

St John the Evangelist Church, Old Moulsham - Lone Working and Personal Safety Policy

Introduction:

During the course of their work, church officers, including clergy, employees and paid consultants, and volunteering members of the congregation may find themselves working alone. This may be in church premises, visiting individuals in their homes, or receiving people into their own home. This may occur regularly or occasionally, but will be a necessary part of the role, and safety of all parties is paramount.

The work of clergy may carry additional risks. It is important that these are fully understood and that a risk assessment and adequate arrangements are made to ensure they are as safe as possible.

Potential hazards of working alone:

Risks can be greater when working alone, and include:

- Accidents or sudden illness when there is no-one to summon help or apply first aid
- Violence or the threat of violence
- Allegations of inappropriate and/or abusive behaviour
- Fire or other threat
- Attempting tasks which cannot safely be done by one person alone, eg, working at heights
- No safe way either in or out of a building (eg danger of being locked in accidentally)
- Travelling, particularly in bad weather

Assessing the risks of lone working:

Both the perception of risk and the reality of it may differ for different people. Eg some may feel more vulnerable after dark, a medical condition may mean working alone is unsafe etc. The PCC and clergy should ensure that appropriate steps should be taken to reduce the risks to anyone working alone.

Some simple tips to minimise the risks of lone working:

Reducing risks is the best form of protection, and after a risk assessment, mitigation steps could include:

- Knowing as much as possible about any potentially risky situation
- Avoiding situations with significant risk of vulnerability as far as possible
- Parking safely and as close to the destination as possible
- Considering a strategy for a swift exit if a situation changes
- If a 1 to 1 meeting is requested, considering who else could be working in the same place consider arranging a meeting in a public place where others are around (eg café), & arrive separately
- Being familiar with strategies for dealing with difficult situations
- Having a mobile phone with you
- Having someone with whom you'll:
 - Share where you're going and when you'll be back
 - Agree to send a short message when you're back safely
 - Agree code words/phrases with in advance, so they know the nature of any threat and who to call for the right assistance eg Police

- Avoiding unnecessary risks, and ending the meeting if you feel uncomfortable, reporting it to your concerns to your Church Safeguarding Officer, Supervisor or Archdeacon

When alone in and around the church buildings, always consider the practicality of the following:

- Ensuring that doors are locked behind you
- Never leaving just one person alone locking up after a service/event
- Do not respond to alarms alone if they are in the middle of the night (eg in the event of a fire/theft)

When alone in your house, you can minimise risks in the following ways:

- Securing all windows and doors to prevent unauthorised access
- Not telling anyone that you are alone (by email, telephone or visitors)

When there are callers to your house:

- Have a list of resource centres to which the caller can be directed (local authority and charities)
- Think carefully before inviting any caller inside, whether or not, but especially if you are alone
- Set times and boundaries when help is available, and do not make 'knee jerk' responses on demand
- The Suzy Lamplugh Trust advises making a phone call after the visitor has arrived, telling someone that you will get back to them at a certain time, after their visitor, 'X' has left. This acts as both an information call and a deterrent

When making a visit:

- Have as much information on the parishioner being visited and their home environment as possible prior to the visit so that risks can be assessed
- Will the nature of the visit or the person being visited be likely to increase the risk of violence?
- Has the person being visited had a history of unbalanced behaviour?
- Is there a known problem with animals. If yes, ask occupants to remove or secure the animals before you arrive
- Will you be alone and/or in a remote location with the person you are visiting?
- Park as close as possible in a well lit area
- Carry out a '10 second risk assessment' when you first arrive and the front door is still open. If you feel there is a risk of harm you should have an excuse ready not to enter the house and arrange for an alternative meeting
- After knocking on the front door, stepping back to create distance when its opened to allow time for further assessment and opportunity not to go in if there is any sense of unease
- Shut the front door behind you to familiarising yourself with the doorlock in case you need to make an emergency exit
- Be aware of your surroundings and potential hazards, knowing your exits and avoiding being in a situation where the person being visited is between you and the exit
- Have your mobile phone easily accessible and switched on
- Take a seat closest to the doorway for ease of exit and so you have sight of the door (and anyone coming in)
- Trust your intuition - if you feel uneasy, act on it straight away and leave
- Avoid confrontation: do all you can to defuse any potentially violent situation
- Do you require training in risk assessment, or in dealing with difficult people?

Reporting incidents or concerns:

Please report to your incumbent or Safeguarding Officer (or Archdeacon if clergy) any incidents as soon as possible. They can support you, lessons can be learned, and any safety measures can be improved.

Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy:

These guidelines on Lone Working and Personal Safety should be read in conjunction with the good practice advice given in the Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy: [Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy | The Church of England](#). Section 2.7 states:

There is risk in all pastoral work. The appropriateness of visiting and being visited alone, especially at night, needs to be assessed with care. The same assessment should also apply to other "out of hours" contact (especially through telephone calls and social media).

Consideration should be given to:

- *the place of the meeting;*
- *the proximity of other people;*
- *the arrangement of furniture and lighting; and*
- *the dress of the minister, appropriate to the context*

which are important considerations in pastoral care. The perceptions of others need to be considered at all times, taking particular care to assess the extent to which others may experience or perceive behaviour to be inappropriate.

At times it may be appropriate to advise a third party in advance of any appointments which have been made. Keeping accurate records of appointments is helpful and good practice

Clergy will often find themselves in the powerful position of meeting people at the limits of their vulnerability. The Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy seek to help you to safeguard and reassure such people, so engendering trust, without which ministry cannot take place. They set out how to maintain appropriate boundaries, which in themselves are helpful in preventing misunderstandings and reducing risks.

Further details on personal safety can be obtained from:

Suzy Lamplugh Trust: www.suzylamplugh.org

Religious hate crime: www.report-it.org.uk/religious_hate_crime

Home Office: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office

Essex Police: www.essex.police.uk/ro/report/ocr/af/how-to-report-a-crime/