



Events and Activities on Church Premises

Guidance for Parishes

Issued October 2026

It should be stressed at the outset **that what follows is clarification of the existing situation** regarding permissions for events and activities on church premises. This is a guidance note, not a new directive; it is not intended to impose additional bureaucracy on PCCs, simply to clarify those circumstances in which permission should be sought (or at least considered) and to identify those circumstances in which retrospective permission might be appropriate to regularise an existing use/activity.

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1. Faculty jurisdiction/canon law

The faculty jurisdiction of the Consistory Court applies to church buildings, consecrated land and churchyards, buildings on consecrated land, buildings licensed for worship, and unconsecrated land and buildings within the curtilage¹ of a church (i.e. including many church halls).

Faculty permission makes lawful something which would otherwise be unlawful. The Consistory Court will evaluate a proposal put to it against a number of factors, including legality, compliance with the doctrine of the Church of England, the heritage significance of a listed building, and any other matters that might count in favour of, or against, the proposal.

The Consistory Court has no power to authorise any use of a church building which would be positively inconsistent with the mission of the Church or which would be 'anti-canonical'. In that regard Canon F15 prohibits the use of a church for any meeting inconsistent with the sanctity of the building (profane use), and Canon F16 requires that if a church is used for a play, concert, or exhibition of films or pictures, the minister must take care that the words, music and pictures are suitable for display in the House of God.

2. Background to issue/aim of guidance

It should be stressed at the outset that what follows is clarification of the existing situation regarding permissions for events and activities on church premises. This is a guidance note, not a new directive; it is not intended to impose additional bureaucracy on PCCs, simply to clarify those circumstances in which permission should be sought (or at least considered) and to identify those circumstances in which retrospective permission might be appropriate to regularise an existing use/activity.

Churches and church halls are host to an ever-increasing number of different uses, events and activities and whilst this is certainly encouraged as a means of widening the church's mission and getting people across the threshold (as well as providing a useful income stream) there are times when a proposed use, event or activity will require faculty permission.

To date this issue has had a strongly self-regulating aspect to it, but as more parishes seek to expand the use of their buildings and new uses are found concerns have been expressed about the nature, extent and frequency of such uses and events and the fact that this previously 'relaxed' approach leaves PCCs and the wider Church exposed when things go wrong. There is a need to balance increased community and commercial use with the need

¹The "curtilage" is the area of land which forms part and parcel of the church building to which it relates.

to protect our churches from damage, profanity and loss of access and our parishes from exposure to reputational damage. Therefore we need to check that there is a common and clear understanding of the applicable legal and canonical principles and to find a model within which the faculty jurisdiction supports productive and responsible use of our church buildings yet at the same time avoids imposing an additional administrative burden on already stretched PCCs.

This affects all churches within the Church of England. Other dioceses are also looking at this issue to see how they might best bridge the widening gap between what the law requires and what is happening on the ground.

In our diocese the DAC, Archdeacons, the Registry and the Chancellor have given careful consideration as to how they can best support parishes without imposing yet more lists to be consulted (we already have List A, List B, and various Additional Matters Orders). Lists can be helpful but they can never cater for all the possible uses of churches and church halls as every church is different and every parish has its own particular needs and wishes. We hope that this guidance note will help rather than hinder parishes, making it clearer when faculty permission must/should be sought whilst also giving parishes more confidence in deciding which simple/low-risk uses can be carried out lawfully and easily without applying for a faculty. Its success will be kept under review and the guidance modified if deemed necessary.

3. General Faculties

Some churches may wish to offer their buildings for repeat hires, setting themselves up as e.g. concert venues or reception venues and may wish to authorise the business model rather than each individual engagement. In such cases the PCC might consider applying for a General Faculty which would authorise a raft of pre-agreed uses/events/activities for a period of 5-10 years, subject to conditions regarding hours, alcohol licensing, food hygiene, insurance, public health and safety, behaviour of guests etc. This would save the PCC from having to apply repeatedly for faculties for individual events.

4. Events/activities which will not require a faculty

Events/activities which are clearly missional or which are seen as ancillary to mission will not require a faculty. The possible uses/events/activities within this category are numerous and wide-ranging, so perhaps the simplest approach is to combine careful thought and common sense and to consider some examples (some clearly missional and others deemed ancillary to mission).

