THE CHURCH

OF ENGLAND

**DIOCESE OF WINCHESTER**

**DIOCESAN REGISTRY**

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

# How does this affect my parish church?

The government’s response to the outbreak of Coronavirus is changing rapidly. This brief note is intended to help parishes to think through some of the immediate legal consequences of the current situation.

This note is *not* intended to replace the extension [guidance](https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches) available from the Church of England. Information available there is not repeated here.

Reference to a Rule in this document is a reference to the Church Representation Rules 2020.

# Regular Services

**All regular services can and should now be suspended**.

While there has been some confusion this week, the Archbishops have clarified in a [letter to all clergy](https://www.lawandreligionuk.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/200319-Ad-Clerum-from-Archbishops.pdf) that *all* public worship should cease. The incumbent and “one or two others” may gather daily to pray or to celebrate Holy Communion on behalf of the community, but “**this is not public worship by other means**”.

In accordance with the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer, it is **not permitted for a priest to celebrate Holy Communion alone** in the Church of England.

The Archbishops have also clarified that **worship outside** is also included in the suspension of all public worship. (It is worth noting that, in any event, Holy Communion must take place “in a consecrated building,” unless otherwise permitted by the Bishop - Canon B 40. Similarly, marriages can normally only take place in an authorised building – The Marriage Act 1949).

# Weddings

With public worship now suspended, it is **not possible to** **call banns** or to complete the calling of banns. It is *not* possible to call banns by written notice, in a live-streamed service or by posting online. You will need to apply for a **common licence**. Contact the Diocesan Registry (see below) for details.

A marriage must take place **within 3 months of the completion of the calling of banns**. If the wedding is postponed, banns will need to be called again, or a common licence applied for.

**Parochial church** **fees are due when the office is performed**. If the calling of banns has not been completed, the fee should be refunded. If a service needs to be postponed or cancelled, the fees are not due until it takes place.

# Annual Parochial Church Meetings (Part 9, Section A of the Church Representation Rules 2020), and

# Meetings of parishioners to elect Churchwardens (Churchwardens Measure 2001)

APCMs (which elect lay representatives on the PCC and Deanery Synod representative) and meetings of parishioners (which elect churchwardens) are usually held around this time of year, and must normally be held by **31 May** (Rule M1(1), s.4(1) Churchwardens Measure 2001).

The **Bishop has now extended the deadline for both meetings to 31 October 2020**. (Rule 78, section 10 Churchwardens Measure 2001). There are no provisions for these meetings to be held **by correspondence, digitally or “virtually**” and it would be **invalid** to attempt to do so. They can and should now be postponed.

In due course **notice of the new date** will need to be given in the usual way (Rule M2, s.5 Churchwardens Measure 2001).

# Meetings of the PCC

There is no longer a requirement for PCCs to meeting for a minimum number of meetings each year. They need only to hold “**sufficient meetings to enable the efficient transaction of its business**” (Rule M23(1)).

It *is* possible to hold **PCC meetings “virtually**” using video conferencing technology.[[1]](#footnote-1) Extra care should be taken to ensure that all members are able to join in and participate. Ensure you are catering for those without technical knowledge and internet access, and check that the chosen conferencing software is stable and reliable.

It may be convenient for PCCs to conduct some essential **business by correspondence** - see Rule M29 for the procedure. Don’t forget to report to the next meeting of the PCC about any business conducted in this way (Rule M29(3)).

The **Standing Committee** of the PCC also has powers to conduct the business of the PCC between meetings – but this should not replace normal PCC discussions and deliberations. See Rule M31 for limitations and restrictions.

# Annual financial statements

Audited annual financial statements should be **approved by the PCC** – Rule M5(6). If the PCC isn’t meeting at the moment, it can nonetheless approve them by **correspondence** (see above).

Once approved and signed by the Chair of the PCC, the financial statements should be **published** – Rule M5(7). This can be done **electronically** – Rule M5(7)(a).

A copy of the financial statements should be **sent to the Secretary to the Diocesan Board of Finance** within 28 days of the APCM – Rule M5(8). As most APCMs are now delayed, this may not happen for some time.

It is worth noting that APCMs do not need to approve the financial statements or vote on them. They are simply “**provided**” so that the meeting can “**discuss**” them – Rule M5(1)(c).

# Electoral Roll revisions

A **revision of the electoral roll is required every year** – Rule 3(1). If a revision is due, this should take place as normal, following the procedure set out in Rules 3 – 5.

A **report on the electoral roll** should be made to the next APCM, whenever that now meets – Rule M5(1)(a). Again, this report is provided for discussion only (see above).

It is *likely* that it will be impossible to comply with Rule 10: this rule requires the appropriate person to **report the number of names on the electoral roll** as at the date of the APCM *no later than 1 July*. Most APCMs will not have taken place before 1 July. While this has not been directly addressed by the national Church at the moment, it is probably sensible to report the number of names on the electoral roll on the *originally* *intended* date of the APCM.

# Can we help?

Need some more advice? Contact the Diocesan Registry by telephone on 01722 432390 or e-mail us at registry@battbroadbent.co.uk

23 March 2020

1. A discussion of some of the legal issues involved in available on the [Law and Religion UK](https://www.lawandreligionuk.com/2020/03/22/virtual-pcc-meetings-and-other-coronavirus-related-issues/#more-56630) blog. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)