

Lone Working Guidance

This guidance covers various situations where staff or volunteers may find themselves undertaking church business on their own: in the church, in the office, or when visiting people in their own homes.

Working alone in church

The church is generally a safe place, and we have had little trouble over the years. BUT there are always a few people around in town who are not in a good place mentally (or are drunk or on drugs), and you could easily find one of them in the building when it is open to the public.

Do you need to work alone?

1. If you can, arrange for someone else to be with you when you need to go into the church to do a job.
2. Please carry a mobile phone with you.

Who knows you are there?

3. If you will be on your own, make sure that someone knows where you are, what you are doing and for how long you expect to be there. Someone in your own household is best, as they will be aware of your movements.

If not, you could ask a friend to check on you if you don't call them after a set time.

4. If you are in the church for a long time, let your 'minder' know all is well every couple of hours or agree a time to call each other.
5. On leaving the premises, let your 'minder' know you are safe.

Check if anyone is present

6. If you are on your own and are staying for more than a couple of minutes, have a look around the church to see if anyone else is present. If they are, and you feel uncomfortable, leave the building and come back later.

Lock yourself in

7. If you are a keyholder, and are staying for some time, consider locking yourself into the building, especially if you are working somewhere away from the exit.
8. If you are not a keyholder and need to stay for a while, make sure you know where all the open exits are situated.

If your route to the main door is blocked for some reason, you can throw the bolts on the door into the churchyard, next to the servery. Practice this if you haven't done it before.

Work safely

9. Don't go up a ladder more than three steps (chair seat height). Don't stand on a table to get round this rule.
10. Don't do anything that could cause an accident. An electric drill should not be an issue but avoid using anything more powerful.

Locking up

11. Plan not to leave when it is late and fewer people will be around. If you need to leave in the dark, and have a key to the hall door, go out that way.

The general rule is to reduce risk as far as possible, by thinking about what you are doing.

Locking up the church at the end of the day

The church is left open whenever we can. This means it is normally unattended and care must be exercised when locking up in case there is someone inside.

1. If you can get someone to go with you to lock up, please do so.
2. Take a mobile phone with you.
3. On entering the church, pull the outside door closed, but don't lock it. That will reduce the risk of anyone entering behind you, while still allowing anyone inside to leave.
4. Pause quietly for a while behind the back row of chairs; look around and listen for anyone in the building.
5. If it is dark inside, turn on the main nave lights ("back four" on the switch panel).
6. Someone might be in the Side Chapel or chancel. Walk through those spaces to check that you aren't going to lock them in. If the door into the outer vestry from the chancel is open, glance inside – you may find another lone worker!
7. If someone is sitting quietly and hasn't noticed you, don't surprise them. If they don't respond to a polite cough, try turning on a light in the area. Give them a minute or so to respond, then politely announce, from a distance, that the church will be closing in a few minutes time. If they still do not respond, leave and call for assistance. Don't try to rouse them on your own.
8. When leaving, check that the door to the corridor is locked, then leave the church locking both doors behind you. After turning off all lights, of course.

Working alone in the office

The office is generally a safer place to work because you can lock yourself in. But there are times when there are meetings in the church or the halls with the outside doors open and members of the public can walk in. Very occasionally a homeless person might come in and demand food or money, so we need to be aware of this possibility.

1. Unless there is a meeting in the halls, keep the outer door to the car park on the latch, so you have control over the door from within the office.
2. Unless there is a meeting in the church (which might need access to the toilets), keep the door at the end of the corridor locked.
3. During office opening hours, keep both of the above doors closed, and let people in on demand using the intercom and the door release button in the office.
4. Whenever you are in the office, turn on the CCTV system so you can see what people are doing in the corridor. The CCTV is there for that purpose.
5. If there is any sign of trouble, lock the office door.
6. If someone suspicious approaches the office unexpectedly, flick the top latch on the office door. Don't waste time fumbling for the key. The latch is there for such eventualities.
7. If you need to leave the office to go into another part of the building that is open to the public at that time, take the administrator's emergency lanyard with you. The button on that device will trigger the alarm system.
8. If an emergency develops, call 111 (or 999 if the perpetrator looks to be violent).

Visiting adults alone in their homes

Visiting adults in their homes is an essential element of many church officers' roles. The Church of England defines a church officer as "anyone appointed by or on behalf of the Church to a post or role, whether they are ordained or lay, paid or unpaid."

Many parishioners will be well known to the church officer and where there have been no previous concerns the level of risk to the church officer or parishioner during visits will usually be low. However, unexpected circumstances can be encountered, some of which may place a church officer at risk. For example, the unexpected presence in the home of a relative or friend with a history of violence or threatening behaviour. Unfortunately, case histories also show that a parishioner may be at risk from a church officer. For these reasons it is very important to ensure that church officers and parishioners are as safe as they can be, and that there is accountability and transparency in the manner in which church officers engage in lone working or visits to homes.

To assure the person you are visiting of their safety, and for your own safety as a church officer:

1. Undertake a risk assessment before an initial visit, especially if you do not know the person – use the Home Visiting Risk Assessment Checklist – appended below. If you have any concerns after completing the assessment, consider whether the visit is necessary, or whether you should be accompanied. **Visiting in pairs is advisable where the person is perceived to be vulnerable or confused.**
2. Do not call unannounced; call by appointment, if appropriate telephoning the person just before visiting.
3. Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return.
4. If the person you are visiting doesn't know you, take identification with you (photographic if possible), or a note of introduction from the church.
5. Be clear about what support you can offer and the purpose and limitations of any pastoral care/support that is available.
6. Do not make referrals to any agency that could provide help without the adult's permission, and ideally encourage them to set up the contact, unless there are safeguarding concerns.
7. Never offer 'over-the-counter' remedies to people on visits or administer prescribed medicines, even if asked to do so.
8. Do not accept any gifts from adults other than token items, to avoid misunderstandings or subsequent accusations from the person or their family. If someone wants to make a donation to the church, put it in an envelope, mark it on the outside as a donation and obtain a receipt from the Treasurer. Similarly, make a record of anything of value that the person may insist on passing to you for any reason, and copy this to the vicar or Parish Safeguarding Officer, for notification to a appropriate family member.
9. If appropriate and necessary, leave information about how and where you can be contacted (by telephone or email) and a central contact point for the church. Unless absolutely necessary, do not give your home address.
10. Make a note in your diary of the date of every visit. For initial visits, or if you have any concerns, report back to the Pastoral Coordinator. They will report any safeguarding concerns to the Parish Safeguarding Officer and/or vicar or directly to the DSA if they are not available.
11. If you are uncertain about what to do, seek advice from the vicar, Parish Safeguarding Officer and/or Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

Reference: CofE Parish Safeguarding Handbook

