close for most activities,⁴⁴ issued by the UK Government in March 2020, was part of a national response to the perceived threat of COVID-19. Church buildings were closed and in some cases churchyards, burial grounds and cemeteries were also locked for a period of time. Denominations interpreted government guidance with various degrees of caution. The Church of England decided that worship should be pre-recorded or live-streamed from clergy homes and *not* from churches, with clergy discouraged from entering their buildings, although some social care activities, such as foodbanks, continued to operate. Evidence from York St John University's *Coronavirus, Church and You Survey* suggests that whilst 51% of respondents believed closing churches was the right thing to do, 57% believed that clergy should have been allowed to access buildings and 27% that churches should not have been closed at all.⁴⁵

Evidence from both Survey 1 and 2 revealed huge anger and sadness, particularly from Anglican clergy, about this decision and its potentially long-lasting impact on members:

[The Church] has given the impression it has just turned its back, locked its doors, and walked away from the people of England. And lots of people will never forgive it for that. And even those of us who are open get emails and telephone calls which are just people still being very angry about it.' Church Leader (Interview)

'Parishioners minded very much that Churches closed their doors during the 1st Lockdown. They wanted to go into our church for quiet prayer and sanctuary and found not being able to gain access difficult. A number of people have been bereaved or were fearful and anxious and the physical church was not there for them in their hour of need.' Member (Survey 2)

The Catholic Church permitted clergy to enter closed churches for the purpose of private prayer and the celebration of Mass, whilst removing the obligation of Catholics to attend Mass every Sunday and encouraging them instead to watch the livestreaming of services. Responses to the *Catholic Voices Survey* indicates broad support for this approach, with 61% approving closure and 81% affirming that clergy should always be allowed to access churches.⁴⁶

'I was allowed to come into the church and celebrate Mass on my own every day. And people knew that that was going on. As a Catholic parish,

⁴³ National Churches Trust, [State of the Churches: the impact of COVID-19](#), May 2020.

⁴⁴ Exceptions included: '(a) for funerals; (b) to broadcast an act of worship, whether over the internet or as part of a radio or television broadcast, or (c) to provide essential voluntary services or urgent public support services.' <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/350/regulation/5/made>

⁴⁵ York St John University, [Coronavirus, Church and You Survey](#), June 2020.

⁴⁶ Catholic Voices, [Coronavirus, Church & You Survey](#) Catholics in the UK, September 2020.

it was important for them to know that Mass was being said. And that their priest was praying for them every day at the altar’.

Church Leader (Interview)

*‘And we were very blessed because we didn’t have the injunction that the Church of England had which said we couldn’t go into our churches. For a Catholic priest that would have been unthinkable just because of the importance of the blessed sacrament’.*⁴⁷

The Methodist Church also required buildings to close but did not insist that livestreaming of worship had to be from ministers’ homes, taking what was seen as a more pragmatic approach to supporting both social care and worship initiatives.

‘At the beginning, we made it very clear we were following government guidance. There was more of an emphasis on if you can do it from home, please do it from home. Later on, there was also an element of, you have to choose you what you want to do and we’re not going to stand in your way either way.’

Member of the Connexional Team of the Methodist Church (Interview)

The Baptist Union of Great Britain advised its members (who are independent charities in their own right) to close for worship and other activities, except those deemed essential and allowed by the government. The United Reformed Church emphasised the importance of the Government’s legal position but left it to Church Meetings and Elders to interpret the guidance. Some remained open for foodbanks and other essential community activities and ministers were able to go into church buildings to record acts of worship.

As society adjusted to the changes brought by the pandemic, and other institutions and public places navigated new norms in social distancing and sanitising practices, restrictions on churches increasingly came to be seen as unnecessarily risk-averse.

‘I mean when you go into our church and you think, well, you can get 60 people in here and with the 2 metres social distancing easily. And yet you can go into Asda but you can’t go in a church which is probably 10 times safer.’ Church Leader (Interview)

‘Risk assessment and repeated changes to this have felt intimidating for those responsible for decisions about opening buildings - fear of being a place where Covid is spread to already vulnerable people makes it difficult to do other than close the doors and offer no in-person activities.’

Church Leader (Survey 2)

Concern was also articulated, by Members and Non-Members alike, that the importance of church buildings and activities and the comfort and support they offer to the wider community was being seriously underestimated.

‘The act of closing, and the announcement of the closure, was more impactful - more hurtful - than that the churches were closed. It sent such a powerful negative message - that churches are most concerned with

⁴⁷ Project Interview with Rev. Canon Christopher Thomas KHS, General Secretary (CC), Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, 28th September 2020.

'At a time of national crisis people turn to the established church and its building as a place for respite, peace and contemplation - but they found the doors locked against them.'

Non-Member (Survey 1)

the safety of their staff, when their job is to minister to the people.....Even just to have been open 2 or 3 hours a day would have been enough. Why do even atheists light candles? Because it is a holy act done in a holy place. How can the church presume to deny us access to our holy places?' Non-Member (Survey 2)

'I feel that churches in general should have made more effort to stay open. Lots of churches have done great things, but too many others seem to have just locked their doors and gone away.'

Non-Member (Survey 2)

The impact of closing buildings on churches' ability to provide social care has already been discussed in Section 1. Here we consider the effects on community wellbeing of withdrawal of access to worship (and space for individual reflection), to enjoyment of shared heritage, and to activities which support social cohesion and reduce isolation. In Section 3, the impact of closure on supporting grieving and loss will be explored.

2.2.1 Church buildings: spirituality, individual wellbeing, and worship

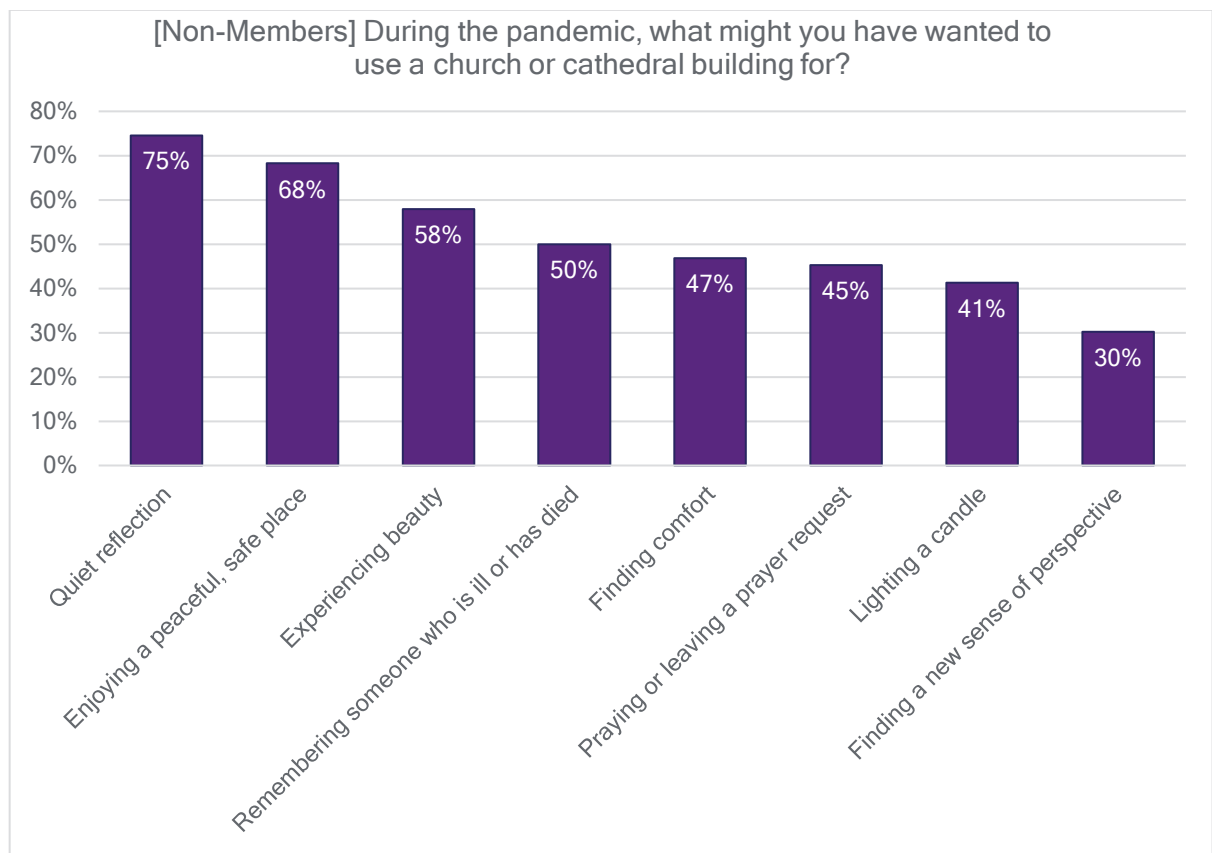


FIGURE 10 - NON-MEMBER DESIRE FOR CHURCH BUILDING USAGE (SURVEY 1).

Church buildings are places that offer everyone – whether members of churches or not - access to places of wellbeing and spirituality. Many respondents identified the loss or restricted access to church buildings as directly impacting on wellbeing. Key

issues included the perception of churches as safe, beautiful, peaceful places in which they could find comfort and gain a sense of perspective, feel connected with others both in the past and the present, and experience rituals which recognise and help to address their anxiety or grief. Indeed, the anger which was expressed at the closing of churches during the pandemic is an important indicator of the perceived values of these buildings to these wider communities.

Many respondents questioned why it was allowable to visit supermarkets but not churches.

'The impositions on churches have seemed particularly stringent - there are a huge number of isolated people who need a place of refuge and some way whereby churches can provide this even in 'lockdown' would be very beneficial. It is odd to see supermarkets open and full of people when churches cannot be.' Church Leader (Survey 1)

'So many people have said "If you can go into a supermarket, why you can't go into a church?" They've managed it because they have to. And if you believe that the spiritual needs of people are just as important as physical food, then there is always a way round, there's always a way that you can make things happen.'

Church Leader (Interview)

This argument is supported by research carried out for The National Churches Trust *House of Good* report which identifies spiritual need as a core human need – just as important as food to many people – which should be recognised as such.⁴⁸

Importance to Non-Members

Church buildings are valued as places of quiet and beauty, which offer space for reflection, processing difficulties, finding comfort, and recharging batteries. These needs have been magnified by the impact of COVID-19 on everyday life, from the pressures of home-schooling, to relationships placed under pressure by furlough, financial difficulties, and lack of access to support structures, families and friends. There has been a disproportionate impact on those living in difficult personal circumstances or in areas of deprivation, who do not have access to quiet spaces inside their homes or green spaces outside. In times of personal and national crisis, people often look to churches as places of comfort and reassurance. This need was particularly apparent in responses from Non-Members.

'Quiet reflection and comfort at a time of crisis was the most important reason for me to use church buildings - but they were locked.'

Non-Member (Survey 1)

⁴⁸ National Churches Trust, *The House of Good Report*, October 2020 (<https://www.houseofgood.nationalchurchestrust.org/>).

'I missed not being able to access a place I go when in need of solace and peace to think through being able to carry on.'

Non-Member (Survey 1)

*'I felt **enormously overwhelmed** by everything at the start of lockdown and **would have loved to sit quietly in a church** and try to block out the doom and gloom.'*

Non-Member (Survey 1)

These observations reflect a deep-rooted instinct in communities to turn to church buildings in times of need. They also express a wider frustration expressed in media comments that, for the first time in the history of this country, this was not possible.

'Never in our history have our churches closed – not during wars, plagues or famines. Instead we have been places of respite and hope.'⁴⁹

What emerges from our surveys is a sense of the profound and negative impact of restrictions to accessing church buildings as a place of solace and sanctuary – from the pressures and mundanity of everyday life – but also for the vulnerable and those seeking a 'safe space' to just 'be'.

'During the height of the pandemic particularly, people myself included, were looking for some sort of spiritual source [...] I find if you are in a cathedral, the building speaks to you and it's a very spiritual place.'

Non-Member (Survey 1)

*'Church closures have left many people **bereft of a safe place of sanctuary**. A place where they can be at peace and away from the panic around them. **Home does not always provide you with the space you need at times like this.**'*

Member (Survey 2)

'I would have appreciated somewhere quiet for reflection. With all the family at home there has been no space for this at all.'

Non-Member (Survey 1)

'I have missed being able to go inside churches and just sit in peace.' Non-Member (Survey 2)

'As an extremely vulnerable person it would have been comforting to sit alone safely in the church.'

Non-Member (Survey 1)

'I have been through domestic abuse and [the church] is the only place I feel safe.'

Non-Member (Survey 1)

This feedback reflects the ways in which the size and scale of church buildings, their architectural and aesthetic qualities, seating arrangements and decoration, create a feeling of solidity, continuity, safety, and security that has a profound impact on psychological and physiological wellbeing. Whilst these qualities have often been commented on in a rather generalised or abstract way, there is a body of evidence

⁴⁹ Pastor Ade Omooba, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/14/communal-worship-criminalised-under-lockdown-church-leaders-say>

now emerging about the benefits of heritage sites⁵⁰ and churches⁵¹ on wellbeing, to which this evidence makes an important contribution. It is particularly important to hear the voices of the 'vulnerable' articulated here. Once lockdown was lifted, many who were anxious about or shielding from COVID-19 found it challenging to return to crowded or unsupervised spaces. Churches were perceived to be safe places to go, where social interaction with others could be sought – or avoided – depending on individual needs.

As noted in Section 1, loneliness and isolation were one of the highest areas of need identified by all respondents. This is further supported by the data below, where the loss of in-person interaction was highlighted as one of the greatest impacts of wellbeing to emerge from restrictions on accessing church buildings by Non-Members.

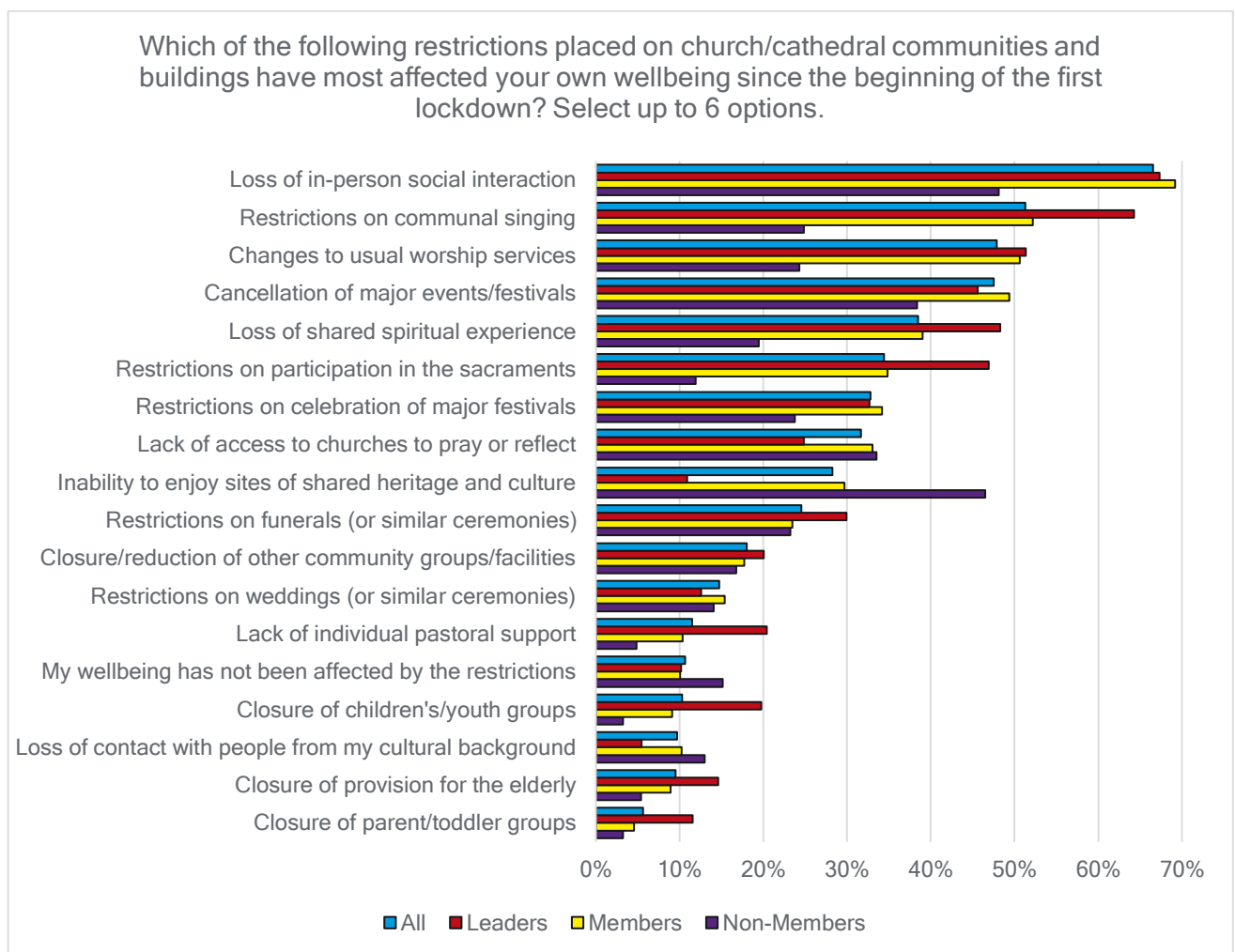


FIGURE 11 - IMPACT OF RESTRICTIONS ON PERSONAL WELLBEING FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS (SURVEY 2).

Alongside the impact of restrictions on lack of ability to enjoy sites of shared heritage and culture (discussed below in Section 2.2.3), Non-Member responses also

⁵⁰ Reilly, S, Nolan, C and Monckton, L (2018) [Wellbeing and the Historic Environment](#) (Historic England).

⁵¹ See Dyas, *The Dynamics of Pilgrimage: Christianity, Holy Places, and Sensory Experience*. Routledge, 2020.

highlighted the impact of restrictions on the cancellation of major events and festivals. This may reflect the ways in which Non-Members are drawn to church buildings not only for their heritage values but also their unique qualities as venues for concerts, performances, exhibitions and other events. Non-church members are often active members of choirs and bellringing communities, and participants in concerts, performances and exhibitions hosted by cathedrals and churches.

The data presented above also indicates that church buildings connect Non-Members with a broader sense of spirituality and 'cultural Christianity' which frequently forms an important part of individual wellbeing. The missed opportunity for churches to support individuals and communities in this way was also lamented by church leaders and Non-Members.

'I would have liked to have the church open for individuals throughout the [first] lockdown...I wanted to be available for my wider community seeking spiritual support and think having the church open would have provided a place for people to approach the church.'

Church Leader (Survey 1)

'I badly miss the encouragement offered to a marginal Christian by real (i.e. not screen content only) - services and the psychological joy and comfort of solo visits to the buildings.' Non-Member (Survey 2)

Open churches allow those on the edges of faith and without faith, to sit and just 'be' and find perspective or comfort at their own pace. However when churches were allowed to re-open in June 2020, the resources normally offered by churches to support individual reflection had in many cases been removed and locked away, due to early concerns about whether COVID-19 could be transmitted on the surfaces of paper or laminated prayer cards.

These findings and observations are important because they emphasise the multivalent qualities and interconnected values of church buildings for Non-Members which need to be taken into account in future decision making. They are also an important reminder of the need, not only to preserve but also enhance spaces within church buildings where these tangible and intangible qualities can be experienced and enjoyed. Churches need to be accessible as places of beauty and calm which are just as important for wellbeing as the facilities and activities which support the provision of social care.

Importance to members

Section 1 of this report explored church leaders and members' perceptions of the wider social needs exposed by COVID-19. In particular, it highlighted concerns about the loneliness and isolation being experienced by the communities they supported. The data presented in Figure 12 addresses a different question, namely respondents' perceptions of the impact of restrictions on their own, personal wellbeing. Nevertheless, it also highlights the lack of broader in-person social contact as a pressing need. This should not surprise us. Church buildings have always offered congregations (who are also members of the wider community) a unique combination of spiritual fellowship and social connection.

'The Church is not just a building, it's a place where people of the same faith can meet together where they feel part of something greater than them.' Member (Survey 2)

'A lot of things have not been possible without the physical use of church and church buildings. Isolation and becoming disconnected from church family and community life has had a huge impact.' Member (Survey 2)

'People haven't been able to socialise and interact as they would usually do. Taking the decision to close due to local risk has meant that people haven't been able to access their buildings which are considered focal to their worship.' Member (Survey 2)

'I am not able to access the social side of the church community. A very large part of my daily life has been removed, and I find it very difficult to perform my acts of worship without access to the physical buildings of the church that I relate to.' Member (Survey 2)

'Our church is a civic church very much at the centre of the local community. From the lifting of the first lockdown we have remained open at least for private prayer, and have conducted limited services when restrictions allow, and this access has been utilised and much appreciated by local people. Restrictions have however severely limited the size of our congregation- usually large - and although we have an on-line offering, the lack of social interaction is keenly felt.'

Member (Survey 2)

These responses reveal the important contribution of church buildings to a sense of spiritual identity and mutual support, something which can only be partially replicated online. On-site connection is built through a range of activities, from sharing in worship to handing out hymn books, preparing and serving refreshments, and caring for the fabric and furnishing of the building. All of these, often undertaken with others, afford opportunities for conversation, physical activity and positive social interactions, overlapping with the other areas of volunteering discussed in Section 1. For some, just attending church itself may be an important part of self-care.

*'Although our church building has been open for **worship**, it has been hard not being able to **socialize** with other members of the congregation and to offer the **after-service fellowship** we used to enjoy.'* Member (Survey 2)

Responses to our survey suggest these activities are strongly missed, notwithstanding the creative solutions we consider in Section 2.3.

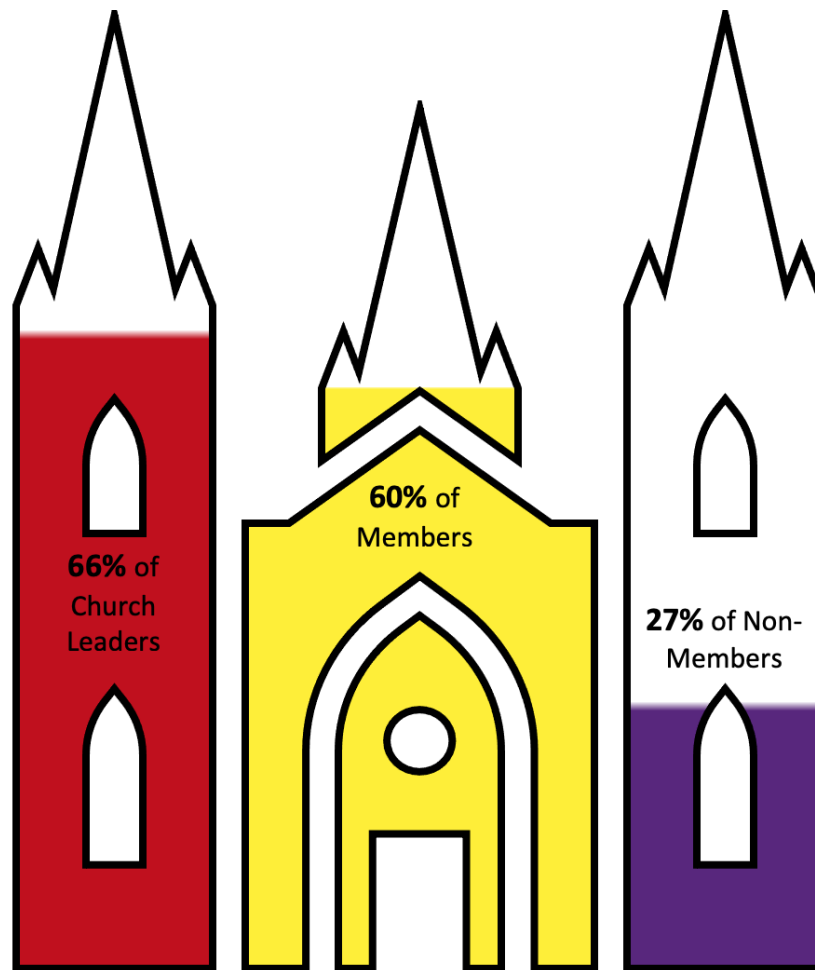


FIGURE 12 - RESPONDENTS WHO BELIEVE THAT IN-PERSON ACCESS TO CHRISTIAN WORSHIP IS A 'MAIN SUPPORT NEED' FOR THEIR COMMUNITY (SURVEY 2).

