**Coronavirus - Pastoral Visiting Policy**

Thank you to all those who take time to visit others in the church. Your support is so valued, particularly during these current days of the pandemic.

With the relaxation of Government restrictions, it is still important that we maintain safe practices when visiting people on behalf of NLC. Above all, we have a duty of care towards those who are vulnerable because of sickness or frailty. We must take full responsibility for our own actions so that we minimise the risk we present to those we are caring for. We must not presume that we are above the risks associated with being in contact with others.

1. **Visiting Residential Homes etc**

Care homes, Residential homes and Hospital visits are now possible under certain circumstances, but please contact them first to check on the regulations and abide by them. Be aware that residents have family members who may wish to avail themselves of limited visiting slots. Please contact the family beforehand to check if these restrictions apply. If in doubt, contact Karen beforehand.

1. **Visiting People in their homes**

There is no specific guidance from the government about pastoral visiting, beyond the fact that the government are recommending that home communion does not take place (though see 13 below). However, we do recommend that all social distancing guidance be followed.

Please always bear in mind that you could be carrying Covid-19 but not have any symptoms. You should be aiming to reduce the risk to all parties to the lowest possible reasonably practicable level.

The following points are offered as issues that you should consider as you assess the risk.

1. **Your own circumstances and health.** If you have any symptoms or you are shielding, or someone in your home is self-isolating due to having symptoms, or shielding, you should not engage in pastoral visits.
2. **The circumstances and health of the person you will visit.** You will need to consider the circumstances of the individual you are visiting. Do not visit if they are self-isolating because they or someone else in the household has symptoms, or they have been told by the NHS to self-isolate. Do not visit if they or someone else are shielding.
3. **Is it necessary to visit them in their home?** If there are appropriate alternative ways of enabling a pastoral conversation to take place such as phone or video calls, or meeting in their garden or another outdoor space, then these options should be followed. For those who are clinically extremely vulnerable it will only be appropriate to visit indoors if they are dying (in last days or hours) of a non-Covid-19 related condition.
4. **Contacting them before you visit.** Make sure that the person (or their supporter) is actually wanting you to come into their home, and aware of the potential risks.
   1. Explain that you will need to social distance, which means they (or another person) will need to open the door and then move away from it before you come in and that you will follow them.
   2. Explore whether you will be able to sit more than 2 metres apart.
   3. Tell them that you will only be able to stay for a short period of time.
   4. Ask them to have windows open in room you will meet in if possible.
5. **Hygiene.** You should make sure that you have hand gel which you use before and after entering the house. While it’s good practice to also wash your hands, on arrival and departure, this may not be possible. Make sure you have tissues with you in case you cough or sneeze. Cough into your elbow if you have no tissue. Your used tissues should be taken with you when you leave and then safely binned.
6. **Avoid Transmission.** Do not touch anything you don’t have to such as door handles and handrails. Don’t borrow items such as a pen or share other objects such as a bible. Try not to put anything of yours down on a surface, e.g. keep a bible in your hand or lap.
7. **Maintaining Social Distancing.** It may prove extremely difficult to maintain the 2m distance due to the size and layout of a house. It may also be difficult to maintain the distance as the person you are visiting may struggle to accept the need to do so. Avoid face to face contact (less than 2m) with those who are clinically vulnerable, which includes over 70s. If this is not possible then you should consider using a simple non-surgical face covering, while recognising that the evidence suggests the effect of doing this is small, so do not assume it makes you or the other party safe. It is better to sit to the side of person as far apart as possible, rather than face to face if 2m distance cannot be maintained.
8. **Length of visit.** Visits should be kept to a minimum length. The track and trace threshold of 15 mins at 2m distance indicates that the longer the visit the greater the risk of transmission.
9. **Meeting in the garden.** Make sure that you follow the above guidance for the entire time you are on their premises.
10. **After the visit.** Clean the outside of anything you’ve taken into the house and which has been placed on a surface, e.g. bible, mobile phone.
11. **Frequency of visits.** You will need to think carefully about who you visit and how many different people you visit. The last thing you want to do is become a super spreader around your congregation. Don’t go from house to house but space out any visits you have to make over a number of days, so that you reduce the number of people you could infect before symptoms develop.
12. **Other Options.** Please consider options such as phone/video calls, letters and cards. Don’t shy away from praying for the person over the phone. Some are wary of praying for others in this way as if the medium devalues the intimacy of pastoral prayer. Yet this offer of prayer might be vital to their spiritual well-being at that moment.
13. **Communion.** If you wish to provide communion, you should use the sealed and disposable cups and wafers that are available in the church building. You should thoroughly clean the surfaces of the containers before passing them on to others.
14. **Records.** Please keep a record of who you have visited – times, dates, length of visit. This might become important if anyone in your social network becomes ill with Covid-19 for “Track and Trace” purposes.
15. **Concerns arising from your visit.** Please notify Karen if there are any pastoral concerns that come up during your visit that she may not be aware of.

Again, thank you for all you do to show pastoral concern for those in and outside of the church family.