

COVID-19 Advice on Ordinations

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The Recovery Group has been set up to support the Church of England as government guidance changes through the COVID-19 pandemic. This document has been prepared with information available by the issue date and is for planning purposes only until present restrictions are lifted. It will be kept under review and updated as the situation develops, with each update issued as a new version. The current version will always be available to download from the Church of England website via the [Coronavirus FAQs page](#).

Choosing dates for ordinations in 2020

1. Ordinations are understood to be intentionally public occasions, even if tickets are used to control numbers in modern times. They should therefore take place only when public worship in churches and cathedrals is permitted and when and where it is safe for them to take place.
2. Recent practice in the Church of England is for most ordinations to be scheduled for Petertide or Michaelmas, although those are only two of the options envisaged by Canon C 3. Any Sunday, holy day, or Ember Day will suffice.¹ It is envisaged that, in 2020, public worship may resume from 4 July *at the earliest* (the feast of Peter and Paul being on 29 June). Given that this is not a certain date, and the Government may need to delay the start of “Stage 3” of the relaxation of the lockdown arrangements, and sufficient time is needed to ensure the ordination services are appropriately planned, Michaelmas seems the earliest practical date, with All Saints the most sensible alternative. If Stage 3 is reached on 4 July, the feasts of the Transfiguration (6 August) or the Blessed Virgin Mary (15 August) are earlier dates when ordinations may be possible. It is advisable to avoid winter dates, as they may converge with the seasonal ‘flu and additional pressure on the NHS.

Location, social distancing and other public health advice

3. Ordinations may take place ‘in the cathedral church of the diocese, or other church or chapel at the discretion of the bishop’ (Canon C 3). This statement offers considerable latitude as to the choice of venue.
4. Care should be taken to ensure, whether in the cathedral or other venue, that social distancing can be observed, not only with respect to seating and positioning of the ministers, ordinands, and congregation, but also in terms of entry and exit control, WC provision, and hand sanitising. The capacity of any venue will therefore be dependent on its ability to provide adequate social distancing as well as its overall size. All public health advice must be followed.

¹ From Canon C 3: ‘Ordination to the office of priest or deacon shall take place upon the Sundays immediately following the Ember Weeks, or upon St Peter’s Day, Michaelmas Day or St Thomas’s Day, or upon a day within the week immediately following St Peter’s Day, Michaelmas Day or St Thomas’s Day, or upon such other day, being a Sunday, a Holy Day or one of the Ember Days, as the bishop of the diocese on urgent occasion shall appoint.’

5. These restrictions mean that gatherings will inevitably be small, and it is likely that in most dioceses additional services will be required to accommodate the number of ordinands, where normally (for instance at the ordination of deacons in many dioceses) ordinations are large and include many if not all to be ordained in the diocese. It is recommended that dioceses hold several ordination services where only a few candidates are ordained at a time. Appropriate cleaning of the venues will be required after each service.

The assembly

6. In *Common Worship*, following ancient custom, in response to the enquiry of the bishop the assembly gives their consent that candidates should be ordained. The assembly must therefore be made up of more than simply those who have other direct parts to play in the service. Within present constraints, it will be appropriate and courteous to invite at least a few guests for each ordinand, also taking into account the need for representatives of the clergy and laity connected with the ordinands' ministry.
7. In addition to the presiding bishop and ordinand(s), the following persons are required at an ordination:
 - Deacons and priests:** a person presenting the candidates (archdeacon or designate); the Director of Ordinands or designate who has been involved with the candidates' formation; the archdeacon or registrar to confirm that the ordinands have taken the oaths and made the Declaration of Assent; at the ordination of priests, at least two priests to lay on hands in addition to the bishop. (*See Paragraph 10 below*)
 - Bishops:** a person presenting the candidate(s); the Provincial Registrar. At least two bishops to join in the laying-on of hands in addition to the archbishop or designate.

Laying-on of hands

8. The laying-on of hands is a significant act at the centre of the ordination and will have great significance both to the candidate and to those who support him or her. It is also the moment at which the greatest care must be taken with safety precautions, for the bishop lays hands upon the head of the candidate (not nearby or above it). Special care must be taken to minimise the number of participants in this action, to keep the contact brief, to ensure distance between those taking part, and to ensure that hands are clean and uncontaminated.
9. In the case of the ordination of **deacons**, the bishop alone, as usual, should lay on hands. He or she should wash hands before and after each candidate.
10. At the ordination of **priests**, the bishop should be joined by two priests (and no more). To minimise the possibility of infection it is recommended that one or both of the priests who assist the bishop in the ordination of each candidate should be the same for each candidate. At least one of the priests should be from the presbyteral college of the diocese (who might be the archdeacon, DDO, or designate to keep numbers low).
11. The Ordination Prayer is a single prayer; it is important that any movement during the prayer does not detract from the unity of the prayer as a whole.² The typical Anglican practice of priests gathering in a large group to join the bishop in the laying-on of hands will not be possible in the current circumstances, and this practice is in any case of no great antiquity.

² Note 12 to the Common Worship Ordination of Priests.

Therefore, the bishop lays on hands first in the usual way, washing his or her hands before and after each candidate. The two assisting priests should follow suit, sequentially, observing distancing between themselves, and washing their hands before and after each candidate.

12. Other assisting priests or bishops who are present, and who might in normal circumstances assist in the laying on of hands, might be invited to express their support in the Ordination Prayer in other ways, for example, by stretching out their hands towards the candidates, or by using the invocation, 'Lord, send your Spirit' as a response at the end of each paragraph of the Ordination Prayer.²
13. At the ordination and consecration of **bishops**, the archbishop or designate and two bishops (and not more) should lay on hands. The archbishop should lay on hands first, washing his hands before and after, and the other two bishops should do likewise, sequentially.

Giving of the Bible

14. This is a necessary part of the service, whether after the Ordination Prayer or at the Sending Out. In either case, individual copies should be given with appropriate precautions which will include the bishop sanitising his or her hands before handling the Bibles to give to each ordinand. The Bibles should be handled as little as possible before the service.

Other customary practices

15. *Anointing*. Some ordinations include anointing, where the bishop anoints the palms of the hands of each newly ordained priest, or (in the case of a bishop) the head. This is an optional component of the service. If it is done, it should be done with an implement which can be thoroughly cleaned or disposed of, as for confirmation.
16. *Vesture*. Where ordinands are clothed in customary vesture during the service, they should clothe themselves, including placing or adjusting their stole. Alternatively, ordinands may enter in the vesture of the order to which they are to be ordained.
17. *Foot-washing* should not be carried out.
18. *Ministry of the Newly Ordained*. The newly ordained should not take an active role in the Liturgy of the Eucharist beyond receiving Holy Communion (i.e. should not prepare the gifts, or stand with the bishop at the holy table).
19. *Music*. It is unlikely on the basis of current government advice that any congregational singing will be permitted. It may be possible for an individual cantor to sing (for example, the *Veni Creator*). Official guidance on the use of music should be followed.

Holy Communion

20. Ordinations take place within the context of a service of Holy Communion. As with all such celebrations at the present time, the appropriate guidance must be followed. This includes Holy Communion received in the form of bread alone, no proximity of persons in the sharing of the Peace, and appropriate social distancing and handwashing protocol. The bishop alone should distribute the consecrated bread.

Face coverings

21. Recent government guidance advises that people should aim to wear a face-covering in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not always possible and they come into contact with others that they do not normally meet. We recognise that during the ordination process, and when administering Holy Communion, social distancing will not always be possible. We advise that those involved may wish to consider wearing face coverings for those elements of the proceedings.

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