Singing and bellringing emerged as particularly important issues, reflecting the key roles of these activities in supporting wellbeing and worship.

'We particularly miss communal worship. The restrictions on not singing have been hard even when we could meet in a socially distanced way. Younger people/families are zoomed out and struggle with online church more than older people, it seems.' Church Leader (Survey 2)

'The inability to sing together has a serious impact on wellbeing and mental health.' Church Leader (Survey 2)

'Now we do not have unfettered access to our beautiful churches, I miss them enormously, especially not being able to ring the bells.'
Non-Member (Survey 2)

Communal singing has the potential to combat isolation and loneliness, and build confidence, self-esteem, and community cohesion. Listening to music also has a powerful impact on wellbeing. These benefits have long been understood but the function of church buildings as hubs for these kinds of wellbeing activities, both in worship and for community groups, has perhaps been taken for granted.



FIGURE 13 - IMPACT OF COMMUNAL SINGING ON WELLBEING (SURVEY 2).

It is perhaps not surprising that initial concerns about the transmission of COVID-19 led to restrictions on communal singing, which increased as evidence for aerosol transmission of the virus emerged during the Summer of 2020. Once church buildings re-opened for worship, the guidance on choral singing prioritised social distancing and mask-wearing, reducing the numbers permitted to sing inside buildings to a maximum of 3,⁵² and advising strongly against communal singing and chanting, as well as windblown instruments. Understanding of the risks of outdoor singing was less clear. This was felt particularly at Christmas, when churches were uncertain whether singing carols outside was permitted – or safe.

This caused great frustration amongst choir members and church leaders, and is an ongoing issue which requires further research and clearer guidance, especially as churches begin to re-open.

2.2.2 Church buildings, community wellbeing, and social cohesion

Church buildings – including churches, chapels, and associated ancillary buildings (including church halls), are often the oldest, most continuously-used community building in a settlement. They play a powerful role not only in shaping a sense of place, connecting individuals and communities with a sense of shared history and heritage rooted in the past (See Section 2.2.3). However, they also function as significant places of contemporary community cohesion and wellbeing. Many of the activities and facilities offered by church buildings are designed to meet community and social care needs, and these are considered in detail in Section 1. However, the particular architectural and spatial qualities of church buildings, including their sheer size and scale, encourage other kinds of uses which bring individuals and communities together for a range of social and cultural activities which promote wellbeing and social cohesion. These range from community cafés to shops and farmers' markets, some of which generate income to support the maintenance and repair of church buildings. Activities can also include book clubs, lectures and literary events and festivals; promoting literacy amongst diverse communities for whom English may not be their first language; or supporting other educational initiatives

⁵² 'Indoors or outdoors: Where singing or chanting is essential to an act of worship, this should be limited to one person wherever possible. Exceptionally, where it is essential to the service, up to three individuals should be permitted to do so.' <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>

with schools and libraries. Indeed, many churches maintain small libraries or second-hand book stalls which offer access to reading materials for relatively low cost.

Music has been an important part of church tradition since the Middle Ages and church buildings usually possess powerful acoustic properties which make them ideal venues for concerts. Music plays a major role in communal worship, but church buildings are also regularly used by school, community and visiting choirs for concerts which are greatly valued cultural and social events for local communities. Drama and theatrical performances, ranging from the great Mystery Play cycles of cathedrals to amateur productions and annual Nativity Plays often deploy the religious heritage of buildings and make use of their acoustic and staging possibilities. Many churches have also embraced public interest in visiting churches as exhibition spaces: from large scale artistic installations by nationally-acclaimed artists attracting thousands of visitors, to much smaller local art and craft exhibitions which showcase and celebrate local talent. Once again, these activities play a powerful role in combatting loneliness and isolation and promoting social cohesion. They also offer churches a modest level of sustainable income.

Qualitative data from our surveys and interviews illustrates the impact of COVID-19 and restrictions on church buildings in relation to community wellbeing and cohesion. Whilst the legislation and guidance on COVID-19 discussed above permitted some churches to continue to operate much-needed social care provision, such as Foodbanks from church buildings throughout the pandemic, the broader types of activities described above have largely had to cease.

‘The government’s view was very, very narrow we felt, in terms of what churches actually did in their community. It seemed to come under this big umbrella of places of worship and there’s quite a blinkered view that a place of worship is just somewhere you turn on to on a Sunday, and that is what was closing.’

Church Leader (Interview)

‘The weekly community café, which provides a vital meeting place and social hub in our rural community, cannot meet. Associated activities such as flower arranging, choir, bellringing, school events (e.g. Open the Book), Farmers’ Markets, are not being held.’

Church Leader (Survey 2)

*‘All [activities] have been effectively prevented to some extent. **Our community feels fragmented, despite us doing what we can to hold things together online.**’*

Church Leader (Survey 2)

‘Inability to meet at church has exacerbated the sense of isolation for people. Temporary closure of the church coffee shop has been the loss of a major social hub.’ Church Leader (Survey 2)

‘Church buildings are important in local communities and continue to be so. Until government restrictions are lifted the church buildings are being unused and this is a shame.’ Non-Member (Survey 2)

‘Social events such as the harvest festival, Christmas services, Christmas bazaar, and annual five church walk, concerts etc have not been held, restricting our ability to connect with non church goers.’

Member (Survey 2)

These findings matter because the community use of church buildings has been argued to provide one of the most promising strands of sustainable use and funding of church buildings, particularly by the Taylor Review and its Pilot, led by Historic England.⁵³ There is an urgent need to consider how these kinds of activities can be brought back safely into churches, alongside worship and the provision of social care. This includes clearer and simpler guidance, templates for risk assessments (including worked examples in visual form showing layouts for small, medium and large churches); clarity around insurance, for churches and community groups wishing to use church buildings. There may also be a need for further research and incentives to bring these important activities back into church buildings. This is particularly important as the full impact of COVID-19 on other community buildings, such as libraries, town and village halls, sports clubs, art galleries and museums, also becomes apparent. The potential closure of other amenities for residents, especially cafés, tea rooms and pubs, may also be an important factor to consider when exploring future partnership working and funding recommendations.

'The village I live in has two churches, but one is closed and facing demolition whilst the other is in the care of the CCT. The village hall was sold a few years ago. Many villagers didn't realise this until the first lockdown when they started to look to the church for some sort of support.' Non-Member (Survey 2)

2.2.3 Church buildings and place-making: shared history, heritage, and culture

'I missed spending time alone in a spiritual place and finding comfort in a place that had stood the test of time through generations. A sense of reassurance, continuity and permanence.'
Non-Member (Survey 1)

'[I missed] the connection of the church to a thousand years of village history and connections to the local community which does value its presence. It is also a repository for the history of the settlement and is an integral part of it.'
Member (Survey 1)

Church buildings form the largest and most significant category of UK heritage sites, from Gothic cathedrals to parish churches; Methodist, Baptist, and United Reformed Church, Chapels and Churches and Meeting Houses; and their associated Church Halls, School and Reading Rooms. Many are listed but many are not, forming an important category of non-designated heritage assets which are nevertheless valued by their communities.⁵⁴ Churches are place-shapers. They speak of the ebb and flow

⁵³ DCMS (2017) [The Taylor Review: Sustainability of English Churches and Cathedrals](#); Historic England (2020) [The Taylor Review Pilot](#); DCMS (2020) [The Taylor Review Pilot: final evaluation](#).

⁵⁴ Existing concepts of value and significance are largely framed by Historic England's (2008) [Conservation Principles, Policy and Guidance](#). A new framework for valuing cultural and heritage assets is currently being developed by DCMS which holds interesting potential for new ways of understanding places of worship, including concepts of 'existence' and 'altruistic' value has just been published Sagger, H, Philips, J and Haque, M (2021) [Valuing culture and heritage capital: a framework towards informing decision making](#).

of communities and their changing spiritual needs. They reflect and respond to changing patterns of settlement, ways of living and forms of wealth. Their construction can reflect prosperity and patronage but also the desire to meet local spiritual, social and community needs. Their closure, adaptive reuse, and ruination speaks powerfully of the changing priorities and practices of faith communities, in the past and the present.

The role of church buildings as places of shared history and heritage and memory banks for communities has long been understood. The UK has a long history of cultural appreciation of church buildings, from the great antiquarians of the past to the 'church crawlers' of today. Visiting churches has become an important part of many communities' 'heritage offer' and churches contribute significantly to the heritage tourism industry of many cities, towns and villages. Cathedrals and major churches are often one of the major heritage attractions in urban areas, sustaining local businesses catering to the needs of pilgrims and visitors and supporting other heritage attractions with joint marketing and festival activities. 'The Economic and Social Impacts of England's Cathedrals,' a report to the Association of English Cathedrals in September 2014, calculated that the direct visitor-related impact of cathedrals amounted to an additional total local spend of c.£125 million per annum. When the full range of their effect on expenditure including jobs is added this figure rises to an estimated total impact on spend of around £220 million per annum.⁵⁵

In many smaller settlements, church buildings are the main attraction.⁵⁶ Data on church visiting is notoriously hard to gather. Cathedrals which charge for entry are able to monitor visitor numbers but most churches are still free to enter. Many therefore have no systematic way of counting visitor numbers, other than visitors' books, which have largely been removed from churches in the current pandemic. For this reason, church buildings are excluded from the annual survey of the value of heritage sites to UK GDP, *Heritage Counts*.⁵⁷ However, a National Churches Trust project, funded by the NLHF, may offer a way forward. The project installed digital people counters into 10 churches to begin to collect visitor numbers and establish baseline data. Results showed that the current 'multipliers' of numbers who sign visitors' books used by a variety of church organisations, which range between 5-10, more realistically need to increase to a range of 15 and above and in one case 50! Further research into this is on-going and more is planned for 2021-22.⁵⁸

The recent restricted access to church buildings has had a major impact on peoples' ability to find respite, and a reaffirmed sense of belonging, through enjoying the shared history and heritage found in places of worship. In cathedrals, paid staff with a visitor- or volunteer-facing role have very frequently been furloughed, whilst the

⁵⁵ <https://www.englishcathedrals.co.uk/downloads/2018/02/economic-social-impacts-englands-cathedrals-2.pdf/>

⁵⁶ VisitBritain 2019 Annual Survey of Attractions recorded a growth in visitor volume to places of worship of 7%. Annual Survey of Visits to Visitor Attractions 2019 Full Trends report <https://www.visitbritain.org/annual-survey-visits-visitor-attractions-latest-results>.

⁵⁷ <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/heritage-counts/>

⁵⁸ Great Interpretations: Evaluation Report 2019, Bright Culture. <https://www.explorechurches.org/sites/default/files/2019-/Great%20Interpretations%20Evaluation%20Report%20May%202019.pdf>

volunteers so crucial to providing a warm welcome and guided tours, have also been required to stay at home. This was not just a result of the initial closure in the first lockdown. Even when churches were permitted to re-open for worship and 'private prayer' they did so with restrictions. One-way systems, social distancing measures, roped-off seating and limited access to some spaces transformed the ways in which

people had previously been able to experience these buildings at their own pace, pursuing particular interests or passions or allowing the building and its collections to inspire curiosity and enable discovery. Advance booking, timed ticketing, and queues became necessary features of larger cathedrals and churches, placing great pressure on reduced numbers of staff and volunteers, often diverting them from previous roles to prioritise social distancing. Mask-wearing has created major challenges in the face to face interaction within and between volunteers and visitors, especially for those with hearing difficulties. Many visitor resources, from audio tours to touchscreens, leaflets and guidebooks have also been withdrawn due to health and safety concerns, leaving visitors with limited opportunities to explore places of worship. This is particularly impactful for the majority of people, who do not have a detailed knowledge of Christianity or places of worship, but are curious to find out more. Rather than being invited to share in a sense of shared sense of history and heritage, present conditions mean that they are further excluded from it.

Different challenges faced smaller churches and chapels, which are often unable to provide the recommended one-way systems or stewarding. Many smaller churches still lack access to water in order to provide hand-washing facilities. Although guidance was reissued and clarified over the course of the summer to allow churches to respond to local circumstances and need, many churches lacked the data on visitor numbers required to fill in risk assessments or satisfy anxious clergy and were therefore unable to open. Some churches wrestled with how to balance these needs within the restrictions imposed. Should churches prioritise access for social care, worship and/or private prayer or visitors?

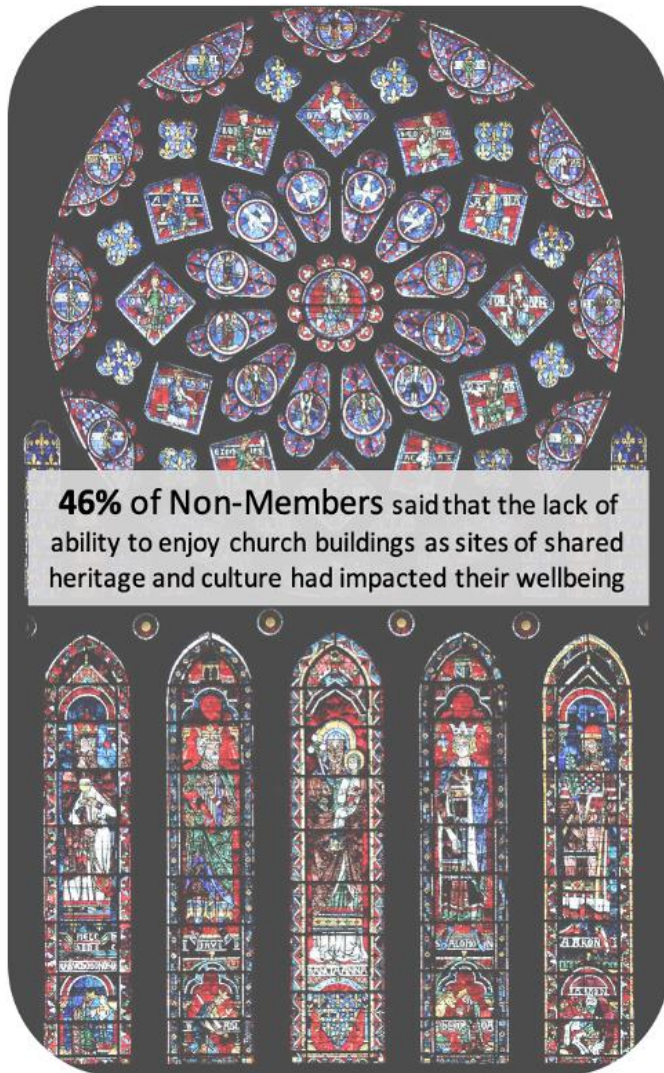
These needs and values do not map neatly onto constituent communities. However, it is telling that 46% of Non-Members responding to Survey 2 said that the lack of ability to enjoy church buildings as sites of shared heritage and culture had impacted on their wellbeing. Moreover, these values cannot be easily separated from the other forms of spiritual provision and cultural activities also considered beneficial to wellbeing.

'I missed absorbing the peace and prayer from hundreds of years.'

Non-Member (Survey 1)

'Primarily beauty, a sense of history, and just somewhere to go that wasn't home or a rushed visit to a supermarket for essentials.'

Non-Member (Survey 1)



46% of Non-Members said that the lack of ability to enjoy church buildings as sites of shared heritage and culture had impacted their wellbeing

FIGURE 14 - ATTITUDE TO BUILDINGS AS SITES OF HERITAGE/CULTURE (SURVEY 2).

'Although I visit them for "tours" I also find sitting in them a comfort. A place to just "be".'

Non-Member (Survey 1)

'I attended Services regularly and also enjoyed a lifetime of delighting in the buildings (and secular ones). They offer more uses than those to which they are normally put and closure is a backward step unless unavoidable.'

Non-Member (Survey 2)

'Regular visitor to historic buildings, including churches, and regular member of audience at concerts and other events held in churches, but haven't been to any for the last year.'

Non-Member (Survey 2)

'[The] inability to enter churches has also had an impact of those, like myself, who enjoy visiting churches for historical and cultural interest.'

Non-Member (Survey 2)

Standard guidance and advice about opening church buildings and engaging visitors with their heritage is normally circulated by a range of organisations, including the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance, the National Churches Trust and the Historic Chapels Trust. Closed churches are supported by charities such as the Churches Conservation Trust and Friends of Friendless Churches. All these organisations have expressed deep concern about the impact of COVID-19 on visitors and visitor experience. During lockdown a number have found creative ways of bringing the stories of historic churches and chapels to life, engaging with new technologies of virtual talks and tours and livestreaming from buildings to engage online and remote users, which are further discussed in Section 2.3.3 below. Monetising this offer, however, has proved challenging and the problems of wi-fi access, digital inequality and poverty, which affect the provision of online worship pose similar challenges for virtual tourism.

There is, however, evidence that the lack of access to church buildings during lockdown has also focused attention on their value and significance. 'Pent-up demand' may result in an increased interest in visiting historic churches, especially given the renewed interest in 'the local'. As restrictions are lifted, a key priority will be to understand and advise on the safe and sustainable opening of church buildings to visitors and pilgrims; to ensure they are met with a warm welcome, but also

accessible forms of information and resources which engage, inspire and encourage long-term support for these sites of shared history, heritage and wellbeing.

'[COVID-19] has helped churches realise how many people love their buildings – and how much – in a way that they might not have realised before. And if they recognise that having to close their building has had an impact on their local community, then perhaps they'll think about how they can make it more accessible/available in the future.'

National Churches Trust (Interview)

'Not having something does tend to make you appreciate what you have lost all the more!' Non-Member (Survey 2)

'I am more aware of the use made of my local church building and churchyard by people as a place of solace since our services stopped last March.' Member (Survey 2)

*'Since lockdown I have spent more time **studying the architecture and history of local churches**, thus my view of them as the **centre of the cultural community** has improved. I have always loved a beautiful church, but that has now gone beyond simply a passion for a beautiful building, to being one of **admiration for the immense heritage and history that churches hold ... such heritage must be protected and cherished**. Because of this I am now **much more willing and enthusiastic about donating to protect my local church** and keeping it from falling into disrepair, or losing it in some other way.'* Non-Member (Survey 2)

2.3 CREATIVE RESPONSES

'We have moved to being a church beyond the walls.'
Church Leader (Survey 2)

2.3.1 Creative ways of providing worship and spiritual provision online

With doors locked and church communities unable to gather in person, not only for weekly worship but for all other groups and services, churches across the country shifted their provision online. This took place on a remarkable scale – Survey 1 found that 90% of church leaders were offering online worship and teaching, while 73% offered prayer/pastoral support online. Both the Anglican and Catholic churches provided national resources enabling people to connect with these offerings.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ [A Church Near You](#) provided an interactive map of Anglican livestreamed and online services. An [online directory](#) was also created by the Catholic church.

These took a wide range of forms from online worship livestreamed in a conference call format (using platforms such as Zoom); to single camera broadcasts (using, for example, Facebook Live or YouTube Live to offer short daily morning and evening prayers), or pre-recorded services hosted on any number of websites and platforms). These were not mutually exclusive – live-streamed services may incorporate pre-recorded segments, while churches who pre-recorded their services also encouraged communication through comments or a chat function. These new technologies were also harnessed by many church leaders to support small group study and Podcast Reflections. While some of these may have pre-dated March 2020, it appears that the vast majority are new developments, showing the ingenuity, resilience, and creativity in the English church landscape and its potential to serve new audiences whilst also enabling church leaders and members to remain connected to their church community.



FIGURE 15 - STATISTICS ON PROVISION OF ONLINE WORSHIP AND TEACHING (SURVEY 1).

'The online worship need has increased dramatically and we now connect with far more people through live and pre-recorded worship on Facebook and YouTube than we have done as a circuit for many years.'

Church Leader (Survey 2)

'We have started using social media much more to connect with loads of people who wouldn't normally walk through the church doors.'

Church Leader (Survey 2)

'Not being a great church-goer previously, the on-line services and contacts has enabled me to become more involved and interested.'

Non-Member (Survey 2)

'Livestreaming has enabled shielded people to be part of the life of the local church.' Church Leader (Survey 2)

'The biggest thing we have done is introduced live streaming for our services, which is a massive achievement. This allows many people who would be in isolation to come together and feel that they are participating in worship.' Church Leader (Survey 2)

New technologies offer the potential to reach people for whom access in-person was previously impossible, whether due to health and mobility issues (for example those who are housebound, in hospital, or in a care home); those who live too far from the church building to visit (such as those who want to connect with a particular place they consider part of their identity; or with relatives and friends of church members,

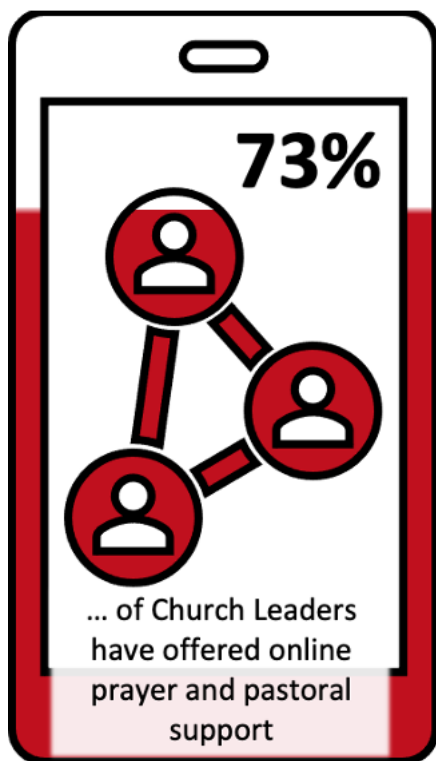


FIGURE 16 - STATISTICS ON PROVISION OF ONLINE PRAYER AND PASTORAL SUPPORT (SURVEY 1).

with whom they have been able to connect spiritually and socially through livestreaming); and those keen to explore or access diverse forms of liturgical and spiritual ‘offer’; to develop their spirituality or ‘test the water’ before making a more formal commitment to faith. In some rural areas, online worship has provided a new way to unite multiple congregations across a benefice in a single service.

For some families, especially those with young children or those with special educational or physical needs, the ability to be able to engage in the life of the church in their own, safe, domestic environment – or at a later time in the day/week if needed, once a moment of quiet is possible – is a newfound and much valued relief. When asked which activities have helped them remain connected with their church/cathedral community, 63% of responses positively mentioned online provisions, suggesting a high level of appreciation for this new element of church life.

Yet the picture is more complicated. Although online worship provision is a deeply-appreciated response, serving as a valued stopgap (and even a lifeline), it is not seen as a permanent alternative to in-person worship. In many areas what it has exposed is the stark

levels of digital division, not only between those who have the technological resources to engage with online material (including both hardware and broadband speeds, an issue of particular concern in some rural areas), but also the familiarity and literacy with the technology to be able to create, contribute to and access online services and events. Older technologies such as telephone ministry have therefore been equally important alongside these new digital offers.

‘Livestream and recorded services. Pastoral support by telephone (including spiritual communion). Weekly emails to keep people informed. Online quiet mornings and home groups. Zoom choir practices and pre-recorded anthems to keep musical input high.’

Church Leader (Survey 2)

Many respondents also noted the phenomenon of online fatigue, expressed particularly by parents who have found it difficult to engage themselves while managing a household of children without the sanctuary of a distraction-less church building and the dedicated childcare provision (and space!) it provides. It is noteworthy that children and young people themselves are also struggling with online engagement, possibly in part because of the additional exposure through home schooling.

‘It would just be good if our church could go back to being a physical church offering all the things it used to do, rather than just being a virtual church on zoom.’ Member (Survey 2)

In addition the demands of producing effective online material on a regular basis are considerable:

*'We have to be **innovative in the way we deliver worship**. We need to recognize as a church that when people start watching something from their living rooms, they've got far more distractions and competition ... It has to be a service that is **moving quite quickly and involves a lot of people** as well, so the voice is changing ... The preaching ... has to involve **a multimedia approach** ... I use clips from musicals, clips from films, lots of visuals.'* Church Leader (Interview)

Many church leaders have been able to give more time to developing such material while other avenues of engagement were restricted. Once they are able to resume their normal in-person ministry, it will be very challenging to incorporate a high degree of online engagement into their workload.

2.3.2 Creative ways of returning to in-person worship

As 'Stay At Home' restrictions were lifted and guidance from different denominations began to take account both of local contexts, many churches found creative ways to re-establish in-person, socially-distanced worship. One-way systems, provision of hand sanitising and washing facilities, roped-off pews and laminated labels directed people to safe areas to sit. Cathedrals and major churches and chapels with larger congregations unable to be accommodated within the socially-distanced requirements, made use of advanced booking systems and multiple service provision, particularly for Festival Services. Innovative use was also made of outdoor spaces, especially as the weather improved and research and guidance suggested that socially-distanced outdoor activities posed relatively low risks of COVID-19 transmission. Churchyards and porches showed the value of these green spaces as places where, when restrictions permitted, people could also meet safely and seek the solace and comfort they needed.