Examples:

- Coffee mornings
- Christmas Fair
- Church summer fete with Pimms tent (but see below re alcohol licences)
- Community café hosted by church
- Playgroup run by church
- Organ recital/choral evening
- Cheese & wine evening raising funds for building repairs (but see below re alcohol licences)
- Permitting church to be used as vaccination centre
- Film screening for church youth group
- Charity lunch
- Hosting foodbank, clothing bank

To help you assess the need for faculty permission, please see our [Events/Activities on Church Premises - Flowchart](#)

5. Events/activities which might require a faculty

There will be circumstances where the use/activity proposed does not clearly fall within the above list of activities requiring a faculty but where the PCC would be wise nevertheless to consider whether faculty permission should be sought. In such circumstances the PCC need to exercise their own judgement, and we would suggest that the question which PCC members should ask themselves is this:

“Does the proposed use/event/activity raise an issue in respect of which our church community might expect to be consulted?”

In other words, is the proposed use/event/activity one which should be advertised to the church community via Public Notices as part of the faculty petition process? (‘Church community’ comprising both the regular worshipping congregation and the wider parish).

Asking this question gets around the problem of defining whether the use/event/activity is “significant”, “unusual” or “controversial”, but it still needs careful thought and the PCC should take care to answer the question honestly and then note in their meeting minutes how they have had due regard to this question and how they have come to a decision.

If the PCC decides that a faculty is required then they will have some protection from any subsequent complaints because they will be able to show due process – careful thought by the PCC, consultation with the DAC, the display of Public Notices and faculty permission granted by Chancellor. It also enables the DAC/Registry to advise on matters such as whether a licence agreement should be drawn up, and whether any anticipated problems can be dealt with by the imposition of conditions on the faculty permission.

If the PCC decides that a faculty is not required, they will still have some protection from any subsequent complaints because they will be able to show that they gave the matter all due consideration and will be able to justify their decision.

But if the PCC simply presses ahead without considering whether consultation is appropriate, then they will have no protection from any subsequent complaints (with associated financial and reputational fallout²). It would be unwise to assume that no-one in the wider community will object to the proposed use/event/activity just because you have asked people in the congregation whom you know and they have not expressed any concern.

[Additional note: Canon F 16 also says no play, concert or exhibition of films or pictures shall be held in a church unless the minister has first consulted the local or other authorities concerned with the precautions against fire and other dangers required by law to be taken in the case of performances of plays, concerts etc and the authorities have confirmed the proposed arrangements are a sufficient compliance with the regulations in force.]

Examples of issues which might prompt consultation (and the need for a faculty):

- Health and safety, risk assessments, fire safety regulations, places of assembly regulations
- Security (persons and property)
- Safeguarding
- Liquor licensing and alcohol consumption
- Planning control
- Late hours/noise/nuisance/amplified music

² To see how a good news story can so easily turn bad see the case of the real ale festival at Norton St Mary, Durham: [From irrelevance to community hub](#) (in 2019) and [Anger as real ale drinkers use headstones as seats and tables as they hold beer festival in a GRAVEYARD](#) (in 2021)

- Risk of anti-social behaviour
- Sensitivity
- Use of premises by other faith groups

To help you assess the need for faculty permission, please see our [Events/Activities on Church Premises - Flowchart](#)

6. Events/activities which will require a faculty

6.1 Uses of a church which are secular in nature

Events/activities that:

- do not themselves pursue the mission of the Church
- are not ancillary to the mission of the Church

Given that the Church's mission is a wide one encompassing pastoral, social, evangelistic and ecumenical aims, there is a degree of flexibility as to what might be seen as missional/ancillary to mission. Whether the proposed use is by the minister/PCC or a third party is irrelevant – it is the nature of the use which matters.

Ultimately, every case will turn on its own facts.

Examples:

- Beer festival
- Wedding reception in church or church hall within faculty jurisdiction (for this specific scenario please see link to Legal Advisory Commission's legal opinion under 'Resources' below)
- Installation of mobile telecommunications equipment to church tower
- Post Office facility
- Village shop facility
- Arts venue (music, drama, gallery space)

6.2 Grant of a licence to a third party to use a church

The grant of a long-term licence by a PCC to a third party to use a church (or the even more legally dispositive step of entering into a tenancy agreement in respect of part of a church building) has always required faculty permission and as part of the faculty process the Diocesan Registrar will need to approve the terms of the proposed written licence or

tenancy agreement. This is as much for the PCC's protection as anything else but the process also enables the PCC to seek advice from the DAC and receive legal guidance from the Registry on matters which might not have been immediately obvious (such as insurance, health and safety, safeguarding, alcohol licencing) but which could impact on the liability of PCC members.