'I have missed services in the actual building, greatly appreciated the short time when we were allowed to go and then missed this again.'

Member (Survey 2)

'We have adapted remarkably. H&S provisions have been outstanding, enabling a food-hub; Forest Church; seasonal events transferred outdoors to churchyard.' Member (Survey 2)

*'We found that senior members of the local community were **keen to take part in mid-week worship** when other local activities (lunch club) had been forced to close. Also the **church garden became a much sought after place of peace and refuge** during the spring/summer lockdown.'* Church Leader (Survey 2)

The timing of Survey 1 in September meant that we were able to capture reflections on the creative ideas which had been developed for Easter 2020 and leaders and members' plans for safe and socially-distanced creative ideas for Christmas, too. These demonstrate the creativity and ingenuity of church leaders and members. A

few case studies reflecting creative responses to Festivals are provided here. Some of these ideas proved so successful that respondents noted they would continue them 'even if things go back to normal.'

'On Good Friday ...we had a very moving, online live Passion Play, where we had probably about 20 different voices from across the parish readout the passion narrative in a contemporary style, and we had a time of reflection and prayer going through it, it lasted just over an hour. And that was really, that was really poignant. And I think we can do a similar thing but from a joyful perspective on Christmas around, celebrating the Nativity.' Church Leader (Interview)

'One thing that we did around Pentecost was 24 hours of prayer, and we had the Zoom Room here open for 24 hours, and people were joining every hour. It was a foundation of people that committed to pray for an hour across the 24 hours. But then other people could join at whatever time of hour or day. And we did that up to the 10 o'clock service for 24 hours up to the 10 o'clock service on Pentecost Sunday, we're going to do the same thing up for Advent, so running up to Advent Sunday we'll have a 24 hour of prayer.' Church Leader (Interview)

'We decided to do 'Carols on your Doorstep' ... 24 carol services on every street of the parish over the course of two weeks. We got the vicar's car, covered it in fairy lights, got a big speaker and put it on the top. We put posters up on each of the streets and spread the word via WhatsApp groups that we were coming. We provided a carol sheet, which they could download onto their phone from a QR code on all the posters and on our website. All they had to do was turn up at their doorstep with a candle and their carol sheet and sing. We did about four or five carols and then the vicar would say a prayer and then we did the Lord's Prayer at the end. And we had so many people come out and they were so chuffed to bits ... to be able to just celebrate Christmas in some way with some singing. And the children absolutely loved it - dancing up and down the street - and it was a real joy. Our aim was to just spread a bit of hope, comfort and hope and joy. We think we reached about 600 people who took part - the vast majority of whom were not congregation members.' Church Member (Interview)

*'At Christmas we did **a number of things for the first time** - used a float to go round the area playing music with a short Christmas message; had a nativity trail with actors in the church grounds and in the building; had an acoustic traditional carol service held on 3 nights.'* Church Leader (Survey 2)

Combining online and in-person provision

Following experimentation with online provision during the first lockdown, many churches have subsequently been seeking to create combinations of in-person worship and online provision. These range from livestreamed services from a church building, uniting virtual and real communities in combined acts of worship and

fellowship, to recorded services uploaded to online platforms, which allow audiences unable to attend in person to watch at their convenience. This mixed offering, responding to the experiences and needs of church members, offers significant potential for the future.

'We have tried to adapt to deliver 'services' and services given the guidelines in place at the time. Some things have moved online or outdoors. A listening service was set up and pastoral schemes reinvigorated. New technology has been embraced and old ways of working brought back into our repertoire. We have adopted a 'no one is left behind' policy ensuring that everyone has access to worship regardless of their ability to access things online. Outdoor 'lockdown proof' outreach and community events have proved popular as have outdoor prayer opportunities.' Church Leader (Survey 2)

2.3.3 Creative approaches to exploring shared histories, heritage and culture

'With more time to explore other churches online I have enjoyed the variety of buildings and church communities I would not have found otherwise.'

Non-Member (Survey 2)

Restricted access to church buildings and the importance of ensuring buildings are COVID-19 safe have presented new challenges to those who regularly welcome visitors to their buildings and those who enjoy visiting them. However, creative solutions have also emerged during the pandemic, building on already-established initiatives, such as the National Churches Trust's 'Explore Churches' website.⁶⁰ Some of these schemes have been primarily aimed at maintaining connection with existing staff and volunteers, combatting the loneliness and isolation of furlough and working from or staying at home. Others have sought to connect with virtual visitors, hoping to encourage them to visit once restrictions are lifted.

'People have taken the opportunity to think about what their church does in terms of its welcoming, its interpretation and its publicity including its online presence and preparing for when the church reopens.'

National Churches Trust (Interview)

Many of these online offerings have made use of existing channels of social media, from Twitter and Facebook to Blogposts providing regular updates on activities or sharing stories and ideas of mutual interest. These short posts have the advantage of being relatively easy to compose and consume and offer a sense of regular connection with much-loved and much-missed buildings and sites. Offering experience of the changing seasons, weather, light and sound, especially interactions with wildlife, has proved particular popular, as people have wrestled with their experiences of time during lockdown.

⁶⁰ <https://www.explorechurches.org/>

'I've missed being able to visit heritage buildings such as churches and I've enjoyed following them on social media and seeing how they've built and maintained online community.' Non-Member (Survey 2)

However, other online offerings have made use of new technologies such as Zoom to offer livestreamed lectures and online workshops, and 360 panoramas and other immersive technologies to offer virtual tours of buildings and collections. This kind of offer is still fairly limited, although there is increasing interest in it from churches seeking to enhance their online presence, engage new audiences and encourage people to visit once restrictions are lifted.



Cathedrals



Westminster Cathedral

Westminster Cathedral is a supreme achievement of art with many distinguished works of artistic merit.



Westminster Abbey

Westminster Abbey presents a unique pageant of British history.



Exeter Cathedral

One of the finest examples of Gothic architecture anywhere: inside you'll find a building which has lived through war, political unrest, the Exeter Blitz and much more.



Canterbury Cathedral

The world famous cathedral, housing many stunning features, including a Romanesque crypt, a perpendicular nave and beautiful medieval stained glass windows.



Bradford Cathedral

Bradford's beautiful cathedral is a hidden jewel waiting to be discovered with its peaceful setting in tranquil gardens where once battle raged.



Brecon Cathedral

Brecon Cathedral started life in 1093, built by the Normans on the site of an earlier Celtic church.

FIGURE 17 - NATIONAL CHURCHES TRUST EXPLORE RESOURCE VIRTUAL TOURS OF CHURCHES (NATIONALCHURCHESTRUST.ORG)

'We've had loads of interest from churches that want to do virtual tours. Some are paying for a professional to do it, while quite a few churches have produced virtual tours on their own using either a 360° camera or an app like Google Street View or Matterport.'

National Churches Trust (Interview)

Church visiting has the potential to contribute to the financial sustainability of church buildings and their surrounding communities. Increased interest in staycations, as a result of the pandemic, combined with the continued desire to 'experience' a place,

mean that churches are well placed to provide bookable group experiences which provide a direct income from tourism. However, tourism also has the potential to create tensions and misunderstandings, between local communities and visitors, and between the needs of tourists and worshippers. Further support and guidance will be needed if places of worship are to seize the opportunity to engage new audiences and there has been a significant increase in church members participating in online tourism training sessions in recent months.

2.5 FUTURE SUPPORT REQUIRED

There is an urgent need to acknowledge the significance of places of worship as places of individual and community wellbeing, offering peace and quiet, beauty and inspiration but also sanctuary, solace and comfort, which has been clearly highlighted by the experience of COVID-19. The value of these buildings to local communities also needs to be recognised, not just as sites of shared history and heritage, but also as place within which individual isolation can be combatted and community life can flourish, through social, cultural and artistic events and activities that further enhance wellbeing. Better understanding and communication of these functions to national policy makers, charitable funders, and in some cases, faith groups themselves, will provide a strong foundation for recovery. Failure to understand these values or the needs from which they spring, will not only lead to lost opportunities to sustain these places for the future, but may also have a devastating impact on individual wellbeing, community cohesion and local, regional and national heritage tourism economies at a time when all of these areas need to be rebuilt. In many areas, the loss or closure of church buildings will remove the last public building and community asset from a settlement.

Our evidence suggests that church leaders, members and Non-Members have a clear sense of vision about the potential of their buildings to meet wellbeing and spiritual needs, and desire to play their part in rebuilding individual confidence and community cohesion as we look to the future. However, in order to fulfil their potential, places of worship will require support. Some of this is readily available, and requires only minor adjustments to guidance, streamlining of processes, and reduction of unnecessary bureaucracy. Other areas will require additional funding; training in partnership working; as well as further research. However, as noted in Sections 1 and 3, the sheer number of church buildings located in almost every settlement in the UK means that investment in places of worship also has the potential to bring benefits to every community, meeting people and their needs ‘on the ground.’

2.5.1 Making buildings fit for purpose: maintenance and repairs, upgrading facilities, and building development

As noted in Section 1, the greatest and most pressing challenge being faced by many churches, is the loss of income experienced as a result of closure and the loss of in-person worship, hire and community use of church buildings, and inability to hold fundraising and other cultural events. Many churches have used reserves to support the provision of social care. Closure and restrictions on volunteers have led to a

deficit of repairs and a backlog of problems likely to emerge as and when the use of buildings resumes. 59% of church leaders identify financial support for building repairs, maintenance and rent as the most pressing and urgent need they face.

Recent government initiatives such as the Taylor Review and funding streams such as the NLHF, have emphasised that community uses of church buildings are important in providing sustainable income in the future. However, in order to accommodate these functions, many churches already needed to upgrade outdated, inefficient and unsustainable heating and lighting systems, install toilet and hand-washing facilities, upgrade wi-fi connections and sound systems, and improve accessibility. These requirements have become even more urgent in the light of COVID-19 and the need to futureproof buildings and activities against continuing or further episodes of virus transmission. Many of these schemes will require advice and support to assess local need, understand the significance of buildings, and co-design solutions which balance the multiple uses of buildings. 52% of respondents identify funding for creation of community hubs as a strategic priority, with 33% asking specifically to improve facilities such as kitchens and toilets.

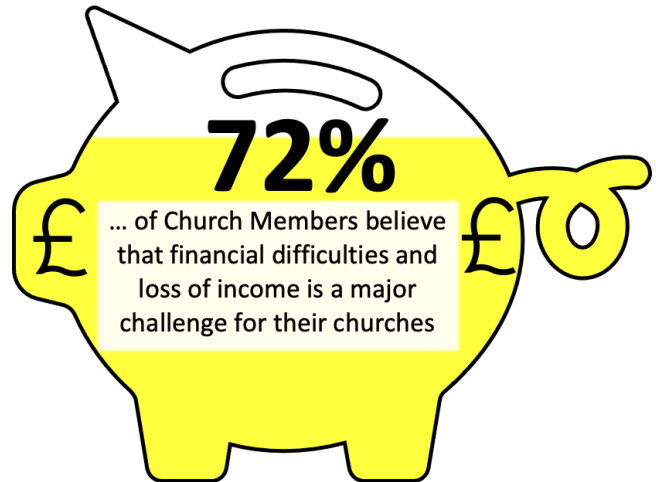


FIGURE 18 - DATA ON PERCEPTIONS OF MAJOR CHALLENGES FACING CHURCHES (SURVEY 2)

'The future planning involves removing pews and making the building more comfortable and suitable for the community to use for events meeting up as well as for worship.' Church Leader (Survey 2)

'To provide facilities in the building to enable it to be used for activities other than Christian worship.' Member (Survey 2)

'We need our church to be accessible and warm to encourage more use and coax people out of their nests.' Member (Survey 2)

Priority needs to be given to funding which supports such schemes. The Government should explore ways in which it can support the development of historic places of worship, either through retaining and extending the Listed Places of the Worship Grant Scheme on a long-term basis, or reducing VAT on repairs, new works and maintenance. This would give places of worship stability when planning capital building projects.

Funders also need to provide advice and support for co-design to minimise the waste of valuable financial reserves and volunteer time. Here, we note the recommendations of the Taylor Review Pilot scheme on the roles which could be played by Community Development Advisors and Fabric Support Officers.

Other initiatives exploring partnership or collective deals with approved contractors for maintenance, repair and the installation of low-carbon energy solutions suited to use in historically-sensitive buildings and sites of archaeological significance are also needed.

Finally, there is an urgent need for churches to be supported in incentivising and maximising giving to sustain and develop church buildings. Some of the more practical support needed post-COVID-19 includes advice on moving from cash-giving to direct debits and/or contactless payment options for congregations and visitors.

2.5.2 Clearer and more enabling guidance

‘Persuade people it’s safe to return to church.’

Church Leader (Survey 2)

‘It’s been v difficult getting back to church in person because the rules are being enforced in such a heavy-handed way. The message too often is "be very afraid" rather than "fear not, we have the Lord as our help.”’

Member (Survey 2)

‘How to get people to come back to church.

How to sing again. Faith restored.’

Member (Survey 2)

One of the most important findings discussed above is the need to keep churches open for quiet reflection and wellbeing, as well as more formal worship provision. A recurring theme across all three sections of this report is the need for clearer, simpler guidance on ways in which churches can be opened safely and cleaned sustainably, and on what kinds of activities can be accommodated within them to meet the needs of church members, Non-Members and visitors. Guidance needs to be enabling rather than intimidating. More positive and welcoming templates for signage and publicising access are also required.

Issues of specific relevance to the use of churches to support wellbeing, place-making, and exploration of heritage, include the provision or clarification of guidance on:

- Opening on a daily basis versus leaving 48-72 hour intervals in between, balanced with advice on sanitising and cleaning
- Legal requirements relating to Test and Trace and GDPR
- Stewarding requirements balanced against visitor numbers, one-way systems and signage
- Latest updates on best practice in social distancing, mask/visor wearing, ability to leave prayer cards, guidebooks, leaflets and other paper or laminated resources for visitors
- Use of churchyards, including sanitising requirements for benches, and guidance on temporary structures such as gazebos to host social and cultural events

In time, further guidance on numbers attending life events, changing guidance on levels of social distancing, hosting of concerts and musical events, preparation and serving of food for social and cultural events will be required.

2.5.3 Supporting online and in-person worship and visiting

35% of respondents to our surveys suggested there was a need for further training in online provision for worship. It is also evident that some Non-Members have found online provision helpful in a time of particular need. The move towards a mixed provision of online and in-person worship and spiritual support will not only require dedicated funding streams for livestreaming and guidance on how these can be installed or used to support the in-person worship experience, but also continuing training in creating and accessing online provision, for church leaders and church members. Many churches have had to confront the practicalities and cost of broadband access in churches.

*'We've purchased **a mobile hotspot** – it costs £300 but because its not wedded to any one mobile provider, we've found **that we've got really good signals from churches we thought would need hardwired provision** to get WiFi. Even in the church that has no electricity we manage – we've bought a **lithium battery generator** for £600. Not cheap, but again **a lot cheaper than putting in WiFi.**'*

Rural Church Leader (Interview)

The evidence also suggests that there is also a need for historic churches in particular, to seize the opportunities presented by staycations and an increasing interest in 'the local' to explore places of worship. There is an urgent need to advise and equip churches with guidance and funding to prepare for a rise in church visiting as restrictions are lifted. Greater understanding of the cultural riches of ecclesiastical heritage and support in opening this up to wider audiences in an inclusive and accessible way is urgently needed. Partnership working, at a local, regional and national level, will be crucial to meeting this new – and growing – need.

2.6 LESSONS LEARNED

Closing church buildings was a rapid response to an unprecedented global pandemic, with, as we have seen, major health impacts on some of the most vulnerable in society. Continuing restrictions and uncertainty on the ground about what is safe to do have had an unexpected and unintended impact on many areas of individual and societal wellbeing.

Whilst many within congregations found new ways of connecting at least partially, those for whom places of worship were an informal site of comfort and reassurance felt locked out and turned away. Section 1 has noted the need to learn lessons about how to sustain the provision of social care in the future. Many of those recommendations also pertain to the issues raised in this Section of the report.

1. Closing churches during the first lockdown and the subsequent restrictions imposed on accessing church buildings had a major impact on the wellbeing of clergy, members and Non-Members

Greater understanding and awareness of wellbeing benefits of places of worship is needed not just nationally but locally, to identify how they are valued and how churches can sustain the wellbeing benefits in the face of ongoing restrictions and future pandemics. Trust will need to be rebuilt. In some cases, careful thought may need to be given to prioritising some areas of provision over others.

2. Over-complex, confusing, inconsistent, or outdated guidance creates fear, confusion and tension amongst clergy and church members and prevents them welcoming Non-Members and visitors to their buildings

If churches are to open safely and fulfil their potential not just as places of worship but also hubs of everyday social activity, guidance will need clarifying, tailoring to local circumstances and adapting in ways that encourage and incentivise clergy and churches to re-open when this is appropriate. This should be informed by systematic and scientific research on the safety of places of worship and the activities within them that can be applied 'on the ground'. Better and more attractive solutions to social distancing and communicating a sense of welcome will also be needed.

3. Online worship and pastoral support has great potential, but in-person worship experience is also greatly valued and the future will require mixed provision

Online provision may open up access to worship, spirituality and heritage of places of worship to new audiences and is likely to be a permanent feature of future worship and visitor engagement. However, people also want in-person experiences which cannot be duplicated online. Investment in technology and online content will need support and guidance. Meeting these new expectations places further pressure on clergy and church members, who may need additional training and access to related funding.

SECTION 3

CHURCHES AND COMMUNITIES: Supporting Grief and Loss

'[Churches] are primarily places of worship and yet they also provide refuge during tough times.'

Caroline Dinenage MP
Minister of State for Digital and Culture, DCMS

'Not able to grieve properly.'
Non-Member (Survey 1)

'Church is a lifeline for many lonely people, also those with anxiety or depression, or experiencing bereavement. Closures and restrictions have massive impact.'
Member (Survey 2)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has exposed the nation to loss and trauma to an unprecedented degree, as the virus has not only taken lives but also imposed patterns of isolation separating many from the relationships and rituals which would have brought them comfort in more normal times. The traumatic impact of so many deaths over a short period of time has been exacerbated by restrictions which have prevented normal care for the dying; reduced or removed the opportunity for ritual comfort; separated mourners from normal sources of support; and suspended the activities and routines which could have helped them to rebuild their lives.⁶¹ The roles which church buildings, rituals, pastoral care, and community activities would normally play in helping individuals and families process grief and loss and find support through familiar networks have been significantly affected.

'I lost a dear friend and wanted to do what I have always done, sit in church, say a prayer and think of them and others that have gone before.'

Non-Member (Survey 1)

The unusually widespread experience of bereavement during the last year has also led to a fresh awareness of the frailty of

⁶¹ A report on 'Funerals and Bereavement,' carried out for the Church of England in January 2021, found that since March 2020, 6 in 10 of those surveyed had experienced the death of at least one person whose funeral they would normally have attended. 1 in 4 experienced more than one death in this category. 4 in 10 experienced the death of someone close. 1 in 10 lost more than one close person ... 7 in 10 of those who experienced someone's death were not able to attend funerals. More than 8 in 10 agreed people haven't been able to say goodbye properly or fulfil funeral wishes.' <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Funerals%20and%20Bereavement%20Summary%20Report%20web.pdf>

human life as even apparently healthy individuals can be taken so swiftly by an invisible force; and related anxiety about the potential vulnerability of others, or indeed of oneself. The impact of these traumas has been compounded by a multitude of 'mini bereavements,' which have undermined individuals' sense of security, as so many have faced the loss of their work, businesses, income, homes, education, and plans for the future. The resultant widespread levels of anxiety, coupled with the potential for the increased incidence of 'complex' and 'unsupported' grief to trigger long-term mental health issues, have serious consequences for wellbeing and for the ability of individuals to continue to function well within their families, social contexts, and work environments. It is likely that the full effects of the pandemic on mental health will not be seen until the immediate crisis is over.⁶²

In a written submission to this project, Andy Langford, Clinical Director of Cruse, underlines the likelihood of long-lasting trauma if these issues are not addressed.

'What we are often hearing is that the lack of being able to meet together to mourn and conduct a funeral, has meant that the usually expected means of grieving are disrupted. This is often coupled with the death being sudden (which is often the case with Covid or a related disorder complicated by Covid), and also the likelihood of someone not being with the person who died, as they were overcome by their condition in hospital where no one could attend. When this is the case, and sadly it is what we are increasingly finding at Cruse in the current context, bereaved people are more likely to experience trauma related symptoms further down the line, including increased levels of depression and anxiety. These can lead to complications over maintaining employment and also what social activity is possible. Ultimately, without support, this can lead to 'complex grief disorder' and a discernible severe reduction in mental health and wellbeing.'⁶³

Use of technology, such as FaceTime, has allowed for some communication where patients were capable of it but has in no way replaced the ability to sit by a bedside, or hold someone's hand, as their life draws to a close.

A lead hospital chaplain commented in an interview for this project:

'So much injury for people to carry – a lot of guilt in not being able to be there for their loved ones ... An awful lot of unresolved grief because people have not been able to say goodbye properly'

Planning for recovery needs to take these factors into account. This section therefore examines the roles which churches and communities have played in the past; the restrictions which COVID-19 regulations have placed on their ability to contribute at

⁶² "A silent epidemic of grief": a survey of bereavement care provision in the UK and Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic.' <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/11/3/e046872.full.pdf>

⁶³ Written submission to 'COVID, Churches and Communities' project, 16.10.20. See also <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-bereavement-and-grief>

present; and their capacity to provide enhanced support for individual and community recovery in the future.

3.2 NEED

3.2.1 A pandemic of unsupported or unresolved grief

In the first lockdown in 2020, the legislation permitted churches to remain open for funerals but safety concerns, at a time when little was known about virus transmission or effective safety measures, meant that funerals did not take place in most churches during that period.

'[Didn't have] the opportunity to gather together with friends and family to remember someone and mark their life in a meaningful way in the place they would have wanted.' Non-Member (Survey 1)

'As a town and rural priest in Devon during the first lockdown the requirement for us to close our buildings had a huge impact on the local community. In areas like mine where the nearest crematorium is over an hour's drive, the local church buildings were used for over 90% of the funerals. It is very difficult to say to a family that we can take a funeral at the crematorium, but not in the church, especially when we could have easily made one of the churches a funeral church with the required time between funerals to allow all risk to be avoided.'

Church Leader (Interview)

At the same time, crematoria were enforcing a range of restrictions which meant that families were not allowed inside the building and had to watch the disposal of their loved one's remains from outside. In an interview for this project, a hospital chaplain described having to take 'a huge number of baby funerals' during 2020. On some occasions, she found herself having to take the baby's coffin from his or her parents in the crematorium carpark because they were not allowed inside the chapel, or having to warn bereaved parents that they would not be able to sit together because the chairs in the chapel had been nailed to the floor two metres apart. In other instances, ministers were conducting burials with a limit of five attendees which meant that siblings might have to decide which of them could be present at the graveside.

'The funeral was limited to five people and not in the place we wanted. Didn't feel like the funeral that our beloved person deserved.'

Non-Member (Survey 1)

Even when churches re-opened for funerals, restricted numbers continued to cause distress.

'My mother died in July and we had to leave many members of our extended family standing outside during the service and we couldn't safely meet afterwards.' Non-Member (Survey 1)

In the early days of the pandemic, graveyards and cemeteries were also closed for a period, causing stress not only to the recently bereaved but also to those for whom visiting graves of family and friends is an important ritual and a source of comfort.

These reductions of access to key spaces for formal and informal rituals have added a further sense of loss of control to those undergoing bereavement.

COVID-19 regulations have profoundly disrupted the processes and structures which normally help to support individuals and communities through grieving. Bereavement during the pandemic has for many been characterised by enforced separation and consequent feelings of both pain and guilt. They have felt powerless and deeply distressed because they could not be with loved ones as they died; were unable to view the body; had to settle for a funeral which was not in content or scale 'what the person deserved;' were unable even to attend a funeral, or visit a church while a funeral was being held elsewhere; and were frequently unable to meet with others for mutual comfort and support. The Co-op Funeralcare *'A Nation in Mourning'* report⁶⁴ published in July 2020 estimated that during the first four months of the pandemic 9 million people had not been able to attend funerals. This was partly due to travel restrictions but also because of the restrictions on numbers allowed to attend.

Non-Members responding to the survey which we carried out in September and October 2020 clearly articulated feelings of dislocation, fragmented experience, and of a sense of failure to fulfil their duty to those who had died.

'My children couldn't attend the service for their cousin.'

'Not being able to hold a funeral in a place that meant a great deal to the person who had died, and the family.'

'Not having the opportunity to gather together with friends and family to remember someone and mark their life in a meaningful way in the place they would have wanted.'

'Unable to see brother before he died & unable to attend a service. Still have his ashes to inter.'

There is a clear indication in these responses from non-church members that ritual, place, and shared mourning, matter a great deal. The second COVID, Churches and Communities survey (February 1 - March 7, 2021) asked *'What are the main support needs that have emerged in your local community since the start of the first lockdown?'* 49% of respondents selected 'Support for bereavement/grief (including funerals).' One church leader voiced the concerns of many about the long-term impact of the 'Lack of ability for people to come together for funerals - not just the service, but the social support and comfort that runs alongside. I feel this will have lasting effects on the grieving process for many.'

These concerns are reinforced by data collected by other researchers. A first stage report, *'Supporting people bereaved during COVID-19,'* published by the Universities of Cardiff and Bristol in November 2020, observes:

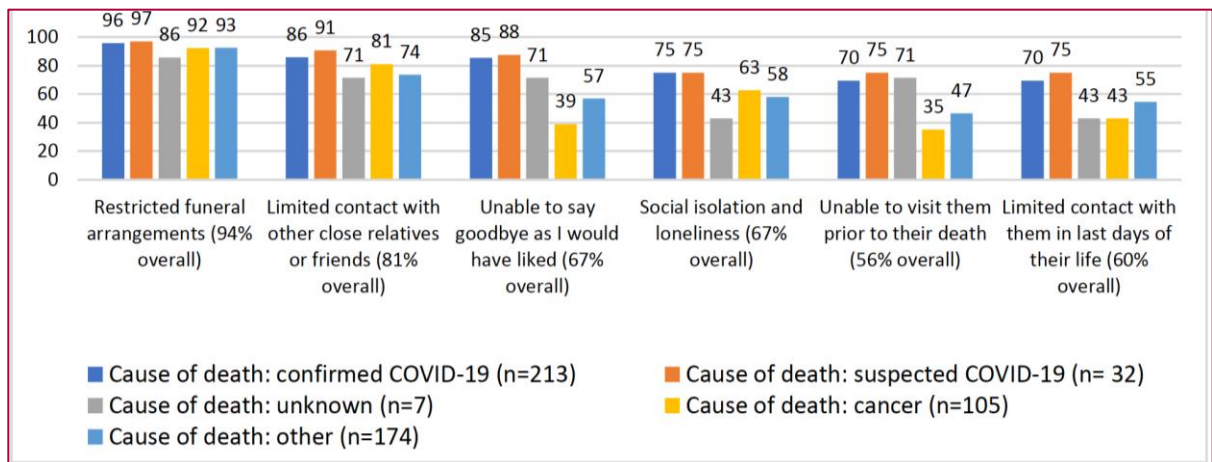
'Being unable to host conventional services or wakes, share stories and celebrate the life of their loved ones was distressing at the time, and made it difficult to find closure and begin to grieve. People also

⁶⁴ 'A Nation in Mourning.' <https://www.coop.co.uk/funeralcare/nationinmourning>

commented on the further distress caused by having to travel to the crematorium alone, sit apart from other family members and, in some cases, return home to empty houses. Likewise, lockdown and social distancing restrictions during early bereavement disrupted the emotional support most needed from close family and friends, again affecting the grieving process.¹⁶⁵

The researchers found that restrictions on visiting hospitals and other care settings, limitations on funerals and on normal social interaction, affected almost all participants in the study, with 51% experiencing 5 or 6 of the experiences connected with bereavement and grieving listed in the graph below:

FIGURE 19 - END OF LIFE AND BEREAVEMENT EXPERIENCES OVERALL AND BY CAUSE OF DEATH (%) FROM SUPPORTING PEOPLE BEREAVED DURING COVID-19 (UNIVERSITY OF CARDIFF AND BRISTOL, 2020).



Lack of direct contact with the dying and with others at vital points in the process of bereavement has become a much more common experience during the pandemic, but still extremely difficult to accept.

'I wanted to be able to provide care of the dying. Not allowed to visit. This caused me great pain and feelings of guilt.'

Church Leader (Survey 1)

The difficulties were exacerbated by the restrictions placed on church ministers which made them unable to fulfil their normal role of comforting the sick and the dying. The initial legislation classed them as 'key workers' but in practice their ability to engage with those in need has been very limited.⁶⁶ Some leaders were themselves in 'vulnerable' categories and had to shield. However, others responding to the project surveys speak of frustration and deep pain and guilt because they have not been allowed to be alongside the dying and bereaved in the way they felt necessary.

⁶⁵ <https://www.covidbereavement.com/post/supporting-people-bereaved-during-covid-19-study-report-1-27-november-2020>

⁶⁶ 'Clergy need to be seen and to view themselves as key workers - emergency responders - alongside others.' Project interview with David Collingwood, National Director of Funerals at CO-OP Funeralcare. October 8, 2020.

'What we do is pastoral and so actually not to be able to go and see a family has been quite hard.' Church Leader (Interview)

'Pastoral care for the dying - not being able to visit; not being able to offer worship for those in care homes; funeral visits – it's very difficult to console families via the phone.' Church Leader (Interview)

Hospital chaplains, as NHS staff trained in protocols, have been allowed to visit wards. However their numbers have not been adequate to fulfil this role and the parallel need to support doctors, nurses and other team members facing 'moral distress' caused by the sheer numbers of deaths of people in their charge and the sense that good end of life care 'has been compromised' by the pressures.⁶⁷

3.2.2 The impact of restrictions on the use of church buildings for funerals and for personal processing of loss

Formal commemoration

The initial closure of churches for funerals deprived many families of the opportunity for a service which would have corresponded more closely to their needs. Some churches are too small for adequate social distancing; however, many could have safely accommodated larger numbers than were permitted at gravesides or in crematoria. The impact of limited funerals can be profound. A report issued in November 2020 cites a bereaved sister reflecting on the continuing pain of an inadequate farewell:

*'[The] funeral was small and [I] still feel we haven't properly said goodbye. So many of her friends often ask when we will be able to do a memorial service. [It] feels as though her life has gone and [she has] not been fully recognised for the person she was.'*⁶⁸

With greater timetabling flexibility than crematoria, churches could also have allowed time for some personal tributes which could have compensated for the lack of opportunity for wakes or other gatherings.

⁶⁷ See Wallace, C. L., Wladkowski, S. P., Gibson, A., & White, P. (2020). 'Grief During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Considerations for Palliative Care Providers.' *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, 60(1) e70-e76. Also Pearce, C et al. 'A silent epidemic of grief': a survey of bereavement care provision in the UK and Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic. *BMJ Open*; 1 March 2021; DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2020-046872

⁶⁸ Harrop E., Farnell D., Longo M., Goss S., Sutton E., Seddon K., Nelson A., Byrne A., Selman L.E. Supporting people bereaved during COVID-19: Study Report 1, 27 November 2020. Cardiff University and the University of Bristol, p.3. <https://www.covidbereavement.com/post/supporting-people-bereaved-during-covid-19-study-report-1-27-november-2020>

The experience of one survey respondent (a non-church member and new mother) illustrates the impact of inadequate opportunities to mourn, alongside other disrupted life events, in the life of one individual:

*'My gran passed away at the beginning of March. Due to the large number of funerals, **hers could not take place until 7th April, by which time it was limited to 12 people.** With only immediate family (husband, daughters and grandchildren) in attendance, **some family members still could not attend. No wake could be held** afterwards for wider family and friends to celebrate her life or share memories. I gave birth to my first child on 10th April and have been **unable to attend classes with my baby** (as well as huge delay on meeting family and friends). My grandfather was sick. **We were unable to see him**, and make the most of his remaining time, before he sadly passed away too. **My brother's wedding also had to be postponed.**' Non-Member (Survey 1)*

The resumption of funerals within churches in June 2020 was a welcome step, though the number of attendees permitted is still determined by universal guidelines, rather than by the capacity of the building concerned. Early in the pandemic it was supposed that 'deferred memorial services' for those who had not had 'proper' funerals would happen within a short period of time but this has not yet proved possible and indeed may no longer be the most appropriate way forward as time passes. Meanwhile, the lack of what is considered to be an appropriate celebration of a person's life can prevent the bereaved from achieving a sense of closure and being able to move forward in their lives.

Informal opportunities to address loss

'I need the church as a physical space to focus on processing grief/feelings from COVID.' Non-Member (Survey 1)

'[One] reason why it was so important to be open and why it was so very painful not to be is that we also act as the hospital chapel for three local hospitals ... people are not able to visit their loved ones in those hospitals ... [and] they couldn't come to the one place where they had always come in the past if they were long-term or returning patients, which was the parish church.' Church Leader (Interview)

As noted in Section 2, many who do not normally attend worship still value church buildings as space in which they can address personal grief and anxiety. The intermittent closure of buildings and limited access at other times has been strongly felt as a factor which has prevented individuals from inside and outside congregations from finding comfort and emotional healing.

'[Need] peace to think and remember.' Non-Member (Survey 1)

"I have lost my husband during COVID. It is heart breaking to be shut out of the place where I would be able to find comfort and some peace for myself."

Non-Member (Survey 2)

The importance of facilitated remembering is underlined by Cruse:

'Having opportunities to remember the person who has died, and all they mean to us, is vital to grieving. It's a fallacy that once someone has died, they are gone. Whatever someone believes on a spiritual level, we still don't stop relating to someone when they have died. We relate to the memories we have, and how we were influenced by the person who is no longer with us in body.'⁶⁹

In personal and national crises, cathedrals and other churches have always previously been able to offer individuals and chance to commemorate those who have died; to feel themselves drawn into a community which acknowledges and shares their pain; to experience beauty; and find comfort and hope. Enforced closures and restrictions have removed these therapeutic possibilities for many people. Even when cathedrals and other churches have been allowed to open, lack of clarity about health and safety guidance has led to withdrawal of opportunities to light candles and leave prayers, actions which research has shown are of great comfort to the bereaved and anxious.⁷⁰

3.2.3 The impact of loss of activities which support individual recovery and wellbeing

Bereavement is associated with an increased risk to mental and physical health, and studies have shown that the recently bereaved are themselves at greater risk of dying, particularly in the weeks and months immediately following their loss. Contributing factors include isolation, heart disease, suicide and lack of selfcare.⁷¹ Guidance on supporting young people through bereavement includes recommendations to 'Try to keep normal routines going as much as possible to provide a sense of security' and 'Encourage them to keep doing activities they enjoy.'⁷² In this context, the interruption both of face-to-face bereavement support services and the suspension of so many community activities for all ages as a result of COVID-19 restrictions is of critical importance. A return to normal patterns of life and contact with others is critical to prevent the sense of isolation and lack of purpose and motivation which can exacerbate the experience of bereavement. The suspension of so many of the normal opportunities to interact with others, including Baby and Toddler groups, through children's and youth groups hosted by churches,

⁶⁹ Andy Langford, Clinical Director, Cruse, written submission.

⁷⁰ See Dyas and Jenkins (eds), *Pilgrimage and England's Cathedrals, Past Present and Future*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

⁷¹ Colin Murray Parkes and Holly G. Prigerson, *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life*. Penguin, 2010, pp. 16-27.

⁷² <https://youngminds.org.uk/>

adult social events, exercise and craft classes, and volunteering, has removed these vital support structures at a time of widespread need.

'The restrictions have meant I have missed emotional support. I've felt entirely on my own throughout with no one to help me get through.'

Non-Member (Interview)

3.3 CREATIVE INITIATIVES

Despite COVID-related restrictions, churches have devised a number of creative ways to support the grieving. Different denominations found different ways to address the problem of restricted access to crematoria. In a project interview, the General Secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales commented:

*'One of the things that we were really opposed to was something called direct cremations which some local councils were doing - which was basically where you could have no service; where the body was taken and simply cremated. The way that we got around that was to encourage priests to stop the hearse, just a little way away from the crematorium or the graveyard to carry out a socially distanced service there with the close members of the family, say their goodbyes there, bless the coffin there and then move onto the crematorium etc ... Where this did happen people were very appreciative.'*⁷³

At a point in the pandemic when coffins for any deaths relating to Covid-19 were simply brought into the crematorium in Leeds with neither service nor mourners permitted, a local Baptist minister volunteered to provide a short service (including prayers, a reading, and a committal) from the crematorium, free of charge. The services were filmed and sent to each family. She commented: 'It was so painful that somebody could be taken into the crematorium with no words, no prayer, no nothing. And their family had seen their loved ones go into hospital – and never seen them again. They couldn't say goodbye. By me doing that, they had some sense of a service for that person.'⁷⁴

Many church leaders have learned to deploy online methods of recording and livestreaming of services and facilitating other contacts:

'To livestream services (including funerals) so even if fewer people can attend these events in person, folk would still be able to connect from home (124 viewed the streamed version of the first funeral service we did, which only 30 could attend in person).' Church Leader (Survey 1)

'This Sunday, it's Remembrance Sunday and we are having a service that we're recording in church and also partly pre-recording. I'm leading it in church and filming it from church. And in the evening, we're going to have a time called Remembering with Thanksgiving, which is a really special time for people who have been bereaved and have lost loved ones. We're going to have the hymns, and the organist playing during

⁷³ Project Interview with Rev. Canon Christopher Thomas KHS, General Secretary (CC), Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 28th September 2020.

⁷⁴ https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/587235/It_was_so.aspx

the evening. And our churchwarden is going to light a candle for each loved one when their names are read out in the church, and people can just come in and they can just be there in private prayer. It won't be a service, but they will still be able to remember their loved ones, and they can come whenever they like to during those two hours.'

Church Leader (Interview)

'We're going to hold a Blue Christmas service for the first time .. for people who struggle with Christmas [...] this year seems really appropriate to start it because there's probably more people who are going to struggle this year. We're doing that online, but with the option that if we're able to we'll do an in person one as well for that.'

Church Leader (Interview)

'We have received iPads for people to see immediate family at end of life, rather than visiting & funeral attendance has been facilitated that way for less immediate family too.' Church Leader (Survey 1)

Other digital tools which provide opportunities for commemoration of individuals and the recognition of grief have included online candle-lighting and naming of those who have been lost offered by many churches and cathedrals.

In-person provision has also been adapted, with services repeated in order to offer safe access to familiar rituals.

'All Souls is a big thing in this parish and people who never come to church come to a huge event, where they love remembering their departed loved ones. [This year] instead of a big requiem mass in the evening, we'll have two or three masses on that day and people can come and hear their loved ones' names read [...] so far there are about 600 or 700.' Church Leader (Interview)

Elsewhere churches developed the practice of offering memory trees and other small-scale opportunities for very personal commemoration and the creation of positive memories. At Christmas, a church on a Yorkshire housing estate offered to write the names of those who had died on Christmas tree baubles and place the baubles on a 'tree of memories' in the church for the public 'to come and see, take photos, and hear their loved one's name called out and their family prayed for.' This idea was replicated and adapted across the country. A church in Derbyshire partnered with local funeral directors (who supplied a large tree to stand outside the church) and with the local council who supplied the lights. All local people were invited to place cards and ribbons on the tree. Many churches used their large indoor spaces to create a safe, welcoming environment which offered peace, beauty, comfort, and the chance to act out expressions of grief and commemoration such as lighting candles, writing names on stars and hanging them on Christmas trees, or putting pebbles in water. Churches also offered online courses such as *The Bereavement Journey*.⁷⁵

'Cruse believes that churches and other faith communities can have a profoundly positive impact upon the wellbeing of those bereaved. Being

⁷⁵ <https://thebereavementjourney.org/>

creative in how gatherings take place, and also how people are able to memorialise (whether that be virtually, or in small face to face groups), all contributes to how bereaved people can be helped to feel less alone ... Such opportunities really help people feel not so alone at this time.¹⁷⁶

3.4 CHURCHES AND RECOVERY



FIGURE 20 - THE DEAN OF ROCHESTER LIGHTS A CANDLE IN MEMORY OF ALL THOSE WHO HAD DIED OF COVID-19 IN THE LOCAL AREA. (ASSOCIATION OF ENGLISH CATHEDRALS)

Asked in Survey 1 what church priorities should be in the event of further waves of the virus, Non-Member respondents cited:

'Space to help those grieving, being able to host funerals (with distancing).'

'Staying open for private prayer/reflection and the running of funerals.'

'Keep their burial grounds open if possible - enables people to maintain a connection with their loved ones, with a sacred space.'

'Supporting the sick and bereaved.'

⁷⁶ Andy Langford, Clinical Director of Cruse.

3.4.1 The need for human contact and in-person support

Despite the many creative, costly, and effective responses to COVID-19 provided by cathedrals and parish churches across the country, survey and interview responses make it clear that grief and anxiety (especially for those outside the church) require more than 'virtual' provision if the full gamut of human need is to be addressed. Online provision will continue to be of value, but in-person contact is indispensable for those who have suffered loss.

When questioned in Survey 2 about initiatives to support long-term recovery of communities, Church Leaders identified the need to mark the loss of life during the pandemic in a collective way, whether in the form of an event or a permanent memorial:

'I've already had a request for some kind of memorial stone/plaque to remember those who have died during the pandemic. We are already offering free memorial services for those who were unable to say goodbye to loved ones in the way they wanted.'

'Acts of remembering will be vital.'

'[We need] remembrance services for COVID victims; services for those who couldn't have people at their funeral.' Non-Member

"The inability to hold funerals with people able to express their grief and support each other has had a huge effect. There needs to be some way of offering a memorial service to help those who are bereaved and allow those who are grieving to come together for mutual support."

Church Leader (Survey 2)

Alongside these concerns runs a desire to develop dedicated support groups for those struggling with grief and bereavement:

'Pre-Covid we ran occasional bereavement courses. More will be necessary once we can meet again.' Member (Survey 2)

'My personal vision for post COVID is to set up drop-ins for folk who are lonely, bereaved, unemployed or experiencing mental illness.'

Member (Survey 2)

'We have a recovery programme in progress to make more space for post pandemic activities e.g. a bereavement café.'

Church Leader (Survey 2)

3.4.2 The role of church buildings in providing comfort

'Churches are not just for the faithful. They are also a place of beauty, a place of quiet and a place where you can feel safe. A place where you feel something that is much, much, bigger than all the horror that surrounds you, is valuable whether you're a person of faith or not. It's really important.'

Church Leader (Interview)

A frequent theme running through survey and interview responses is the importance of church buildings during a period of crisis and recovery. Church Leader responses note the need for 'open access to grieve for people lost' and 'the ability to provide an "open church" so that people can find that quiet place.'

'A place of safety and the feeling of being welcome despite the fear.'
Non-Member (Survey 1)

'A place to feel safe and close to someone when they may not have anyone.' Non-Member (Survey 1)

*"Until very recently, the closure of the church building meant that **we were unable to welcome those people, who need a quiet place for prayer and reflection.** These are often people, of all ages, who are grieving over the death of someone who has left a huge gap in their lives. It is understood that for good reasons we cannot currently receive the normal footfall of church visitors, but **some sensitivity should have been extended to those people, who find solace and refuge from daily cares only in church.**"*

Member (Survey 2)

3.5 SUPPORT NEEDED

3.5.1 Recognition of the importance of funerals, not only to members of faith groups but to the wider population.

Faith groups need both acknowledgement of the critical role played by appropriate mourning rituals, and the support of national and local government and Public Health experts, as they seek to meet this need and to balance the challenge of avoiding virus transmission with the risks to wellbeing of withholding access to these forms of comfort and support.

'Funerals are a closure on physical loss.'
Non-Member (Survey 1)

'Funerals are a celebration of life that give friends and family an opportunity to share memories and say goodbye.'

Non-Member (Survey 1)

*'Watching the service online **isn't the same** as being able to comfort grieving relatives.'*

Non-Member (Survey 1)

Priority needs to be given to clearer guidance which can easily be applied to a range of contexts and to forward planning which will ensure that any further waves of infection do not impair the capacity of these key rituals to support the bereaved and their future wellbeing.

3.5.2 Provision of clearer, more positive guidance

Meeting the needs voiced by members and Non-Members for churches to be re-opened and enabled to stay open, even in the light of future waves of infection, highlights the urgent need for definitive clarification of key practical questions faced daily by those managing buildings on the ground. These include:

- Is the stewarding of an open church essential for COVID-19 safety measures? Or is providing appropriate signs, instructions, and sanitiser at all key points sufficient?
- Does the whole building have to be sanitised after use or only those areas which have been marked as utilised (by cards or other indicators)?
- Can individuals write and leave prayers in a designated place?
- Can those attending a funeral take the service sheet home?
- Is it permissible to light candles as part of personal reflection and commemoration?
- Can people take anything away from a church, such as a prayer card or message of comfort?

3.5.3 Training in counselling and bereavement support for church staff and volunteers

Both staff and volunteers will be facing unprecedented levels and complex forms of bereavement. In addition, many of them will have been touched by the effects of the pandemic and quite probably will have experienced bereavement recently themselves, making the need for training and support even more critical.

'[We will need] guidance on how to engage with the national need for a place to mourn and express the grief and loss that has occurred during the pandemic once we begin to come out the other side.'

Church Leader (Survey 2)

3.6 LESSONS LEARNED

1. Closing churches for funerals during the first lockdown and the subsequent application of 'blanket' restrictions on numbers allowed to attend has restricted access to funerals for millions of people with serious consequences for the ability to process grief. It put great pressure on crematoria and in some areas led to unhelpful misunderstandings between ministers and funeral directors.

'Funerals were not offered to the Church of England in our area because the funeral directors thought the churches were closed & clergy unavailable.' Church Leader (Survey 1)

2. Closing churches or restricting access for individual prayer and reflection meant many people were prevented from seeking comfort and finding ways to address their grief

'The people who wanted to mourn, the people who wanted just a bit of space to take on board a diagnosis ... they had nowhere to go ... Normally they would come into the church and be seen ... they'd go into their consultant or and then they would just pop into the parish church to light a candle or to say a prayer or, or just to sit and weep really. All of that stopped.' Church Leader (Interview)

3. The status and function of church ministers as 'key workers' in the community needs to be more clearly defined and supported. Greater investment is needed in hospital chaplaincy both to support patients and the wellbeing of NHS staff as they continue to deal with the stress and 'moral distress' caused by the pandemic.

'Clergy are key workers and should be allowed to be.'

Member (Survey 1)

'Clergy should have been allowed to visit those in need in the community with appropriate precautions.' Church Leader (Interview)

'We are completely exhausted. It has been incredibly tough. This has been the hardest thing I have ever had to do – the sheer amount of pain, so many sad stories, the relentless nature of it - but I wouldn't want not to be doing it.' Hospital Chaplain (Interview)

4. Online or phone contact is helpful to the bereaved but no substitute for in-person communication

'We are finding that whilst virtual provision for weddings, christenings and funerals is better than nothing at all, it is no substitute for people, when they so value face to face interaction.'

Andy Langford, Clinical Director, Cruse

5. Over-complex, rigid, confusing, inconsistent, or outdated guidance inhibits action and provision for those in need

'Half of our churches were unable to meet social distancing and flow requirements and so have been closed to their communities for almost a year. Most funerals have been held in the churchyards.'

Church Leader (Survey 2)

DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

'Faith groups have vital resources which are crucial for community wellbeing, and which cannot be found anywhere else. We need our institutions to be able to work respectfully with people whose starting point is religious faith and to tap into the moral perspectives, and the experience of running practical initiatives, which faith communities offer. All of us in Parliament need to take heed, and to work out the implications for public policy.'⁷⁷

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP
Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group
on Faith and Society

OVERVIEW

COVID-related closures of church buildings and the suspension of many activities have had substantial negative effects on individuals and communities. In the coming months, every effort should be made to complete the re-opening of buildings, and to ensure that they can remain open. This is essential if churches are to develop further their proven contribution to mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing; social care; community cohesion; and heritage tourism, and thus support long-term recovery.

Greater recognition is needed from government, local authorities, and policy and decision-makers, of the roles played by church buildings and associated green spaces in enhancing the wellbeing of the wider community, both during a pandemic and under normal circumstances. Funding and other support measures need to address and balance the multiple roles of church buildings as places of worship, spirituality and comfort; spaces of shared heritage; as community hubs; and as key partners with local authorities and other agencies in supporting the most vulnerable in communities.