The problem is that the line between a use which is "significant enough for a faculty" and "too insignificant to worry about" is not set out in law – a simple one-day hire agreement is still technically a type of licence - and there is a real spectrum between churches who have long-term licence agreements (e.g. for a local play group to use the church building every Tuesday afternoon) and others which have a busy schedule of short-term hires (e.g. the church hall is available for hire for birthday parties). The challenge we face is how to identify the tipping point, paying proper attention to pragmatism and existing practices.

So:

- if you are entering into a tenancy or granting a long-term licence to a third party to use the church/church hall, you will need a faculty for that specific tenancy or licence
- if you are allowing a third party to use the church/church hall for a one-off event under a hire agreement see section 5 above 'Activities which might require a faculty'
- if you regularly hire out the church/church hall for one-off events using a standard hire agreement (e.g. birthday parties) then a general faculty might be appropriate (see section 3 above)

Examples of long-term licences:

- Licence granted to CAMRA to host beer festival annually for 5 years
- Licence granted to 3rd party to run soft play area in church as commercial enterprise
- Licence granted to 3rd party to run playgroup in church every Tuesday afternoon

6.3 Introduction/removal/alteration of items or re-orderings which support the proposed use (unless permitted by List A, List B or an AMO)

If you need to introduce equipment into the building or remove or alter items within the church to support the proposed use and that introduction/removal/alteration is not already permitted by List A, List B or an Additional Matters Order then you will need a faculty. Particular consideration should be given to any impact of the proposal on the heritage significance of the building.

Examples:

- Relocating fixed pews in church to enable beer festival to take place

- Introduction of equipment for soft play area in church
- Introduction of equipment to create Sensory Room

To help you assess the need for faculty permission, please see our [Events/Activities on Church Premises - Flowchart](#)

7. Alcohol and temporary events licensing

Please note – whether or not an event requires a faculty, if it involves the sale³ of alcohol or the provision of regulated entertainment you should also check whether an alcohol licence of any type is needed. For information on the different types of alcohol licences available and guidance on how to apply for them see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/alcohol-licensing>. The licences which you are most likely to need are:

7.1 Premises Licence

If you want to sell alcohol or offer entertainment from a particular venue on a regular basis you will need to contact your council to apply for a premises licence. See <https://www.gov.uk/find-licences/premises-licence> or contact the licensing department of your local authority for advice. For detailed guidance and application forms go to <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/premises-licence-application-forms>

7.2 Temporary Events Notice (TEN)

For the purpose of a TEN, a temporary event is a relatively small-scale event attracting fewer than 500 people and lasting no more than 168 hours, so this would be applicable if your event is a one-off. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/alcohol-licensing#temporary-events>

8. Contact

If you have any questions or concerns arising from this guidance, or if you are in any doubt as to whether your proposed event/activity requires faculty permission, please contact your Archdeacon.

³ Sale of alcohol – be aware that if you sell a ticket for an event and the ticket price includes an alcoholic drink, this constitutes the ‘sale’ of alcohol. (Example: you sell a concert admittance ticket for £5 which includes a ‘free’ glass of wine – that is the ‘sale’ of alcohol). Do not be tempted to find a way around the legislation.

9. Resources

- [Anti-social behaviour in churchyards/church premises](#) – Church of England guidance
- [Crossing the Threshold Toolkit](#) – Diocese of Hereford (January 2013)
- [Fire safety risk assessment: small and medium places of assembly](#) – Home Office guidance (August 2024)
- [Food Safety: your responsibilities](#) – Food Standards Agency
- [List A, List B and Additional Matters Orders](#)
- [PCCs: legal position of members](#) - Legal Advisory Commission opinion (January 2013)
- [Premises Licence](#)
- [Safeguarding](#)
- [Sharing your building](#) – Church of England guidance (includes legal options for complementary use of church buildings, and case studies illustrating uses)
- [Temporary Events Notice \(TEN\)](#)
- [Wedding receptions held on church premises](#) - Legal Advisory Commission opinion (March 2011)
- [Using Churches for Secular Purposes](#) – Legal Advisory Commission opinion (October 2016)

10. Flowchart