Acknowledgement also needs to be made of the importance of rituals which frame major life events to emotional security and societal cohesion. The delays and restrictions which have affected both funerals and weddings have caused additional disruption and distress at a time when many have already been suffering severe stress. Varying restrictions on numbers for worship, weddings and funerals have been perceived as arbitrary and not giving due regard to local context and capacity. More consistent guidance and greater flexibility are needed in these areas.

Summer 2021 must be used for consultation with grassroots practitioners, clarification and simplification of policy and guidance, and establishing more effective channels of information dissemination, so churches can fully support recovery and community wellbeing, even in the event of further waves of virus transmission.

⁷⁷ https://www.faihandociety.org/wp-content/uploads/APPG_CovidReport_Full_V4.pdf 12 November, 2020.

1. FINANCE

- It is critical that churches have the financial means to make and keep them fit for purpose in a context of increasing need throughout society. During the pandemic, churches and other faith communities have made great efforts to support the poorest and most vulnerable.
- Dedicated advice, support, and targeted funding streams are needed to ensure that churches survive the effects of the pandemic so they and their buildings can continue to help communities recover, develop greater future resilience, and experience greater levelling-up.
- Financial support for churches needs to be tailored to their needs, to enable them to continue what they are already doing more effectively, and where necessary expand this.

Funding with a focus on community activity

Revenue funding is essential to ensure that churches have sufficient cash flow to survive the financial impact of COVID-19 and develop enhanced provision to help communities recover and achieve greater resilience.

- When churches meet the necessary criteria, they should be eligible on equal terms for all sources of public and government funding targeted at charities, social enterprises and the voluntary sector.
- Because churches do not pay rates, they were unable to benefit from some emergency funding schemes. Some churches will need tide-over grants to make up for lost income in last 12 months. This is especially relevant for churches which have had to furlough or make staff redundant and need to re-establish capacity to reinstate social projects.
- The Government needs to bring to fruition the work it has already carried out and legislate to confirm that Local Authorities and Parish Councils may legally donate money to their local church buildings to meet community needs, as recommended in the Taylor Review.⁷⁸

Funding to ensure buildings are physically safe and fit for purpose

Safe, well-maintained and well-equipped, church buildings are key to the delivery of much local social care provision and other activities supporting wellbeing in the community.

- Support is needed with the costs of maintaining special COVID-related safety measures, including safe ways to facilitate giving to churches using contactless payment methods

⁷⁸ 'The Taylor Review: Sustainability of English Churches and Cathedrals' December 2017. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/669667/Taylor_Review_Final.pdf Detailed Recommendations, 3, p31.

- A new repairs and maintenance grant programme targeted at historic places of worship is essential.⁷⁹ Eligibility should take into account the ways in which a church is already engaging with its community, even if community activities are not heritage-based.
- There is a great need for simple, straightforward access to funding both for installation or improvement of essential facilities (such as kitchens and toilets) to enhance safety and encourage community use; and to improve the environmental efficiency and sustainability of church buildings.
- New capital funding is required to roll out/scale up the national programme of Community Development Advisers and Fabric Support Officers trialled as part of the Taylor Pilot Review Report.⁸⁰
- The Government should explore ways in which it can support the development of historic places of worship, either through retaining and extending the Listed Places of the Worship Grant Scheme on a long-term basis, or reducing VAT on repairs, new works and maintenance. This would give places of worship vital stability when planning capital building projects.

2. IMPROVED GUIDANCE

Churches and other places of worship need authoritative up-to-date guidance which local communities can confidently interpret and implement for their own situations. Government guidance therefore needs to be informed by wider consultation with practitioners and transmitted to and through denominations in a timely, simple, and easily applied form. The focus needs to be on what *can* be done and providing clarity on key issues.

Many respondents noted the considerable confusion caused by a perceived gap between the multiple strands of guidance issued by government (and further interpreted by denominations) and the practical issues they were facing on the ground.

Government guidance needs to be informed by wider consultation with practitioners and to incorporate greater flexibility according to local context. Practitioners need a single authoritative source of guidance. When core guidance is updated, this must be communicated clearly and quickly, and with adequate notice.

- 'Go local': there needs to be more scope to interpret guidance in the local context, according to the size of buildings, local capacity and resources, and local Public Health advice. This will encourage and incentivise churches to re-open with confidence when this is appropriate.
- There should be fewer levels of interpretation of guidance.
- When guidance is updated, previous guidelines must be removed from websites etc

⁷⁹ 'Taylor Review,' Recommendations 5 and 8, pp. 33; 35.

⁸⁰ Recommendations 1 and 4. pp29 and 32

- There is a particular need to provide clearer, simpler, up to date, evidence-based guidance in the following areas:
 - re-opening for worship, individual reflection, processing grief, finding comfort; (clarification on key issues such as leaving prayers, lighting candles, giving out prayer cards and other resources). Up to date guidance is needed on the use of buildings for individual reflection and key therapeutic activities such as leaving prayers and lighting candles.
 - re-opening for provision of church-hosted social care and community groups using church buildings (templates for risk assessments based on activity and clarity around insurance; clarification on GDPR issues with reference to contacting vulnerable people). More visual guidance would be valued.⁸¹
 - re-opening for cultural and social events, visitors (templates for risk assessments, practical management based on level of visitors, safe use of resources such as leaflets and touchscreen displays, and clarity around insurance).

3.TRAINING

The pandemic has revealed once more the strengths and assets churches bring to partnership working with Government, local authorities and agencies. Churches need access to better training and support for enhanced partnership working. There is a need to build shared understanding of changing local needs, and the potential of partnership working between church leaders and local agencies, including statutory and voluntary groups.

- Training and support in development of innovative and creative approaches to partnership working and engagement with communities (both digital and in-person), which were developed during the pandemic and can usefully be incorporated into long term practice and provision.
- Improved training for leaders in Volunteer Management.
- Support for training programmes and streamlined oversight for returning and new volunteers. This could include a cross community skills certificate in Volunteering and implementation of the proposal, made in the Kruger Levelling Up Report, for a 'Volunteer Passport' to be 'used across different organisations, in the public and social sectors, with a single identity and criminal records check.'⁸²

⁸¹ See, for example, <https://www.covid19saferspaces.org/> 'Safer Churches.'

⁸² *Levelling up our communities: proposals for a new social covenant A report for government by Danny Kruger MP September 2020* recommends, This would enable organisations in search of volunteers, whether for general or specific tasks, to find willing candidates with the right skills and capacity and in the right place; and it would greatly reduce the bureaucracy and delay involved in placing volunteers into roles ... it would enable people to grow their skills and to build up a record of their volunteering for their CV.'

- Support and training to help churches embrace more creative approaches to engagement with visitor communities (both digital and in-person), building on the support of existing networks in the visitor sector.

4. ENHANCED SUPPORT FOR THOSE SUFFERING GRIEF AND LOSS

Expanded support for the sick, dying, and bereaved should include allowing church ministers to operate as key workers in the community, and greater investment in hospital chaplaincy to support patients and NHS staff.

Both churches and crematoria have important roles to play in offering ceremonies to bereaved families. Large churches can often offer more flexible approaches to funerals than a crematorium, including accommodating more mourners and offering longer services with more time for commemoration.

More flexible and collaborative approaches to permitting, and providing funerals

- Even in severe lockdown, some larger churches could remain open for funerals as a shared resource, with local ministers/volunteers sharing tasks. This would relieve pressure on crematoria, allow for greater numbers, and avoid extra pain caused by delayed funerals. This strategy must be supported by national and local government policy and guidance.

Keeping churches open for private grieving and offering simple personal rituals of remembrance must be a priority

- Opportunities to express grief in buildings which offer safe peaceful spaces of comfort and perspective, acknowledge the person lost, and provide wider community support are vital to many whether church members or not. Provision of this kind facilitates the creation of positive memories and connections which enable individuals to move forward positively.

Pastoral support for the sick, the dying, and the bereaved needs to be expanded

- Church ministers should be seen as key workers in the community and equipped with PPE.
- Greater investment is needed in hospital chaplaincy, to support both patients and NHS staff dealing with stress and 'moral distress' caused by the pandemic.
- Current guidance for funerals limits attendance 30 people, irrespective of the size of church buildings. Greater flexibility is needed with risk assessments based on local context and capacity.

5. FURTHER RESEARCH AND INFORMATION NEEDED

This project has charted the response of many churches and organisations to the pandemic. It has also identified the need for further work in the following areas to clarify and support the contribution which church buildings and activities can make to a sustained recovery:

- Further work is needed to establish *why* some churches have responded effectively to COVID-19 and others have not been able to do so. What are the key factors: finance? people? problems interpreting guidance? unsuitable buildings? limited partnership working skills? lack of training?
- There is an urgent need for a greater systematic and scientific analysis of the safety of church buildings and churchyards during a pandemic to inform future decisions about appropriate restrictions, social distancing, stewarding, worship, and community and social care activities.
- How can channels of communication and support between government decision-makers and national, regional, and local levels of churches be made more effective and supportive of action?
- The recommendations of the 2017 Taylor Review on models of sustainability for churches need to be revisited in the light of the impact of the pandemic. The 2017 Taylor Review offered a series of important recommendations linking the potential sustainability of parish churches and provision of community activities. Many of the activities commended are very strategic, though the Taylor Pilot Review acknowledged that some (such as cafés), though productive in terms of outreach, not infrequently cost churches more than they earn in financial terms and do not necessarily cover core building and maintenance costs.⁸³

Unfortunately the Taylor recommendations, like so much else in national life, have been overtaken by the unforeseeable impact of the pandemic. COVID-19 has radically changed the landscape in which churches operate and is forcing some reappraisal of the Taylor strategy. Not only has the pandemic caused the suspension of many such community enterprises, exposing the churches concerned to a critical loss of income, it has also revealed the complexity of human need, which goes far beyond the provision of services such as Post Offices, cafés, community shops, playgroups, and tourist attractions, valuable as they are. The cost of withdrawing the much wider, multi-faceted range of everyday opportunities for human interaction, learning, mutual support, and enhancement of mental and physical wellbeing, which churches provide, has been shown to be highly-detrimental, not only to those usually regarded as vulnerable, but to many who have not hitherto experienced significant need. As one Non-church Member respondent stated:

'A solution must be found for all places of worship ... These places must remain open. They are essential to the community, regardless of numbers in the pews on a Sunday. They need to be there especially for times such as this. Open them. Keep them open!'

⁸³ 'In some cases providing those activities, especially to vulnerable groups, required the listed places of worship to commit volunteer time and money rather than increasing funds. It is not the case that more people using the building, or joining more activities, will necessarily produce more income.' (Taylor Review Pilot Evaluation Report (October 2020) Paragraph 4.3.4 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-taylor-review-pilot-final-evaluation>)

APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH TEAM AND METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Investigators

Dr Dee Dyas is Reader in the History of Christianity and Co-Director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity at the University of York. She has led several major funded research projects on cathedrals and oversees the Centre's heritage interpretation partnerships with cathedrals and parish churches. Her recent publications include *The Dynamics of Pilgrimage: Christianity, Holy Places and Sensory Experience*. Routledge, 2020; and *Pilgrimage and England's Cathedrals, Past, Present and Future*. (co-edited with John Jenkins), Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Dr Kate Giles is Co-Director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity at the University of York and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Archaeology. She is an expert in the history and archaeology of medieval and early modern community buildings on which she has published widely. She was former York Minster Archaeology Fellow, is a trustee of Yorkshire Historic Churches Trust and joined the CSCC team in October 2020.

Project Research Associates

Dr Rob Barward-Symmons recently completed his PhD in the Sociology of Religion from the University of Kent based on an ethnographic study of an evangelical youth group in London looking at processes of religious formation within these spaces. Previously Rob earned degrees in Theology and Religion & Society from Durham University and worked as a research assistant for Cranmer Hall, Durham and the Bible Society. While undertaking his PhD, Rob was a tutor and lecturer at Ridley Hall College, Cambridge.

Dr Joshua Heyes is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Learning about Science and Religion at Canterbury Christ Church University, where he works on interdisciplinary education initiatives. He has degrees in philosophy, theology and social research. His PhD in Education from the University of Birmingham examined the relationship between sexuality, education, and religion.

Dr John Jenkins is a historian who has published work on aspects of English church life from the medieval period to the modern day. For the COVID and churches project he was responsible for researching and writing the historical overview (Appendix 4).

Historic Places of Worship Consultant

Becky Payne spent 18 years with Historic England before serving for 7 years as Policy Officer in the Cathedral and Church Buildings Division (CofE), promoting and enabling the potential of church buildings as a resource for the whole community. She now works as a freelance consultant undertaking projects on sustaining historic places of worship (including developing online resources for congregations; evaluating various sector initiatives - most recently the NLHF's Grants for Places of

Worship and the National Churches MaintenanceBooker initiative - and acting as consultant to the Open University's research project on community-led planning for places of worship. She is a member of the London Diocesan Advisory Committee and Development Director at the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance (Heritage Alliance).

Project Advisory Board

Representatives of the following organisations have supplied advice and information as members of the Project Advisory Board.

[Historic England](#) is the public body responsible for protecting and championing the historic environment, understanding and managing change within historic places and providing expertise to government and local communities.

[The Association of English Cathedrals](#) is a registered charity interested in promoting the role of cathedrals in national and church life, supporting and sharing good practice, conducting research, liaising with government departments and agencies, national ecumenical bodies, issuing guidance and providing training.

The [Historic Religious Buildings Alliance](#) is an independently-funded group within The Heritage Alliance which brings together those working for a secure future for historic religious buildings. It is a non-religious organisation which provides regular briefings for members. It is independent of government but where appropriate provide a channel of communication with government on matters affecting historic religious buildings in Great Britain.

The [National Churches Trust](#) is a charity dedicated to supporting places of worship of historic, architectural and community value used by Christian denominations throughout the UK. It promotes the benefits of church buildings to the public and encourages their discovery through the online portal [ExploreChurches](#). It encourages good management and regular maintenance of buildings, connecting communities with high quality builders and craftsmen through its Maintenance Booker tool. It provides grants for urgent repairs and community facilities.

The Research Team also acknowledges, with thanks, the information and support received from many other sources. These include national and regional church leaders in the Church of England, the Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church of England, the United Reformed Church, the Baptist Union of Great Britain, specialists in bereavement (CRUSE; National Co-op Funeralcare), and experts in Public Health.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In order to address the main research questions at the heart of this project, we decided to approach the topic from a range of methodological angles. Alongside the analysis of existing research, this consisted of three primary phases of original data collection incorporating both quantitative and qualitative techniques through online surveys and interviews. These were highly dynamic, responding not only to our own findings but also those emerging from other research, as well as the constantly

changing national situation, including multiple changes to both governmental and national Church guidance. These three phases were:

1. One survey ('Survey 1') for a general audience and two for targeted audiences (September-December 2020).
2. Follow-up semi-structured interviews with survey respondents, national church leaders, and other experts in related fields (October-December 2020).
3. A second survey ('Survey 2') for a general audience (February-March 2021).

The analysis of both survey and interview data was an ongoing process, with the findings constantly feeding into the next stages of research and recommendations.

While acknowledging that the restrictions and guidance impacted everyone who in any way interacts with churches, we wished to explore how particular groups were affected in distinctive ways. As a result, through all of our data gathering we invited participants to identify themselves into one of three categories, here and throughout the report referred to as **Church Leaders, Members, and Non-Members**. We also asked for demographic information for our respondents' age and context ('Rural', 'Urban', 'Town', or 'Suburban') in order to understand our responses better. While we heard from a wide range of individuals, respondents were predominantly Members, aged over 60, and from either Rural or Town environments.

Through these different research phases, we were able to hear from thousands of individuals at a grassroots level across the English church environment. The scale of responses – with over 5,500 responses across the surveys along with fifty interviews – has allowed us to analyse a considerable depth of qualitative data from a wide range of respondents. It has enabled us to focus on key issues that we identified as central to both understanding experiences thus far, and developing effective responses going forward. In particular, the strength of this research lies in the high level of responses from those who are both the primary deliverers *and* the recipients of the work of churches around the nation, and thus those most affected by the restrictions imposed. These include insights from hundreds of respondents who do not consider themselves to be church members yet nevertheless deeply value the role of churches in their local communities. Thus, while the surveys cannot be considered nationally representative, they give great insight into the lives of those for whom the restrictions were most keenly felt. As a result of launching surveys five months apart we have also been able to explore how attitudes shifted across this time and in relation to changing governmental and ecclesiastical responses. This has also enabled us to ensure that the report remained as current as possible in what continues to be an exceptionally fast-changing period of ecclesiastical history.

Surveys

In total, and in consultation with our funding partners, we developed four separate (yet closely connected) surveys to address different areas of our research questions and to respond to emerging needs. All four were designed and hosted on SurveyMonkey, while the final survey was also hosted on a specially designed website that also contains information on the project's findings. Each of these surveys took between five and ten minutes to complete – remaining focused on the key issues while avoiding consuming too much of our participants' time. They incorporated a range of both qualitative and quantitative question styles (as well as

demographic questions), and in order to encourage maximum engagement there was only one compulsory question.⁸⁴ This question asked participants to sort themselves into one of three categories:⁸⁵

- 'Church Clergy and Staff' [Phase One surveys]/'Priest/Minister/Lay Minister or Staff Member' [Phase Three survey]
- 'Church Member and/or Volunteer'
- 'General Public'

This question was mandatory as the survey was then divided into three separate sets of questions for each group, ensuring that people were only answering questions deemed relevant to their status, while retaining sufficient overlap to enable comparisons between groups. There are two issues to note here. Firstly, we decided to broaden the scope of the first category of respondent for the Phase Three survey. This enabled us to better incorporate church leaders from a range of ecclesiastical backgrounds. Secondly, throughout this report we have referred to these categories as: '**Leaders,**' '**Members,**' and '**Non-Members,**' enabling the particular experiences and perceptions of these three groups to emerge, alongside their common needs as members of the wider community.

The first three surveys were launched at the beginning of September 2020, and were developed for different audiences, including project partners for whom interim reports were then prepared. By this stage, approaching six months into the pandemic in England, churches and individuals had developed into new forms of Christian worship and practice, yet these were understandably in flux. The primary survey in this phase, which will be referred to throughout this report as 'Survey 1', was developed for a wide audience across England and was disseminated through a wide range of networks. This survey received 2,934 responses, including 1,564 Members.⁸⁶ Alongside this general survey we launched a concurrent survey targeted towards churches used for major community and social welfare activities which received 25 responses. These surveys remained open throughout the Autumn, allowing us to reflect on the impact of initial church closures, re-opening and the impact of more local guidance and introduction of Tiered system by the government prior to November 2020.

The final survey, here referred to as 'Survey 2', was developed for a general audience and ran from the beginning of February 2021 to March 7th. As a result, through this survey we were able to hear from those in the midst of the third lockdown, assessing the long-term impact of restrictions as well as the move towards more locally applied guidance on church leaders, members and non-members. The

⁸⁴ All participants also had to give their consent to the survey in order to proceed beyond the introductory page. This project was approved through the University of York ethical approval process, and survey respondents were offered full information on the project upon entering the survey, including access to the privacy policy statement, and were required to confirm that they were over 18 and consented to the use of information given. Participants for interview were also given information sheets and asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview confirming they understood and agreed to the process. A full list of Survey Questions is provided in Appendix 5.

⁸⁵ This question was not asked in the Community and Social Welfare Survey

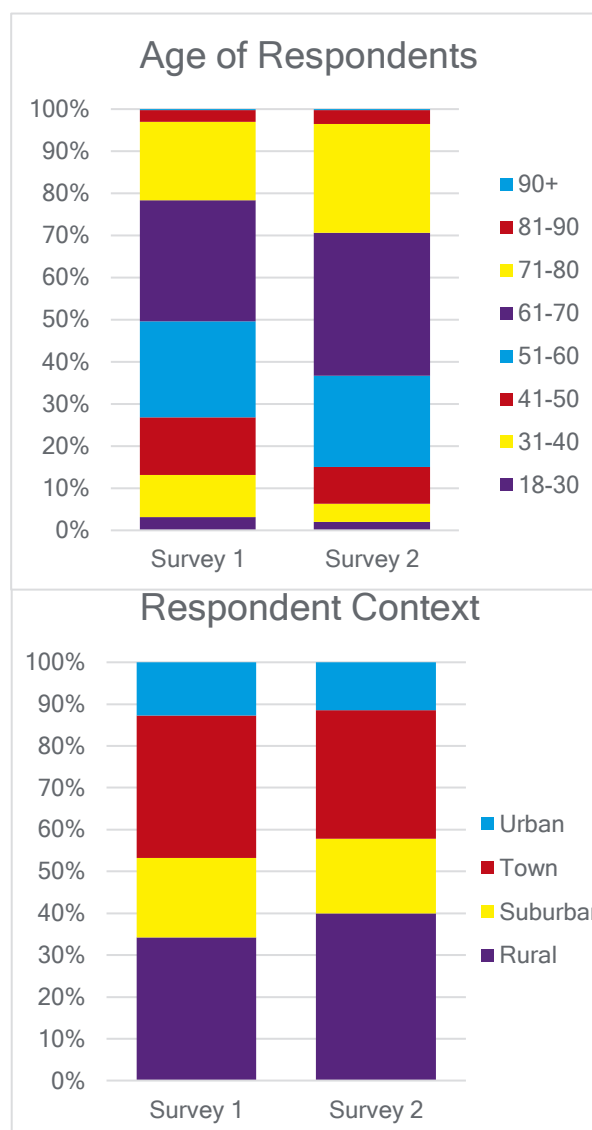
⁸⁶ As mentioned above, no question beyond this initial one was mandatory, and as a result the questions that follow do not have a 100% response rate. This is also true of the other surveys.

details of changing guidance are discussed in detail in Appendix 3. Here, however, it is worth noting that although churches were allowed to remain open (albeit with restrictions), many church leaders and communities made the decision to close for corporate worship because of their local context. These questions, again a blend of qualitative and quantitative research methods, were developed in response to our earlier findings as well as the constantly shifting national landscape. This survey received 2,621 responses of whom 1,861 identified as Members. Across our four surveys launched between late 2020-21, we therefore garnered over 5,500 responses, from Church Leaders, Members, and Non-Members from across the country.

Alongside asking which category the respondents would consider themselves, we also asked two demographic questions to all respondents (Age and Context – Rural, Urban, Suburban, or Town). In addition, in Survey 2 we asked one question about the denominational identity of the church with which the respondent had the closest relationship, and one question for Non-Members inviting them to describe their religion or faith. As a result, we know that half of respondents for Survey 1 were aged over 60 while a third lived in Rural areas.⁸⁷

Survey 2 received a slightly older demographic, with 63% over the age of 60, while the proportion of Rural respondents also increased to 40%.

Following the surveys, the findings were analysed on both a qualitative and quantitative level. For the qualitative data, we identified both general themes (including those that had previously been identified as key project focuses as well as those that emerged perhaps unexpectedly in the responses themselves) and specific interesting quotes, many of which are presented through the course of this report. The quantitative data was analysed across a range of demographic and other criteria in order to observe distinctive trends emerging. While the first survey used unique quantitative questions catered for each participant group, the second utilised the same questions across all respondents, allowing for direct contrasts across the different categories.



⁸⁷ A further third came from Towns, while 20% were Suburban and 13% from Urban areas.

Interviews

Phase Two of our data collection involved a series of semi-structured interviews with survey respondents from across the four surveys⁸⁸ as well as other key figures relevant to the major issues we have explored. These included interviews with 25 Church Leaders, 13 Members, and 6 Non-Members from around the country. This further expanded the depth of rich qualitative data we were able to gather from those most impacted by the restrictions, and in particular get a greater level of detail into specific approaches churches have taken to respond to the situation. While some interviewees were contacted based on particular characteristics of their church, others were contacted to explore further responses to survey questions. Interviews varied in theme and focus, as interviewers sought to use a set of prompts to invite respondents to reflect on the topics about which they felt most strongly, whilst keeping the overall interview time to around 30 minutes. These interviews were transcribed and analysed according to both key and emerging themes. Key quotes and ideas were then gathered together and shared across the team for further analysis alongside the findings from our surveys and external research. These data were supplemented by interviews with national church leaders and other experts in relevant fields, including Public Health and Bereavement.

⁸⁸ The final question on all surveys asked respondents to offer their contact details if they were interested in being interviewed for the project.

APPENDIX 2: RELEVANT SURVEYS AND REPORTS CARRIED OUT BY OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Throughout the project, we consulted relevant surveys and reports being undertaken by other organisations to contextualise our own research. We have highlighted several of their key findings in the main body of the report where they bring increased understanding and nuance to our analysis and recommendations. Here, we provide a full list, together with a short summary and link to where the original reports can be accessed, according to the following structure:

- 2.1 Surveys carried out prior to March 2020 which provide baseline data demonstrating the public benefit created by churches and cathedrals
- 2.2 Surveys and reports undertaken from March 2020 onwards, providing crucial and complementary evidence on the overall impact of Covid-19 on places of worship, specifically,
 - 2.2.1 Surveys carried out by faith groups or organisations focusing on faith and church activities
 - 2.2.2 Surveys carried out by other faith groups
 - 2.2.3 Surveys carried out by organisations from outside the church sector
 - 2.2.4 Surveys carried out by heritage organisations focusing on heritage issues

2.1 Surveys carried out prior to March 2020 which provide baseline data demonstrating the public benefit created by churches and cathedrals

The Economic and Social Impacts of Cathedrals in England

ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd, June 2004. Commissioned by English Heritage and the Association of English Cathedrals.

Calculated that the direct visitor-related impact of cathedrals amounted to an additional total local spend of c.£91 million pa. When the full range of their effect on expenditure including jobs is added this figure rises to an estimated total impact on spend of around £150 million p/a.

The economic and social impacts of England's cathedrals [2014]

A report to the Association of English Cathedrals. Ecorys, September 2014.

This report revised the above figures to £125 million and £220 million respectively

<https://www.englishcathedrals.co.uk/downloads/2018/02/economic-social-impacts-englands-cathedrals-2.pdf/>

A new edition based on data for 2020/21 is forthcoming.

The economic and social impacts of England's cathedrals [2021]

A report to the Association of English Cathedrals. Ecorys, 2021.

Paul Bickley, Good Neighbours: How Churches Help Communities Flourish (London: Church Urban Fund and Theos, 2014), p. 10.

'10 million people in England would say that they or their family has accessed community-based services provided by the church (not including acts of worship) in the last year [2013]'.

<https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/Reportfiles/Executive-Summary-Good-Neighbours-2014.pdf>

Cinnamon Faith Action Audit 2015/16 [2017]

The 2015/2016 audit estimates the following as what the faith sector collectively gave that year:

- 219,889 Social Action projects
- Support for 47,823,751 beneficiaries
- 125,586 paid staff
- 1,910,413 volunteers
- 95,838,462 paid staff hours
- 288,397,160 volunteer hours

Over £3 billion worth of support (paid staff hours, plus volunteer hours calculated using the living wage of £7.85, plus management, not including physical infrastructure)

<https://www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk/cinnamon-faith-action-audit-reports-2015-16/>

Church of England Statistics for Mission 2017

Research and Statistics Department (CofE), November 2019

Almost 13,000 churches responded to a questionnaire about social action and community outreach. 80% were involved with at least one form of social action and several were involved in more than one, with over 1,800 reporting that they ran three or more. In addition to running 13,100 projects themselves, churches hosted 3,600 projects, carried out 4,900 in partnership with other organisations and supported 11,100 projects in other ways. **In total, these churches between them were involved in almost 33,000 social action projects.** The projects were wide ranging: 23% of churches reported that they ran parent/carer and toddler groups, 16% ran lunch clubs and over 60% supported food banks in some way, often in partnership with other organisations.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/full-extent-church-england-work-support-local-communities>

Church of England Statistics for Mission 2019

Research and Statistics Department, October 2020

An additional question asked churches about their involvement in social action and community outreach. **It found that 77% of churches were involved in one or more forms of social action and overall that churches were involved in 35,000 social action projects.** Churches ran more than 15,000 social action projects themselves, with other projects being hosted by churches, carried out in partnership, or supported with volunteers or donations. Churches were particularly involved in running or supporting food banks, hospitality for older people, and parent and toddler groups.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/2019StatisticsForMission.pdf>

House of Good

National Churches Trust, October 2020.

Research looking into the social and economic benefits that churches provide to local communities and to the UK more generally

Using methodologies and analysis consistent with HM Treasury's Green Book valuation methods, this research quantified the market and non-market value of the welfare and wellbeing created by church buildings. This study was commissioned prior to the COVID-19 lockdown and the deadline for completion of the survey was 4th March 2020.

Key findings:

- the overall social and economic value of church buildings is at least £12.4 billion annually
- Average value per year per church - £300,000
- For every £10 invested in church buildings there is a Social Return on Investment of £37.40 using the most conservative methods.
- UK churches:
 - house food banks providing £7bn worth of services
 - provide mental health services worth £900m
 - provide £400m in youth services
 - provide £127m in addiction services every year
- Market value and replacement cost per year - £2.4 billion
- The direct economic value created by the running, staffing and hiring out of church buildings - £1.4 billion
- The replacement cost of volunteers' time - £850 million
- The wellbeing value to volunteers - £165 million

- **The wellbeing value to the people who benefit from social and community services - £8.3 billion**
- The wellbeing value of attending church services - £1.4 billion

<https://www.houseofgood.nationalchurchestrust.org/>

2.1 Since March 2020, other organisations have also carried out valuable research.

The following reports provide crucial and complementary evidence on the overall impact of Covid-19 on places of worship.

2.1.1 Surveys carried out by faith groups or organisations focusing on faith and church activities

National Churches Trust: Churches and COVID-19 Opinion Poll, 30th May 2020

Savanta ComRes surveyed 2,085 UK adults online between 22nd and 25th May 2020.

The key findings suggested that the public:

- would support an earlier re-opening of churches as the COVID-19 lockdown eases, as long as they can maintain social distancing (49%). For those who attend church regularly it is 66%.
- thought that most important uses for churches and chapels after the COVID-19 lockdown eases were:
 - providing a place where those who died as a result of the coronavirus can be remembered (46%).
 - providing a place for quiet reflection or private prayer (44%)
 - holding occasions such as weddings, funerals and baptism (42%)
 - providing community support services (e.g.: food banks, youth clubs, and activities for vulnerable people (39%)

<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/news/churches-and-covid-19-opinion-poll>

and

<https://comresglobal.com/polls/national-churches-trust-public-omnibus-research/>

State of the Churches: the impact of Covid-19

National Churches Trust, May 2020

This reported on an in-depth online survey of over 500 UK churches during May 2020. A key finding was that 75% churches agreed that the closing of their building during COVID-19 lockdown had a negative effect on the community and 64% thought their buildings would become more important in the future as a result of COVID-19.

The results also described some of the help churches have provided to the community during the lockdown:

- 34% of churches say they have been able to fully continue their existing support, and around 55% say they have continued partially. This means that a vast majority, around 89%, of churches are continuing to provide some form of support.
- Once they are open again, churches are most looking forward to being able to provide togetherness/companionship, closely followed by religious services, being able to gather together in the building again and restarting outreach and community activities.
- Churches have set up a wide range of new community support services and forms of worship. The top five new activities are making contact with isolated and vulnerable people, online worship, telephone befriending, shopping and/or delivery of shopping or essential supplies and online support groups.

<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/sites/default/files/29-05-20%20State%20of%20the%20churches%20COVID-19%20FINAL%20PDF.pdf>

The 1st Church Covid Survey

The Evangelical Alliance, June 2020.

Nearly 900 UK churches were polled between 14th and 20th May 2020 to explore how the Church has changed in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

- 59% of the UK churches surveyed reported a marked increase in people interested in finding out more about the Christian faith. 70% of church leaders have reported more people who would not normally attend church, now attending virtually during the lockdown.
- More than 90% of Evangelical Alliance member churches surveyed are providing support for vulnerable people, and around 75% of these are working collaboratively with either other churches, charities or local authorities.

<https://www.eauk.org/resources/what-we-offer/reports/changing-church>

Coronavirus, Church and You Survey

York St John University, June 2020

Launched after the 1st lockdown, the aim was to assess 'the Church's' experience of the pandemic'. Although intended for the Church of England, it was open to clergy and lay people from any denomination in the UK and over 7,000 people took part.

Initial results published in *Church Times* on 26th June 2020 (at which point 6,000 people had participated), revealed that of the 2,462 people who received rather than gave ministry in the lockdown, 91% accessed services online and that people generally appreciated the quality of the services. However, while over 75% of the sample recognised that the lockdown had helped move the Church into the digital age, only a fifth thought online worship was the way ahead for the next generation.

As to what might happen after lockdown when churches reopen (fully), over half (56%) said they would revert back to services in church, but 42% said they would use online worship sometimes if it was available. *'There seemed little danger of a mass exodus to the virtual world, with only 2% thinking they would worship mainly or entirely online'*.

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/26-june/comment/opinion/coronavirus-church-you-survey-an-in-depth-look-at-the-preliminary-results>

The initial report can be downloaded here <https://www.yorks.j.ac.uk/media/content-assets/document-directory/documents/CC&Y-survey-initial-report.pdf>

Baptist Union of Great Britain, June 2020

A small-scale research project was commissioned by their Communications Team who sent a short survey to an existing database of individuals who have previously agreed to be part of occasional review to try to *'capture some of the wonderful ways that churches have been responding to the current crisis, to get some feedback on what's helped and hindered them in lockdown and to hear how both the Regional and Specialist Teams can continue to offer support, going forward'*.

398 individuals completed the survey, the majority of whom were local Ministers or Church Secretaries/Treasurers over the age of 40.

- Nearly 90 per cent of participants recorded that their church had connected with people digitally.
- The majority spoke of future being a hybrid approach to services and meetings i.e.: some in person, some online.

<https://baptist.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=264916>

The Methodist Church

Launched a survey on 12th August 2020 to find out about churches, circuit or district's experience of lockdown with particular regard to holding and taking part in online services and holding meetings. There were 342 responses and highlights included:

- Almost 74% of those who responded offered online Sunday worship with nearly 95% saying they didn't engage in worship online before lockdown
- Other online offerings undertaken by church/circuit/district/other projects included 245 business meetings, 40 parent and toddler group, 96 youth groups, 146 Coffee mornings. 187 prayer
- 92 respondents considered their online endeavours to have been very successful, 167 successful and 58 OK.
- Over 58% are intending to carry on offering online worship once churches are fully open again, 31% unsure.

The results were published on 24th August 2020 in *Methodist News*.

Digital use during lockdown

Ecclesiastical, August 2020

Research carried out by specialist insurer Ecclesiastical has revealed that almost 9 in 10 churches used new channels to keep in touch with churchgoers during the lockdown.

Almost a third (30%) have seen an increase in attendance as a result of the move to digital channels of communicating – including using Facebook Live (18%) to stream sermons directly to parishioners.

The popularity of these new channels means 38% of respondents said they would continue to use the new channels after lockdown to keep in touch and attract new members to their churches.

<https://www.ecclesiastical.com/media-centre/churches-go-digital-to-counter-lockdown/>

Catholic Voices: Coronavirus, Church & You Survey Catholics in the UK

Professor Francis Davis (University of Birmingham and Oxford), Professor Andrew Village (York St John University) and Professor Leslie Francis (University of Warwick), September 2020. Undertaken in collaboration with *Catholic Voices* to publicise the survey and produce the report.

The Survey of the Catholic community in England, Wales and Scotland ran between 19th May and 26th July 2020.

The topics covered included the experience of the pandemic on well-being, the experience of receiving and giving pastoral care and support, giving care and support to the wider community.

It also asked about support of clergy as well as well accessing online worship and attitudes to the lockdown of church buildings and attitude to church buildings generally.

<https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/media/content-assets/document-directory/documents/CC&Y--Roman-Catholics-UK-Survey-Report.pdf>

COVID-19, Christian Faith and Wellbeing

Arthur Rank Centre and University of Exeter, October 2020

During August and September 2020, this study examined if and how communities of the Christian faith transitioned to new forms of engagement and worship during lockdown, identified preferred means of engagement and connection and the general effects of the COVID-19 crisis on Christian faith communities across the country.

Key findings:

- 50% of those who took part in the research have been **live streaming services** or using Zoom to worship with 95% of respondents previously attending in person. Some of those who took part in the research thought the response of their local church was overly geared towards the 'elderly

congregation', while others thought those who were older or without the internet were not appropriately considered. Some people also felt online resources and activities were not sufficiently engaging.

- A total of 44% said they had felt **well supported** by members of their church communities in recent months, and 41% said they felt well supported by their local clergy.
- **Volunteering** 41.2 per cent of respondents stated that the level at which they volunteered increased as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic
- **Re-engaging with church and other faith-related activities post.** Regarding physical reengagement with the church post-lockdown, the overwhelming message was one of a need for support, safety, and confidence.

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/research/centres/crpr/research/projects/archive/project/index.php?id=667>

More than 17,000 online services and events provided by Church of England parishes, October 2020

Using an analysis of *A Church Near You* data, it was found that across the Church of England, more than 17,000 online services and events have been provided following the introduction of the lockdown and restrictions on public worship in March. Many of these services take place regularly and this figure represents a snapshot of the likely total number.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/more-17000-online-services-and-events-provided-church-england>

Digital polls held during the Welsh Historic Places of Worship Forum's Faith in the Future online event in Wales

22nd October 2020

- *What are the three most important issues you are facing when re-opening your church after Covid-19?* People to reopen the space safely 47%; Financial resources to reopen 14%; Engaging with our community 39%; Encouraging people back 37%; Developing a fresh vision and a way forward 33%
- *What would be the two most useful things for churches to stay open and serving the community?* More volunteers to come and do the work 49%; Better community engagement 36%; Better networks and contacts with other community group 36%; Financial help 32%
- *What are your three key ambitions for your church over the next 5 years?* Responding to community needs and community activities 66%; Growing membership 47%; Improving online presence 36%; Welcoming visitors 36%
- *What is the biggest challenge facing you/your organisation when looking after an historic place of worship?* Lack of people/volunteers 57%; High maintenance and running costs 40%; Lack of local knowledge/expertise 23%

<https://rcadc.org/faith-in-the-future-historic-places-of-worship-in-the-aftermath-of-covid-19/#toggle-id-5>

2nd Church Covid Survey, the Evangelical Alliance

October 2020.

Undertaken between the 1st and 12th October, they received responses from more than 1,000 individuals and in excess of 450 church leaders. The aim was to gain a fuller picture of how churches are navigating the continually changing landscape, evolving laws and guidance, and the challenge of local and regional lockdowns.

Key findings:

Finances:

- Nearly half the churches are seeing reduced donations: 46% of churches reported decreasing contributions due to Covid-19

Community work

- 88% of church leaders said their churches are working to meet the needs of vulnerable people. Of these churches 72% are working in partnership with either local authorities, other churches or charities.
- 48% of responding churches have started a new community engagement initiative since the coronavirus outbreak began.

Church attendance

- More respondents are attending church now than before Covid-19 especially amongst 18-24-year old. 99.8% of respondents have been to an online or in-person church service in the past month.

<https://churchgrowth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Changing-Church-autumn-survey-executive-summary.pdf>

COVID concerns keep congregations away

Ecclesiastical Insurance Survey, 16th December 2020

The survey conducted by YouGov asked 1,367 churchgoers whether they planned to go to church for Christmas 2020. It found that:

- A third of churchgoers won't attend church this Christmas due to coronavirus concerns
- 33% say they will avoid church due to fears of contracting COVID-19 at church
- Current government restrictions limit traditional church activities this year – with many moving online

The survey found concern about coronavirus was the main reason given for not attending church this year (38%), followed by restrictions in the local area (26%) and churches not hosting events (22%).

In a separate survey of churches by Ecclesiastical conducted by the Bible Society between 27th November and 8th December 2020 found that the majority of respondents (64%) believed the Government should allow all places of worship to open to the public this Christmas, with 35% citing the effect on the mental health of individuals and the wider community as the main impacts of churches being closed.

The impact of coronavirus has forced many churches to reconsider their plans this Christmas.

Ecclesiastical found that only 59% of churches will host a carol service this year compared to almost all churches (96%) in previous years, while only 38% will host a Nativity and 48% will host Midnight Mass.

78% churches planned to live stream or share events this festive season, with 71% of respondents saying they will host an online carol service and 39% will livestream a Nativity service.

<https://www.ecclesiastical.com/media-centre/covid-keeps-congregations-away/>

The Church in Lockdown, Your Neighbour

7 January 2021, outlines how the Church mobilised to meet the myriad of needs across our nation brought about by the pandemic and reflects on our Your Neighbour was able to build a network.

Your Neighbour is a network of over 1000 churches from over 40 denominations which was brought together in March 2020, as a UK church response to the Covid-19 crisis working with churches, the Government and the NHS. It is an initiative of the Good Faith Foundation (GFF), a new charity seeking to combat social exclusion by bringing people together. <https://goodfaith.org.uk/>

A survey of this network found:

- 2.8 million meals provided to vulnerable families through the lockdown hunger partnership
- 5 million meals provided to those in need by the church each month since the beginning of the pandemic
- 90% of churches have supported the vulnerable during the pandemic
- 71% of churches have delivered new services many in areas of the community they have never been active in before.
- They also found that:
 - 99% of churches experienced organisational hardship due to loss of revenue post-lockdown.
 - 82% of churches saw a loss of human resources, while all churches saw disruption of their usual activities.

<https://yourneighbour.org/the-church-in-lockdown>

An improvement found in non-Christians perception of the UK church as a result of the coronavirus pandemic

February 2021

The survey was conducted by Savanta ComRes and commissioned in partnership by YourNeighbour and international Christian children's charity World Vision. The study surveyed 2,170 respondents.

Key findings:

- Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, 25% of non-Christians i.e.: those who do not identify as Christian, agreed with the statement that the UK Church is making a positive difference in the world, compared with 19% three years ago.
- 42% of UK adults agree that local Christian churches are making a positive difference in their community, with 24% disagreeing.
- 36% of the total UK population agree that Christian churches are making a positive difference in the world.
- When asked what community needs Christian churches could provide for, events for the elderly and homeless services were selected most often, with both chosen by 1 in 4 UK adults (24%), closely followed and food/clothes/toy collection and distribution (20%).

<https://yourneighbour.org/news/looking-up>

Rural Churches response to Covid-19

Yorkshire Churches Rural Business Support (YCRBS), R Battersby and N Garside, January 2021

YCRBS, a Christian organisation seeking to support farming and rural communities, commissioned a study during the latter quarter of 2020. The purpose was to ask *'what will the 'new normal' look like? How will life be different going forward and especially what are we learning from these times that should be nurtured and developed. YCRBS trustees believe a first step to inform the way forward should be to quantify and collate the extent of rural church responses to the pandemic within their respective communities'*.

Identified Emerging Challenges for the Rural Church

- Across all areas (Worship, Pastoral, Prayer, Discipleship & Fellowship, Social Action) there is a growing need for Church in the communities that we serve.
- There has been an exponential growth in demand and pressure placed on Church Leaders, especially in Rural Areas. This has been brought about by a rise in mental wellbeing need and pastoral issues (and a short fall in medical provision), the changing nature of ministry and technological skills required, loss of volunteer support, and a sense of loss as physical presence and relationships are put on hold.

Key Recommendation is that the Church develops a digital strategy, including a model of practical operation, that includes the following:

- 1. Action on providing supportive communities for Rural Church leaders, to share and grow best practice of sustaining and growing the mission of God using new technology in Rural Areas.
- 2. A framework to train and support church members, leaders and those training for ordination on technology and the uses of this in worship, prayer, discipleship ... etc, recognising the benefits to the Rural Church.

<https://ycrbsorg.wordpress.com/covid-rural-church-response/>

Funerals and Bereavement Research

9 Dot Research, March 2021

An online survey was conducted by 9 Dot Research on behalf of the Church of England in January 2021 of a representative sample of 2008 adults in England aged between 18 and 75 years old.

Since March 2020, many people have been impacted:

- 6 in 10 experienced the death of at least one person, 1 in 4 experienced more than one death
- 4 in 10 experienced the death of someone close, 1 in 10 lost more than one close person

In respect of funerals:

- 7 in 10 of those who experienced someone's death were not able to attend funerals.
- More than 8 in 10 agreed people haven't been able to say goodbye properly or fulfil funeral wishes.

Being isolated in grief:

- 8 in 10 agreed those grieving need more support.
- in 4 agreed grief has been harder due to the restrictions.

People feel the Church of England should be offering help and support by:

- offering indoor and outdoor spaces for reflection, grief, prayer or lighting candles.
- listening to and supporting people with dying, death, funerals and grief.
- holding private and public services, praying for people, and helping people to pray.
- offering online support and spaces for remembering or prayer.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Funerals%20and%20Bereavement%20Summary%20Report%20web.pdf>

Forthcoming: York St John University 2nd Survey

Launched January 2021: The impact of lockdown on churchgoers

The aim is to get a sense of how clergy and lay people have coped with the last year. One of the questions being asked is whether online services are the way forward. 'The blossoming of different forms of online and socially-distanced worship has shown the creativity of local churches, but also the variations in how much can be achieved'. They hope to make a detailed audit of what has been done, and what those who produce, or access services make of them now.

<https://www.yorksja.ac.uk/coronavirus-church-and-you/>

2.2.2 Surveys carried out by other faith groups

How Covid-19 has impacted the Sikh Community! A report

The Sikh Network, 11th June 2020

Key findings:

- Sikhs in the UK are a very visible minority community, whilst representing less than c.1% of the population, they have disproportionately been impacted by Covid-19.
- Sikh religious festivals have also had to adapt, towns and cities across the UK would normally be filled with vibrant cheer and celebration throughout the month of April, as Sikhs mark Vaisakhi, the birth of the Khalsa, with processions and events. However, with isolation and restrictions, Sikhs have had to be innovative and creative using online web streaming tools and social media to express their joy and celebrations through the lockdown.
- Tremendous community outreach of compassion shown by the Sikhs through their selfless service for all. As the pandemic forced restrictions on Sikh Gurdwaras, many have taken the Sikh principle of Langar (free kitchen) out to the most vulnerable., serving over 150,000 meals a week

<https://www.thesikhnetwork.com/33021-2/>

Covid-19: The Neighbours Next Door Report: the Story of Muslim Organisations responding to Covid-19

The Muslim Charities Forum (MCF) July 2020

The MCF identified 194 Muslim charities attending to a whole array of needs. Many mosque spaces were shut and turned into centres to support the local community, such as organising a food bank or providing training to volunteers. Funds have been distributed to those that have been hit hardest financially by the virus. With the unfortunate loss of lives, many took on the task of providing burial and bereavement support. Other charities organised themselves to support the NHS staff in times of great strain on their lives. From ensuring that food and medicine gets to those in need, to supporting victims of domestic violence, stranded students, and single parents, Muslim organisations have been working tirelessly to provide multifaceted support for communities and individuals during this crisis.

<https://www.muslimcharitiesforum.org.uk/covid-19-the-neighbours-next-door-report/>

The Institute of Jewish Policy Research

Launched a major nationwide survey of Jews in July 2020 to find out the impact of Covid-19 on Jewish communities. <https://www.thejc.com/comment/columnists/you-can-help-us-%EF%AC%81nd-out-the-impact-of-covid-19-1.501474>

Subsequent short policy reports published:

- **Renew our days as of old: Will we go back to Jewish activities and events?**, Jonathan Boyd, Carli Lessof and David Graham, , The Institute of Jewish Policy Research, 22 September 2020
<https://www.jpr.org.uk/publication?id=17563>
- **Hidden effects: The mental health of the UK's Jewish population during the COVID-19 pandemic**, David Graham, Carli Lessof and Jonathan Boyd, The Institute of Jewish Policy Research, 5th October 2020
<https://www.jpr.org.uk/publication?id=17593>
- **Moving beyond COVID-19: What needs to be done to help preserve and enhance Jewish communal life?** Jonathan Boyd, The Institute of Jewish Policy Research, 9th March 2021
<https://www.jpr.org.uk/publication?id=17813>

FaithAction: Faith Covid-19 Response

August 2020

FaithAction are a member of the Government's Taskforce for places of worship. In this role they were given £125,000 to consult and engage with different community groups and places of worship up and down the country to ensure their views are represented at the Taskforce's meetings. In August 2020, they published a '*quick 3-point summary*' of some of the main points of interest, they had heard from each faith community recently'.

<https://www.faithaction.net/blog/2020/08/20/faith-covid-project-update/>

Survey: Impact of COVID on Mosques

Launched 23rd January 2021

The Muslim Council of Britain, the Muslim Council of Wales and the Muslim Council of Scotland, have jointly launched a survey to assess the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on mosques. This survey will inform specific requests made to authorities to mosques and their recovery and sustainability, as well as highlight the challenges faced by mosques over the last year to Government, the media, and other Muslims. This is part of research being carried out with the University of Cardiff.

<https://mcb.org.uk/general/survey-covid-impact-mosques-2021/>

2.2.3 Surveys carried out by organisations from outside the church sector

Talking Toddlers

May 2020. Commissioned by HOPE Together, the Church of England, and the Evangelical Alliance to highlight the potential for sustained church growth if the church nurtures the faith of under-fives and their parents.

The research shows that churches are already in contact with nearly three-quarters of all parents of under-fives in Great Britain:

- 74% of all parents with children under the age of five have attended a church activity in the past 12 months
- Only 25% of all parents of children aged 0-4 are currently not in contact with a church, but 35% of them would welcome an invite to a church-led activity for them and their children

www.hopetogether.org.uk/talkingtoddlers

'A Nation in Mourning Report: Is the UK heading towards a grief pandemic?'

Co-op Funeralcare Media Report, July 2020

Conducted in May 2020, this research revealed the devastating impact the 2020 lockdown has had on the nation's ability to grieve. Based on Co-op Funeralcare's own business data and YouGov research, it warned that the nation could be heading out of lockdown and into a grief pandemic.

It estimated that by May 2020 about 9.7 million haven't been able to attend the funeral of a loved one and that *'during the lockdown sadly an estimated 243,000 bereaved families have been denied the right to say goodbye to their loved one in the way they would have wished'*.

<https://www.coop.co.uk/funeralcare/nationinmourning>

Levelling up our communities: proposals for a new social covenant

A report for government by Danny Kruger MP, September 2020.

In June 2020, the Prime Minister asked Danny Kruger MP for proposals to sustain the community spirit we saw during the lockdown. The report sets out a vision for a more local, more human, less bureaucratic, less centralised society in which people are supported and empowered to play an active role in their neighbourhoods. It includes proposals for:

- a new deal with faith communities. 'The Government should invite the country's faith leaders to make a grand offer of help on behalf of their communities, in exchange for a reciprocal commitment from the state. For each faith group, the offer would include the commitment to mobilise their congregations and commit their resources to tackling one or more besetting social problem in our society: problem debt, or children in care, or prisoner rehabilitation, or rough sleeping, or something else'.

- the Volunteer Passport: a system that effectively matches the supply of citizens to the demand for their time. This could be used across different organisations, in the public and social sectors, with a single identity and criminal records check.

<https://www.dannykruger.org.uk/sites/www.dannykruger.org.uk/files/2020-09/Kruger%202.0%20Levelling%20Up%20Our%20Communities.pdf>

The impact of COVID-19 to date on older people's mental and physical health

AGE UK, October 2020. The report highlighted the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic on older people's physical and mental health.

This survey of over 500 older people in August 2020 found that even while case numbers were dropping, many remained deeply afraid of COVID-19, leading to staying at home, an increase in stress, uncertainty, and isolation, and a loss of the benefits of mobility and socialising.

https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/health--wellbeing/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-older-people_age-uk.pdf

The role of faith during the coronavirus pandemic,

Age UK, November 2020.

An article on the Age UK website which aims to raise awareness of different faith communities and strengthen relations. They spoke to 5 older people about how their faiths have been affected by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Talks about impact on funerals, worshipping online and finding comfort in lockdown.

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/discover/2020/11/the-role-of-faith-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

Forthcoming:

Age UK

Commissioned a second survey in January 2021 to understand more about how the pandemic and specifically the new winter restrictions have impacted older people's health and care.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/28GSQTW>

Faith and Society: Keeping the Faith Partnerships between faith groups and local authorities

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society, November 2020.

Reported that local councils understanding and links with places of worship and faith groups has increased substantially during the pandemic. And that the imperative of providing support to vulnerable families has overcome decades of wariness.

Gathered very positive feedback from both councils and faith groups of their experience of this collaboration.'

- COVID-19 has meant Local authorities and faith groups relationships have deepened, are more willing to share resources, and are centred on **directly meeting emergency needs in the areas of food poverty, shielding and self-isolation, and mental health and wellbeing.**
- APPG Faith and Society expects this type of work to continue but also “anticipates increases in other areas of partnership between local authorities in such areas as **homelessness, debt counselling, and education**” as the **aftermath of the pandemic plays out.**
- Councils have praised the ability of churches and **faith groups to reach the most deprived communities**, mobilise volunteers and offer their buildings for wider community use
- The largest barrier to councils considering partnering with faith groups were concerns that they would want to provide services exclusively to people from within the faith group, have conflicting views on equality, or would only be interested in activities that included explicit evangelism.
- There seems to be “generally less anxiety” about working with faith groups since COVID-19.

https://www.faithandsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/APPG_CovidReport_Full_V4.pdf

Compassionate Communities for Exceptional Circumstances

Cruse Bereavement Care, January 2021

This project was carried out in partnership with Cruse, the leading national bereavement charity and a major provider of extra care housing, The ExtraCare Charitable Trust, together with researchers at the University of Bristol and Aston University.

Based on the diaries of those working with the bereaved during the pandemic written between May and September 2020 (during and after the first period of 'lockdown'), this report outlines some of the unique experiences and needs of bereavement support during the COVID-19 era.

https://www.cruse.org.uk/sites/default/files/default_images/pdf/Documents-and-fact-sheets/J0339%20Cruse_Lockdown_Diaries.pdf

The Covid-19 Voluntary Sector Impact Barometer

A partnership between Nottingham Trent University, Sheffield Hallam University, NCVO, and Economic and Research Council. This is part of a major new study using real time data to explore how voluntary organisations are being impacted by the coronavirus pandemic over the next year: the financial impact, and the impact on the way on the way organisations are run, new practices they are adopting and its employees and volunteers. Is producing monthly reports and a final report is expected in November 2021.

<https://www.ntu.ac.uk/about-us/news/news-articles/2020/09/largest-study-of-voluntary-organisations-reveals-devastating-financial-impacts-of-covid-19>

Community Life COVID-19 Re-contact Survey Findings: Volunteering

11 January 2021. DCMS commissioned the Community Life COVID-19 Re-contact Survey (CLRS) to provide data on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected volunteering, charitable giving, social cohesion, wellbeing and loneliness in England.

Formal volunteering: Volunteers have given unpaid help to a range of organisations or clubs, including to over 3000 Mutual Aid Groups. <https://covidmutualaid.org/> Across England, around 21% of people formally volunteered at the beginning of the pandemic.

Informal volunteering: COVID-19 has seen innumerable acts of kindness, giving unpaid help to people who are not relatives - referred to here as informal volunteering. 47% of people informally volunteered during the pandemic and 52% of those were helping people affected by COVID-19.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-look-at-volunteering-during-the-response-to-covid-19>

Loneliness Annual Report 2021

DCMS, January 2021

In April 2020, at the start of the national lockdown, DCMS had launched a comprehensive plan to tackle loneliness, including funding and a government campaign. This report describes what was achieved on this and how impacted by Covid-19 over the past year and sets out the plans for the future which is based on three objectives:

- [Reducing stigma](#)
- Ensuring that relationships and loneliness are considered in policy-making and delivery by organisations across society
- [Improving the evidence base on loneliness](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/loneliness-annual-report-the-second-year/loneliness-annual-report-january-2021>

2.2.4 Surveys carried out by heritage organisations focusing on heritage issues

The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Surveyed heritage organisations between 20th and 27th March 2020. They targeted the charities and third sector organisations which they had previously supported.

The survey was sent to 1,424 grantees who had received a grant of over £250,000 within the last 10 years. They received 1,253 replies which came from across the UK, across different sectors and sizes of organisation.

The key finding was that the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is UK-wide. **98% of heritage organisations were impacted – largely financially** - within the first three weeks and the remaining 2% expected some impact in the future.

<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/blogs/how-coronavirus-covid-19-affecting-heritage-sector>

Historic England

Undertook a survey of the impact of Coronavirus (Covid-19) on the heritage sector in April 2020. It was aimed at **those looking after historic buildings, contractors, consultants, professionals, craftspeople, and specialists.**

The results indicated that the most vulnerable of the respondents are either:

- craftspeople / smaller crafts-based businesses
- 'professional services': architects/ surveyors / engineers

Over 40% of these businesses forecast their businesses failing within 3 months even if the current Government support scheme delivers.

Small consultancies are slightly less vulnerable, while both faith-based organisations and Trusts with heritage purposes face the future with somewhat greater confidence.

<https://historicengland.org.uk/coronavirus/heritage-sector/survey/>

Historic Religious Buildings Alliance (HRBA)

Between 31st March and 4th June 2020, the HRBA invited its members, e-newsletter subscribers and key organisations in the sector to *'drop us an email, letting us know the impact of the pandemic on historic religious buildings, summarise the challenges they were facing and describe any uncertainties you may be facing as to government policy and thoughts on how things might develop in future as a result of the shock to the system caused by covid-19'*.

- Immediate impact: drop in income and reduced repair projects and maintenance activity.
- Key areas of longer-term impact: impact of social distancing on the return of church services.

Anecdotal evidence suggests many thousands of congregations will show a degree of resilience when the pandemic has eased, but there is a major concern is that those 'vulnerable' to COVID-19 because of age may be less willing to return to church or their many voluntary tasks, at least for the medium term.

The responses from these exercises were summarised in the response HRBA made to the DCMS Select Committee Inquiry: *The impact of COVID-19 on Historic Religious Buildings in England* on 2nd July 2020.

<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/7153/pdf/>

The First Report of DCMS Select Committee Inquiry was published on 23rd July

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2022/documents/19516/default/>

The Heritage Alliance

Surveyed its members during the 1st Lockdown and again in July 2020. Key impacts on heritage organisations were:

- Financial due to lack of, and even after limited re-opening, reduction in visitor numbers
- Reduction in repairs and maintenance due to lack of funds
- Lack of staff who are on furlough and volunteers reluctant to return

The Future for Religious Heritage

In order to understand the impact of COVID-19 on religious heritage organisations undertook a survey from **31st March to 18th May 2020**. More than 70 organisations from 21 countries shared their perspectives and insight.

The key findings were that:

- most organisations have strongly felt the impact, firstly on their funding and secondly on their income sources.
- Digitalisation has played a key role in mitigating the impact and adapting to the new work environment.

<https://www.frh-europe.org/results-of-the-frh-survey-on-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-religious-heritage-organisations/>

Forthcoming:

Historic England

Launched its Heritage Sector Volunteer Survey on 9th February 2021, to find out about the impact of COVID-19 on heritage organisations that need support from volunteers to keep the organisation sustainable. This is about organisations which are entirely volunteer-led as well as those which only have a few volunteer roles.

<https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/volunteersurvey21/>

APPENDIX 3: COVID-19 GUIDANCE: ISSUES IN CLARIFYING, DISSEMINATING, INTERPRETING AND APPLYING GUIDANCE TO PLACES OF WORSHIP

3.1 Key reference material

The impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the exercise of religion in the UK

Frank Cranmer, David Pocklington, Centre for Law and Religious, Cardiff Law, October 2020

<http://www.churchstate.eu/pdf/COVID19/UK.PDF>

COVID-19 Coronavirus: legislation and guidance

The **Law and Religion** website. This provides a complete list of all guidance produced by the Church of England as well as other Christian denominations in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as well as other faith organisations and faith groups from February 2020 to the present day. It also lists and includes links to all government guidance issued and to legal (and much wider) information and advice over the same period. <https://lawandreligionuk.com/2020/09/16/covid-19-coronavirus-legislation-and-guidance-ii/#List%20of%20the%20posts>

and

<https://lawandreligionuk.com/2020/09/16/covid-19-coronavirus-legislation-and-guidance-ii/#Church%20of%20England>

The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance

Has also posted throughout guidance produced by all the main denominations in England, Wales, Scotland and NI as well as other relevant information. <https://www.hrballiance.org.uk/coronavirus/>

3.2 Outline timetable

On 3rd March 2020, the UK Government published a Policy Paper **Coronavirus action plan: a guide to what you can expect across the UK** which included details on (the then) current planning; and the phased response termed the Delay phase, the Research phase and the Mitigate phase.

On 10th March 2020, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York wrote to clergy to alert them to forthcoming guidance.

On 12th March 2020, the UK Government published a statement on the UK Government response to Covid which including links to a number of relevant areas e.g.: public health in each of which there was a substantial amount of information.

On 12th March 2020, the Church of England also published information in the form of two updates:

- All government guidance was reviewed, and generic healthcare and policy information streamlined to a single page providing links to relevant NHS and GOV.UK pages for latest information.
- Very detailed guidance, in the form of FAQs, provided on how to manage communion, baptism, ordination, confirmations, pastoral visiting, catering, washing of vestments. Very detailed down even to 'refrain from passing collection plates around'. Advice re: visiting of care homes and hospitals was to abide by guidance issued by the particular hospital/care home.
- The key guidance was 'to **suspend the administration of the chalice** as well as physical contact during the sharing of the Peace, blessing or "laying on of hands"'.

On the 23rd March 2020, the UK Government imposed a national lockdown in response to the Covid-19 virus outbreak on 23 March 2020. On the following day, the Church of England closed all its churches completely, including for individual private prayer, the term used by the Church. This was applied to clergy as well as to lay people.

They remained closed until 13th June 2020, when they were allowed to open for private prayer. This was defined in the Government guidance issued on the 7th June 2020 as individual prayer, whereby a person, or single household, which may include an existing support bubble where eligible, entering the venue to pray on their own.

They were allowed to open for congregational worship from 4th July.

Between July and September 2020, more extensive and increasingly rigorous *ad hoc* local Public Health regulations were introduced. When this failed to control the spread of the virus, on 14 October 2020, the Government introduced a three-tier approach across England, with legal restrictions varying according to government-defined tiers.

On the 7th October 2020, the Archbishop of Canterbury had made a plea for churches to be allowed to stay open (if there was to be another national lockdown) on the Today Programme (Radio 4):

'My experience as we have gone through this huge crisis and tragedies of losses is that churches are now very very serious about safety and they were from the beginning.

And there is at the moment there is no sign that churches are places where people are contracting infections. And when I visit parish churches in my own diocese there is enormous care as in Canterbury Cathedral recently – we had an ordination there – everybody separated, everyone wearing masks, everybody washing their hands, in a huge building. It was really really carefully done'.

Throughout this period, which at its height involved 4 Tiers, many regions moved between Tiers. Churches were allowed to remain open for communal worship and private prayer in all 4 Tiers.

On the 3rd November 2020, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, together with the Bishop of London, joined national faith leaders in calling on the Government to permit public worship during the forthcoming national lockdown in England. They set

out how public worship can play a vital role in supporting social cohesion and mental health and offer “an essential sign of hope”.

They concluded by calling

‘on the government to recognise and support this, and enable us to continue to worship safely, as part of the essential fabric of the nation.’

<https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/archbishops-join-interfaith-call-pm-allow-public-worship>

On 5th November 2020, the tier regulations were revoked and were replaced by the 2nd national lockdown. During this 2nd lockdown which lasted until 1st December 2020, communal worship was no longer allowed, but churches could stay open for private prayer and online worship could be broadcast from the church building.

Communal worship returned from 2nd December 2020. Churches were allowed to remain open for both communal worship and private prayer during the 3rd lockdown which started on 5th January 2021.

National policy from the Church of England did change and there was a clear move towards making the decision to close a local one that could be made by the clergy themselves. In a letter, dated the 1st November 2020, from the Archbishops of York and Canterbury and the Bishop of London, addressed to ‘the Clergy of the Church of England’, a key paragraph said:

‘We were cautious about these issues during the first lockdown – perhaps overly so – but in this second lockdown we want to encourage church buildings to remain open for private prayer wherever possible, making sure that their buildings are Covid secure in the ways that we have learned in recent months, and to broadcast services from their church buildings. **However, if you do not have the resources or wherewithal to do this, please do not feel that you have failed in any way. The good thing about provision of worship online, is that people can join in from anywhere and therefore we can support each other more easily in this endeavour**’.

This was re-iterated in the lead-up to Christmas 2020 when some areas were put into Tier 4 and again, during the current 3rd lockdown where the seriousness of the pandemic and the steep rise of cases during late December, January and some of February 2021 especially in London and the south-east meant that many churches who had been open, decided to voluntarily temporarily close for both communal worship and private prayer.

On Saturday 19th December 2020, in a joint statement with the Bishop of London, the Rt Revd Sarah Mullally, who chairs the Church’s Covid recovery group, Archbishop Welby urged clerics and others who are shielding not to feel obliged to lead or attend worship, despite the exemption.

‘We are grateful that, even in Tier 4, church buildings can be open this Christmas. But we urge everyone to take precautions and, especially for those in Tier 4, to be exceptionally careful. Even though attending public worship is permitted, many people may feel it is currently better they do not do so. **Clergy and others who are shielding should certainly feel**

no compulsion. At this time of year — even this year — we celebrate the birth of Jesus with joy and hope. Jesus came to bring light that shines in the darkness. We need that light now and always.’

The Government’s *Path out of Lockdown* was announced on 22nd Feb 2021

Following the Prime Minister's statement to Parliament, the Bishop of London, who chairs the Church of England's Coronavirus Recovery Group, commented that the Church would study the details of the statement and, 'working with Government Departments, refine our own advice for local churches in the weeks ahead'.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/coronavirus-reopening-roadmap-comment-bishop-london>

The Church of England has now published a guide to the four stages of the Government’s ‘roadmap’ and says they will provide more advice about how this will affect worship and other church activities as they receive information from government.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance#na>

There is some anger at some of the dates set out in the Pathway. Cathedrals for instance cannot not open for visitors until 17th May 2021 although they can open for private prayer and communal worship, whereas non-retail shops (including Cathedral Gift shops) can open in April. Bernard Donoghue, Director of the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions quotes research undertaken by the Berlin Institute of Technology, published in February 2021, which says that the risk of COVID-19 transmission is far lower in museums and theatres than in supermarkets, restaurants, offices, or public transportation.

<https://hyperallergic.com/623971/museums-are-safer-than-any-other-indoor-activity-covid-19-study-says/>

APPENDIX 4: THE ENGLISH CHURCH AND EPIDEMIC DISEASE THE LONG VIEW

INTRODUCTION

The last respiratory pandemic to ravage England ended almost exactly a century ago. Since then advances in modern medicine and sanitation have made many formerly fatal diseases treatable and removed the environments in which those such as typhoid, cholera, and tuberculosis could flourish. For the most of the 20th century and the start of the 21st the risk of human-to-human transmission of fatal disease in England was lower than it had been at any time in history, and the main causes of death have been lifestyle-related. Sickness has increasingly become a personal burden, which support communities such as the parish have helped to alleviate.

The circumstances surrounding COVID-19 in many ways represent a return to normal historical social risk, particularly with regard to community gatherings. For places such as parish churches which serve to host communal events, the change in circumstances which COVID has forced have been particularly challenging, with little to inform possible lines of best practice. Despite its contemporary relevance, the response of the Church to pandemic disease has not been well-studied, particularly in practical terms.⁸⁹ Yet up to the 1920s clergy were used to dealing with, and mitigating against, waves of community-transmitted disease. Until the professionalisation of palliative healthcare in the 19th century the parish church and its clergy often found themselves at the front line of healthcare provision. Over the previous millennium the clergy of England were active in adapting their churches and their practices to safeguard parishioners through epidemics. Indeed, many of England's parish churches remain substantially the same buildings as those which witnessed the arrival of the Black Death in this country.

As many of the buildings have remained the same, so have the problems those who serve them have faced. The balance has always been between the care of souls and the care of the body. Then as now, those who are most vulnerable are often those who need the comfort and succour that only their local church, to which they may have a lifetime connection, can offer. Perhaps the most painful and vital function of the parish church is the provision of funerals at such times, giving people the comfort that their lost ones have had a proper 'send off,' even if they may not be entirely sure why it is important for this to take place in the church. At times of hardship and high mortality the church's role at the centre of communities is particularly clear.

Past responses to endemic disease are highly relevant to the present situation. Until the late 18th century diseases were believed to be spread through 'miasma' – bad air – and as such the standard preventative approach to the transmission of contagious diseases such as the plague was as if they were respiratory. Practices now familiar in a COVID-affected world, such as the self-isolation of households when one member falls ill, and the banning of mass gatherings, were commonplace in the era of plague. From 1563, for example, individuals in plague-affected households were

⁸⁹ Howard Phillips, "'17, '18, '19: religion and science in three pandemics, 1817, 1918, and 2019', *Journal of Global History* 15:3 (2020), p. 435.

ordered not to attend church for a fortnight after the occurrence of symptoms.⁹⁰ From as early as the 14th century doctors warned against attending communal worship as a potentially high-risk environment for transmission of disease yet, historically, spikes in disease also coincide with greater church attendance and of pilgrimage.⁹¹ More recently, studies repeatedly show that the life-transforming onset of acute or chronic illness is a powerful factor in the decision to connect or reconnect with the Church.⁹² Then as now, people seek the comfort of the Church at times of great distress.

Communion and Communal Worship

It may feel as though the historic practices of the Church have been met with a new threat in the shape of COVID-19. Yet the manner and mode of worship in the contemporary parish church is in many ways more regular and communal than at any point in its previous history. Although it is often assumed that there was a 'golden age' of widespread church attendance in England, apart from short periods of revival in the mid-nineteenth century congregations at most parish churches outside of the key feasts at Easter and Christmas have historically often been small and sporadic.⁹³ Until the nineteenth century Holy Communion or Eucharist was only rarely offered or taken more than monthly, and for most only once a year at Easter.⁹⁴ The sharing of the cup, a key concern for the modern Church, was less central to the everyday religion of Anglicans in past centuries.

There is a common idea that the medieval Church's restriction of wine to the priest alone from the late twelfth century was a response to the outbreak of plague, yet there is little evidence for this causality. Instead it reflected medieval ideas about the mystery of the sacrament, fears over the risk of spilling or irreverent treatment of the consecrated wine, and a desire to enable more frequent communion by minimising the outlay that would be needed on wine, especially in areas such as England where it was more scarce.⁹⁵

Following the Reformation, although the Sacrament Act 1547 appears to allow for the provision of communion in one kind only, or at least gives Parliamentary assent to such, prior to the 21st century the Church itself made no pronouncements on the restriction of one or both kinds of Communion during outbreaks of disease. Indeed, Article 30 of the 39 Articles, composed in 1563 and entirely retained for the 1571

⁹⁰ Charles Creighton, *A History of Epidemics in Britain* (Cambridge, 1891), i, p. 316.

⁹¹ Ben Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines of Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 170-80.

⁹² Leslie J. Francis and Philip Richter, *Gone For Good? Church-Leaving and Returning in the 21st Century* (Peterborough, 2007), p. 73; Richard J. Janet, 'Providence, Prayer and Cholera: The English General Fast of 1832', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 51:3 (1982), p. 305.

⁹³ Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1990* (London, 1991), pp. 40-1; Robin Gill, *The 'Empty' Church Revisited* (Farnham, 2003), pp. 2-7; Clive D. Field, 'A Shilling for Queen Elizabeth: the Era of State Regulation of Church Attendance in England 1552-1969', *Church and State* 50:2 (2008), pp. 213-53.

⁹⁴ Arnold Hunt, 'The Lord's Supper in Early Modern England', *Past and Present* 161 (1998), pp. 40-1; Gill, *'Empty' Church*, pp. 29-32; Amy Nelson Burnett, 'A Social History of Communion and the Reformation of the Eucharist', *Past and Present* 211 (2011), pp. 88-9; Judith Maltby, 'The Prayer Book and the Parish Church: From the Elizabethan Settlement to the Restoration', in *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey*, pp. 210-12.

⁹⁵ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi; The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 70-1.

issue, offers no exceptions to the offering of Communion in both kinds.⁹⁶ There has been much variation of practice at a local, parish, level, respecting changes in the Eucharistic theology of the Church over the centuries and often depending on the extent to which the 'common feast' or 'sacrifice' elements of the Eucharist were foremost in the presiding minister's understanding of the meaning of the rite. This may have included individual ministers deciding to withhold the common cup from communicants at times of particularly fierce epidemic, although the evidence points more to communicants refusing the cup for fear of infection than churches refusing to administer it. Far more common was the restriction of both kinds or the provision of communion in spirit (for which every version of the Book of Common Prayer since 1547 has allowed) to the symptomatic sick justly impeded from church attendance through self-isolation.⁹⁷

The Church since the Reformation at least has been united in affirming that pandemic disease was natural and, even if divine punishment, represented God acting through physical and secondary means rather than being an act of divine providence. As such, natural, physical preventative measures were necessary to stop it alongside spiritual remedies such as days of penitential fasting.⁹⁸ This also meant that communion was recognised as a potential source of community transmission. There have long been concerns about infected communicants passing on their sickness through the communal bread and wine, particularly by breathing on it.⁹⁹ Since the late nineteenth century numerous scientific studies have attempted to discern whether the common cup represents a vector of disease, with the overall consensus being that if symptomatic or immunocompromised people do not partake, and the cup is wiped after each communicant, the risk of transmission is very small.¹⁰⁰ In 1998 the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention stated that there had never been an outbreak of infection related to the communion cup, and a recent overview of the history of disease and the common cup in the context of COVID-19 concludes that 'the common communion cup may theoretically serve as a vehicle of transmitting infection, but the potential risk of transmission is very small. Currently, available data do not provide any support for the suggestion that the practice of sharing a common communion cup can contribute to the spread of COVID-19'.¹⁰¹

The major problem in continued provision of communal worship was, in the case of London clergy from at least the late-sixteenth century, priests deserting their parishes during plague epidemics and thus concentrating communicants in fewer and hence busier services.¹⁰² This created the circumstances for 'super-spreader' events. St Clement Danes became a focal point for a major Communion service in 1625, requiring three priests to tend to the large numbers from surrounding parishes whose

⁹⁶ George Frederick Maclear and Watkin Wynn Williams, *An Introduction to The Articles of the Church of England* (London, 1895), pp. 352-7.

⁹⁷ Michael C. Sansom, 'Liturgical Responses to (Natural) Disaster in Seventeenth-Century England' *Studia Liturgica* 19 (1989), p. 182

⁹⁸ A. Wear, 'Making us Cruel as Dogs: Plague in 16th and 17th century England', *The Lancet*, 386 (2015), p. 2475.

⁹⁹ D. Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 2000), p. 196.

¹⁰⁰ D. Anyfantakis, 'Holy Communion and Infection Transmission: A Literature Review', *Cureus* (2020) Jun;12(6):e8741

¹⁰¹ N. Spantideas et al. 'COVID-19 and Holy Communion,' *Public Health* 187 (October 2020) pp. 134-5, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2020.08.012> (open access)

¹⁰² Alan D. Dyer, 'The Influence of Bubonic Plague in England 1500-1667', *Medical History* 22 (1978), p. 325.

priests had fled to the countryside. Two of the three priests fell ill with plague shortly after, and one died.¹⁰³ In the fifteenth century, however, in Doncaster, Wakefield, Stratford-on-Avon a number of private chantry and guild chapels in the towns were repurposed as chapels-of-ease at times of plague, manned by unbeneficed clergy to provide spaces where the sick could go and do divine service, so that the other parishioners could go to their parish churches 'without danger of infection'. The same idea was pursued in Coventry and Birmingham, except there the private chapels were opened up for those who wished 'to avoid ill airs and the press' of people.¹⁰⁴ The Church showed itself adaptive in using church plant to ensure social distancing and maximising the provision of communal worship to those who wanted it.

Parish Churches: Worship and Funerals

Throughout history, many of England's churches have been forced to temporarily close their doors in response to virulent disease. Yet in most cases this was delegated to the parish priest, operating with local knowledge and responding in ways that were appropriate to local circumstances. In the 16th and 17th centuries church services were exempted from plague controls as they were essential, local, and manageable parts of the life of a community rather than potentially raucous 'public gatherings'.¹⁰⁵ Local preventative measures could even enhance the spirit of worship in the parish. In the famous case of the 'plague village' of Eyam in 1665 the rector took the step of locking the church to prevent the communication of the disease, providing open-air services at a clearing known as Cucklett Delf to a congregation of socially-distanced family groups instead. This locally-driven initiative maintained the cohesion of the parish and added to its culture, as Cucklett Delf remains the site of annual thanksgiving services to this day.¹⁰⁶ Conversely, in 1637 the borough council of Hull ordered church services to be suspended and the church closed during an outbreak of plague. The imposition of this ruling caused something of a spiritual rupture in the town, and it took several decades for congregational numbers to recover.¹⁰⁷

In the devastating plague of 1625 Parliament called for a general penitential fast as part of prayers for relief, and the Privy Council wrote to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York asking them to instruct those in infected parishes to observe this fast in private rather than in their parish church, yet the churches themselves remained open.¹⁰⁸ As the person-to-person spread of the disease was well attested many congregants chose to stay away altogether, both in this episode and in subsequent waves including that of 1665, but the parish church continued to act as a hub for communal grieving and commemoration of the dead. Churches instituted

¹⁰³ J. Shrewsbury, *A History of Bubonic Plague in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 326-7.

¹⁰⁴ A. Kreider, *English Chantries: The Road to Dissolution* (Cambridge MA, 1979), p. 54.

¹⁰⁵ Shrewsbury, *History of Bubonic Plague*, p. 323; Cheryl Lynn Ross, 'The Plague of *The Alchemist*', *Renaissance Quarterly* 44:3 (1988), p. 447; Alice Hall, 'Plague in London; A Case Study of the Biological and Social Pressures Exerted by 300 Years of *Yersinia pestis*' (MA Thesis, Oregon State University 2008), pp. 210-15.

¹⁰⁶ William Wood, *The History and Antiquities of Eyam* (London, 1842), pp. 62-3.

¹⁰⁷ John Patten, *English Towns 1500-1700* (Folkestone, 1978), p. 210; K. J. Allison (ed.), *A History of the County of York: East Riding Volume 1, The City of Kingston-Upon-Hull* (London, 1969), p. 100.

¹⁰⁸ *Acts of the Privy Council 1625-1626* (London, 1934), pp. 127-8; Shrewsbury, *History of Bubonic Plague*, p. 323.

congregational distancing measures during services for those who still wished to attend, and acted between service times as centres of welfare organisation and distribution and providers of counselling.¹⁰⁹ Funeral processions were prohibited, but burials continued to take place in parish churchyards, highlighting the importance of families being able to commemorate individuals: the idea of the unmarked mass grave 'plague pit' is largely a myth in England.¹¹⁰ It was, subsequently, one of the prides of London and its clergy that the churches had resisted calls to close and had been so visible in supporting their communities.¹¹¹

More recently, contrasts can be drawn in the responses of churches in America and England to the 1918 Spanish Flu. In Philadelphia and other hard-hit cities churches prohibited funeral services for influenza victims, who were instead allowed open-air rites with only the immediate adult family present. Subsequent analysis has noted the devastating effect this had on communities and their relationship to the Church, as the pain of the loss of family was coupled with an inability to fulfil responsibilities to their loved ones after death, or to grieve with the support of Church and community.¹¹² In England, conversely, with the country experiencing the devastating after-effects of the mass loss of life in the First World War, churches not only remained open but ministry became more relaxed about the commemoration of the dead in response to immediate public and community needs.¹¹³ This in turn may have helped to mitigate the deleterious effects on faith of the horrors of the First World War and the subsequent pandemic, resulting in a palpable if less easily definable centring of the place of the established Church at the heart of national and communal life and memory.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

It is only in the last century that the Church of England has not had to deal with the problem of communicable deadly disease as part of its balance of risk and reward. The history of lay interaction with the church as a place of refuge and comfort indicates that it is at these times of peril when access is needed most. Churches and the clergy who serve them have throughout these times displayed the adaptability to local circumstances which is most needful, while an understanding that the practices of the Church can change to meet extraordinary circumstances has contributed much to its continued dynamism.

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¹⁰⁹ Richelle Munkhoff, 'Poor Women and Parish Public Health in Sixteenth-Century London', *Renaissance Studies* 28:4 (2014), pp. 579-80.

¹¹⁰ Virginia Harding, 'Burial of the Plague Dead in Early Modern London' in J. Champion (ed.), *Epidemic Disease in London* (London, 1993), pp. 53-64.

¹¹¹ Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (J. M. Dent: London, 1900) pp. 262-3

¹¹² Nancy K. Bristow, *American Pandemic: The Lost Worlds of the 1918 Influenza Epidemic* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 52-3.

¹¹³ W. S. F. Pickering, *Anglo-Catholicism: A Study in Religious Ambiguity* (London, 1991), pp. 46-7.

¹¹⁴ Clive D. Field, *Periodizing Secularization: Religious Allegiance and Attendance in Britain, 1880-1945* (Oxford, 2019), pp. 175-214; Hastings, *History of English Christianity*, pp. 80-1.

APPENDIX 5: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Survey 1 Questions

Church Clergy and Staff:

- 1) What is your role? [Open text]
- 2) Which of the following have you been able to provide for your congregation(s) and community during lockdown? Tick any number...
 - a) Online worship and teaching
 - b) Online prayer/pastoral support
 - c) Resources for home learning
 - d) Community care e.g. foodbanks
 - e) Contacting isolated and vulnerable people
 - f) Telephone befriending
 - g) Shopping for those in need
 - h) Socially-distanced visits
 - i) Activities for children and young people
- 3) Was there anything you wanted to provide but could not? What were the obstacles [Open text]
- 4) Has your relationship with the following groups changed as a result of lockdown? Tick any number...
 - a) Congregation
 - b) Wider community
 - c) Volunteers
- 5) Please provide details of these changes in relation to the groups you have ticked above. [Open text]
- 6) What did you lose during lockdown that you want to regain? What newly-developed approaches to caring for your congregation/ community do you want to take forward? [Open text]
- 7) Has the enforced period of closure of your buildings had an impact on maintenance and incidents of heritage crime?
 - a) No
 - b) Yes (please provide details)
- 8) If you have provided online worship, did you offer an opportunity for attendees to give financially?
 - a) No
 - b) Yes
- 9) If yes, how much income did you receive on average per service?
 - a) £1-50
 - b) £51-100

- c) £101-200
- d) £201-300
- e) £300+

- 10) As restrictions ease, what are your priorities in reaching out to and caring for your community, congregations, volunteers, and visitors? [Open text]
- 11) If a second wave brings the re-imposition of some restrictions, what have you learned that could help inform priorities and responses locally and nationally? [Open text]

Church members and volunteers

- 1) Which of the following events and activities provided by your local church/cathedral did you usually attend before COVID-19? Tick any number
 - a) Sunday worship
 - b) Fellowship/prayer group
 - c) Regular social group or event (e.g. coffee mornings, lunches, toddler groups, markets)
 - d) Seasonal services (e.g. Christmas, Easter, Harvest, Remembrance)
 - e) Activities for children and young people
 - f) Other (please specify)
- 2) How much, and in what ways, have you continued to feel a part of a church and/or volunteer community since lockdown? [Open text]
- 3) Which of the following has your church provided since lockdown?
 - a) Online worship and teaching
 - b) Online prayer/pastoral support
 - c) Resources for home learning
 - d) Community care e.g. foodbanks
 - e) Telephone calls
 - f) Help with shopping
 - g) Socially-distanced visits
 - h) Printed updates/cards
 - i) Other (please specify)
- 4) Which activities have helped most in keeping you connected to your church/cathedral community? Could you briefly explain why? [Open text]
- 5) Which of the following have you missed most as a result of not being able to access church/cathedral buildings?
 - a) Enjoying a peaceful, safe space
 - b) Quiet reflection
 - c) Praying or leaving a prayer request
 - d) Finding comfort
 - e) Remembering someone who is ill or who has died
 - f) Lighting a candle
 - g) Funerals and memorial service
 - h) Welcoming visitors
- 6) Do you have any specific roles at your church/cathedral or help out in any capacity? (e.g. Churchwarden, serve coffee, supporting community activities)

- a) No
 - b) Yes. Briefly describe what you do...
- 7) COVID-19 has had a significant impact on many people's routines. In light of this, are you expecting to continue in your role(s)?
- a) N/A
 - b) Yes
 - c) No
- 8) Please describe some of your needs as a church/cathedral member as restrictions lift. [Open text]
- 9) If restrictions are re-imposed (e.g. due to a second wave), are there more things churches/cathedrals could do to help you (and others) stay connected? [Open text]
- 10) What would you (and others) miss most if your church/cathedral was forced to close permanently? [Open text]

General Public

- 1) Has the closure of church/cathedral buildings during lockdown affected your use of the following? Tick any number...
- a) Community activities (e.g. coffee mornings, lunches)
 - b) Community facilities (shop, post office, launderette, parcel drop-off)
 - c) Food banks
 - d) Mums and toddlers' group
 - e) Activities for Children and Young People
 - f) Funerals and memorial services
 - g) Other (please specify)
- 2) Which of these restrictions have affected you most? Could you briefly explain why? [Open text]
- 3) In times of difficulty, loss and struggle, many people use church/cathedral buildings as helpful spaces. During the pandemic, might you have wanted to use a church/cathedral for the following? Tick any that apply...
- a) Enjoying a peaceful, safe place
 - b) Experiencing beauty
 - c) Finding a new sense of perspective
 - d) Quiet reflection
 - e) Praying or leaving a prayer request
 - f) Finding comfort
 - g) Remembering someone who is ill or who has died
 - h) Lighting a candle
- 4) Which would have been most important to you? Could you briefly explain why? [Open text]
- 5) What are the most helpful things churches and cathedrals could offer the wider community as they reopen? [Open text]
- 6) Would you have any anxieties about accessing these?
- a) No
 - b) Yes

- 7) Do you normally attend any of the following special services or events held in a church/cathedral building?
 - a) Christmas
 - b) Easter
 - c) Harvest
 - d) Remembrance
 - e) Weddings
 - f) Baptisms
 - g) Other (please specify)
- 8) Which aspect of these services would you miss the most if COVID-19 restrictions mean they cannot take place as usual? [Open text]
- 9) What should church and cathedral priorities be in the event of a second wave? [Open text]
- 10) What would you (and others) miss most if your local church/cathedral was forced to close permanently? [Open text]

Survey 2

All

- 1) If you attend a church/cathedral, which denomination or group best describes that church? If you do not attend, which denomination or group best describes the church/cathedral with which you have the most frequent interaction?
 - a) Baptist
 - b) Catholic
 - c) Church of England
 - d) Congregational
 - e) Independent/Free Evangelical Church (e.g. FIEC)
 - f) Lutheran
 - g) Methodist
 - h) Moravian
 - i) New Churches (e.g. Icthus, New Frontiers, Vineyard)
 - j) Orthodox Churches (e.g. Coptic, Greek, Russian)
 - k) Pentecostal (e.g. Assemblies of God, Elim, RCCG)
 - l) Plymouth Brethren
 - m) Presbyterian
 - n) Religious Society of Friends/Quaker
 - o) Salvation Army
 - p) Unitarian
 - q) United Reformed Church
 - r) Don't know
 - s) Other (please specify)

Priest/Minister/Pastor/Lay Minister or Staff Member

- 2) What are the main support needs that have emerged in your local community since the start of the first lockdown? Select up to 6 options.
 - a) Support for those struggling with social isolation/loneliness
 - b) Support for people suffering with mental health issues/anxiety
 - c) Support for people in financial difficulties/poverty
 - d) Support for victims of domestic violence/abuse
 - e) Access to public spaces for socialising/meeting others
 - f) In person access to Christian collective worship or other church activities
 - g) Access to spaces of spiritual reflection/comfort/hope
 - h) Access to church buildings as sites of beauty, shared heritage and culture
 - i) Ability to participate in life events/rites of passage (weddings, graduations, etc.)
 - j) Provision of toddler/pre-school groups and/or parenting support
 - k) Provision for children/youth
 - l) Support and care services for the elderly
 - m) Support for bereavement/grief (including funerals)
 - n) Access to technology/technological support
 - o) Other (please provide details)
- 3) How have the restrictions on the use of church/cathedral buildings and the community activities they host/provide (e.g. health and safety guidance, interaction with others, track and trace etc.) affected the issues you selected above? [Open text]
- 4) What new/continuing support services have you/your church/cathedral been able to offer during the pandemic in order to address these needs? Please provide details [Open text]
- 5) Which of the following restrictions placed on church/cathedral communities and buildings (listed below alphabetically) have most affected your own wellbeing since the beginning of the first lockdown? Select up to 6 options.
 - a) Cancellation of major events/festivals
 - b) Closure of children's/youth groups
 - c) Closure of parent/toddler groups
 - d) Closure/reduction of other community groups/facilities (e.g. cafés/food banks/Post Offices/shops etc. operated by/from churches)
 - e) Closure of provision for the elderly
 - f) Inability to interact in person socially with others
 - g) Lack of access to church buildings to pray, reflect, or as places of pilgrimage
 - h) Lack of ability to enjoy church buildings as sites of shared heritage and culture
 - i) Lack of individual pastoral support
 - j) Lack of in person shared spiritual experience
 - k) Loss of contact with people from my ethnic/cultural background
 - l) Restrictions on/changes to usual worship services
 - m) Restrictions on communal singing
 - n) Restrictions on funerals (or similar ceremonies)
 - o) Restrictions on participation in the sacraments

- p) Restrictions on celebration of major festivals
 - q) Restrictions on weddings (or similar ceremonies)
 - r) My wellbeing has not been affected by the restrictions on churches/cathedrals
- 6) Are there any additional initiatives that you would like to offer during the pandemic and to support the long term recovery of your community? Please provide details. [Open text]
- 7) What support (listed alphabetically) do you need from government/national church bodies/other sources in order to support your church and local communities in the upcoming phases? Please tick all that apply.
- a) Financial support for building repairs/maintenance/rent
 - b) Financial support for community projects
 - c) Financial support for staffing
 - d) Financial support to improve facilities (e.g. kitchens, toilets)
 - e) Guidance/training for improving community engagement
 - f) Guidance/training for partnering with other organisations
 - g) Guidance/training for recruiting/maintaining volunteers
 - h) Improved health and safety guidance
 - i) Pastoral/counselling support for church leaders/staff
 - j) Sharing of creative mission/ministry ideas
 - k) Support for churches as community hubs by national government
 - l) Technical guidance/training for online provision
 - m) Other (please provide details)

Church Member and/or Volunteer

- 8) What are the main support needs that have emerged in your local community since the start of the first lockdown? Select up to 6 options.
- a) Support for those struggling with social isolation/loneliness
 - b) Support for people suffering with mental health issues/anxiety
 - c) Support for people in financial difficulties/poverty
 - d) Support for victims of domestic violence/abuse
 - e) Access to public spaces for socialising/meeting others
 - f) In person access to Christian collective worship or other church activities
 - g) Access to spaces of spiritual reflection/comfort/hope
 - h) Access to church buildings as sites of beauty, shared heritage and culture
 - i) Ability to participate in life events/rites of passage (weddings, graduations, etc.)
 - j) Provision of toddler/pre-school groups and/or parenting support
 - k) Provision for children/youth
 - l) Support and care services for the elderly
 - m) Support for bereavement/grief (including funerals)
 - n) Access to technology/technological support
 - o) Other (please provide details)
- 9) How have the restrictions on the use of church/cathedral buildings and the community activities they host/provide (e.g. health and safety guidance, interaction

with others, track and trace etc.) affected the issues you selected above? [Open text]

- 10) Have you personally participated in any new/maintained support services that your church/cathedral has offered during the pandemic in order to address these needs? Tick as many as are applicable and provide further details if you wish.
- Yes, as a volunteer
 - Yes, as a participant
 - My church has offered responses, but I have not participated in them
 - As far as I am aware, the church has not offered any responses
- 11) Are there any additional support services that you would like your church/cathedral to offer during the pandemic and to support long term recovery of your community? [Open text]
- 12) Which of the following restrictions placed on church/cathedral communities and buildings (listed below alphabetically) have most affected your own wellbeing since the beginning of the first lockdown? Select up to 6 options.
- Cancellation of major events/festivals
 - Closure of children's/youth groups
 - Closure of parent/toddler groups
 - Closure/reduction of other community groups/facilities (e.g. cafés/food banks/Post Offices/shops etc. operated by/from churches)
 - Closure of provision for the elderly
 - Inability to interact in person socially with others
 - Lack of access to church buildings to pray, reflect, or as places of pilgrimage
 - Lack of ability to enjoy church buildings as sites of shared heritage and culture
 - Lack of individual pastoral support
 - Lack of in person shared spiritual experience
 - Loss of contact with people from my ethnic/cultural background
 - Restrictions on/changes to usual worship services
 - Restrictions on communal singing
 - Restrictions on funerals (or similar ceremonies)
 - Restrictions on participation in the sacraments
 - Restrictions on celebration of major festivals
 - Restrictions on weddings (or similar ceremonies)
- 13) Since the beginning of lockdown, what do you believe are the main challenges (listed alphabetically) faced by your church/cathedral community? Please tick up to 5.
- Building maintenance
 - Financial difficulties/loss of income
 - Following government/national church body/other guidance
 - Inability to provide/maintain vital groups/services
 - Lack of or outdated facilities (e.g. kitchens, toilets)
 - Leadership/staff stress and mental health
 - Maintaining personal relationships with community/congregation
 - Offering online/digital worship and other provision

- i) Other (please provide details)
- j) Retaining volunteers
- k) Sustaining congregational engagement

General Public

- 14) Which of the following describe your religion or faith?
- a) Christian (including any Christian denomination)
 - b) Not religious/I don't have a religion or faith
 - c) Other religion or faith (please specify)
 - d) Muslim
 - e) Jewish
 - f) Hindu
 - g) Buddhist
 - h) Sikh
- 15) What are the main support needs that have emerged in your local community since the start of the first lockdown? Select up to 6 options.
- a) Support for those struggling with social isolation/loneliness
 - b) Support for people suffering with mental health issues/anxiety
 - c) Support for people in financial difficulties/poverty
 - d) Support for victims of domestic violence/abuse
 - e) Access to public spaces for socialising/meeting others
 - f) In person access to Christian collective worship or other church activities
 - g) Access to spaces of spiritual reflection/comfort/hope
 - h) Access to church buildings as sites of beauty, shared heritage and culture
 - i) Ability to participate in life events/rites of passage (weddings, graduations, etc.)
 - j) Provision of toddler/pre-school groups and/or parenting support
 - k) Provision for children/youth
 - l) Support and care services for the elderly
 - m) Support for bereavement/grief (including funerals)
 - n) Access to technology/technological support
 - o) Other (please provide details)
- 16) How have the restrictions on the use of church/cathedral buildings and the community activities they host/provide (e.g. health and safety guidance, interaction with others, track and trace etc.) affected the issues you selected above? [Open text]
- 17) Which of the following restrictions placed on church/cathedral communities and buildings (listed below alphabetically) have most affected your own wellbeing since the beginning of the first lockdown? Select up to 6 options.
- a) Cancellation of major events/festivals
 - b) Closure of children's/youth groups
 - c) Closure of parent/toddler groups
 - d) Closure/reduction of other community groups/facilities (e.g. cafés/food banks/Post Offices/shops etc. operated by/from churches)

- e) Closure of provision for the elderly
 - f) Inability to interact in person socially with others
 - g) Lack of access to church buildings to pray, reflect, or as places of pilgrimage
 - h) Lack of ability to enjoy church buildings as sites of shared heritage and culture
 - i) Lack of individual pastoral support
 - j) Lack of in person shared spiritual experience
 - k) Loss of contact with people from my ethnic/cultural background
 - l) Restrictions on/changes to usual worship services
 - m) Restrictions on communal singing
 - n) Restrictions on funerals (or similar ceremonies)
 - o) Restrictions on participation in the sacraments
 - p) Restrictions on celebration of major festivals
 - q) Restrictions on weddings (or similar ceremonies)
 - r) My wellbeing has not been affected by the restrictions on churches/cathedrals
- 18) Have you personally participated in any new/maintained support services that your church/cathedral has offered during the pandemic in order to address these needs? Tick as many as are applicable and provide further details if you wish.
- a) Yes, as a volunteer
 - b) Yes, as a participant
 - c) My church has offered responses, but I have not participated in them
 - d) As far as I am aware, the church has not offered any responses
- 19) What more do you believe local churches/cathedrals could offer to your wider community, both as the pandemic continues and in the long term as communities recover? [Open text]
- 20) How has your opinion of your local church/cathedral's contribution to the community changed since the beginning of the first lockdown? Select the most relevant option and provide additional details if you wish.
- a) It has remained the same
 - b) It has diminished
 - c) It has improved
- 21) To what extent has your opinion of the value of church/cathedral buildings changed since the beginning of the first lockdown? Select the most relevant option and provide additional details if you wish.
- a) It has remained the same
 - b) It has improved
 - c) It has diminished