

# OPEN FOR BUSINESS



This resource asks two simple questions of our churches;

1. Are we open for business?
2. Do we advertise the fact?

Our buildings can be a great resource for the parish and wider community. They provide a sacred space, a place of refuge and peace among the noise and chaos of life, to which people can retreat for just a moment to pray, reflect, enjoy a few minutes quiet.

Sadly, many of our churches are open for services only, or just at certain times during the day or week. The need we feel for peace, reflection and prayer does not happen by appointment or during pre-appointed hours. Someone walking by a church might be drawn to come in, only to find the door locked because 10 minutes ago, the designated time for opening came to an end.

This resource is designed to help a parish community consider whether to open the doors of the church building all day, every day as an act of mercy, welcome and outreach, and if so, how to do that safely and to maximum effect.

To open a church all day, every day is to take a risk. Something could get stolen or a building could be damaged.

*Crime is inevitable in an open church, so minimise the risk, opportunity and property vulnerable to theft.*





The Crime Prevention Triangle helps us understand how to minimise that risk.

Crime will occur when all three sides of the triangle are present.

Remove one or more, and the risk is lessened.

**Suitable target** - - if you leave large brass candlesticks out and unsecured, they will get stolen.

**Action** – remove valuable items that would be attractive to criminals.

**Motivated offender** - - there are people who are quite willing to commit crime against a church.

**Action** - - there is no real defence against this but if a church serves the community, there may be a sense from the locals that this is ‘their’ building and so to be treated with respect

**Absence of capable guardians** - - If there is no ‘presence’, either physical or by means of CCTV

for example, then a church is more vulnerable to crime. **Action** - - it is questionable whether having people in church ‘watching’ during open hours is wise. All it may do is place elderly and vulnerable people at risk. More effective might be CCTV, either dummy or real cameras, and the use of Smartwater. These measures accompanied by signs are a good deterrent.

## Top tips for opening your church

- **Get advice**

Talk to your local Crime Prevention Officer. Often Police Forces have people who specialise in Church safety. They will advise you on what measures to take.

- **CCTV**

This is useful as a deterrent and in catching an offender after the event. However, CCTV is of limited use, rarely giving clear enough images to secure identification. It may be worthwhile getting dummy cameras fitted at minimal cost to act as a deterrent. Always put up signs informing people of the presence of CCTV, even if the cameras don’t work. The sign will be the deterrent.

- **Smartwater**

To mark valuable items with this is a requirement of the Catholic Church Insurance Association. It means that anything taken and later recovered can be quickly identified and returned. Always put up signs informing people of the presence of Smartwater. The sign will be the deterrent.

- **Lighting**

Ensure the church grounds are well lit and consider having some lights in the church entrance or porch triggered by a motion sensor. This will provide light for people to safely enter the church and also will alert others to the presence of visitors.

- **Restrict access**

Which areas are you happy for people to have access to and which would you want to keep private? Lock the sacristy and other areas that can be secured. If you would rather people didn't enter the Sanctuary, then a simple solution would be to close altar gates if you have them or put a rope barrier across the entrance to the Sanctuary. Even if these can be easily stepped over, they provide a psychological barrier. An alarm across the Sanctuary entrance is expensive and only effective if it can be heard outside the church. Having access on a key code is fine for parishioners who know the code, but useless for the passer-by who wants to pop in to pray. Either the church is open, or it isn't.

- **What can be stolen?**

Remove items of value that you don't want taken. Any brass candlesticks etc are a prime target. Decide what you are not particularly concerned about losing; CTS pamphlets or booklets for example are of little value and may actually benefit someone.

- **Create activity**

If a building looks occupied or busy, then offenders are deterred. Simple actions can help, like encouraging parishioners to pop in when they pass the church or suggest to your Parish Priest that he could stick his head in the church door whenever going out or coming back from something. Having cars parked in the church car park or near the church door gives the impression that someone is around.

- **Does the Church *look* open?**

Even if the church door is left unlocked, it may appear to be closed for business and passers-by may be reluctant to cross the threshold. Consider having a notice on the front door inviting people to come in. 'Church Open. Come in and pray' may be all the invitation someone needs.

- **What do people experience when they cross the threshold?**

Consider:

- Votive candles available for lighting – follow basic fire prevention advice.
- A prayer board on which people can place written prayers for the parish community to join in
- Leaflets and pamphlets about the Catholic faith
- Gentle music playing on a loop to create a sense of the sacred
- Notices about RCIA, social groups, Alpha courses .....
- Ensure noticeboards and the porch to the church are tidy and welcoming and clear of clutter.

## Resources

- [www.cbcew.org.uk/CBCEW-Home/Departments/Evangelisation-and-Catechesis](http://www.cbcew.org.uk/CBCEW-Home/Departments/Evangelisation-and-Catechesis)
- [www.catholicnews.org.uk/Home/Special-Events/Proclaim-15-Building-Missionary-Parishes](http://www.catholicnews.org.uk/Home/Special-Events/Proclaim-15-Building-Missionary-Parishes)
- [www.catholicfamily.org.uk/projects/everybodys-welcome](http://www.catholicfamily.org.uk/projects/everybodys-welcome)

- [http://www.dioceseofnottingham.uk/information/diocesan-commissions/01\\_commission-adult-formation](http://www.dioceseofnottingham.uk/information/diocesan-commissions/01_commission-adult-formation)

## GUIDING PEOPLE AROUND OUR CHURCHES

Parishes often keep their churches locked because they say no one would want to come in. The demand could be a lot bigger than you think. When a church opens its doors for the first time one of the most common responses from visitors is, "Oh I've gone past this place on so many occasions and always wanted to see inside but it's never open." So if there is any one answer to this question, it's probably 'More people than you think'.

### **First impressions count!**

Make sure all the signs and notice boards display clear, unambiguous information so visitors can tell at a glance when the church is open. If it's not been open regularly before, people may carry on walking past, assuming that they won't be able to get in.

Putting out an A-frame or prominent sign outside the church to announce that it's open is an effective way of overcoming this. A template is available for use. Please adapt as necessary. Is the entrance easy to find and clearly signposted?

Keep all your notice boards tidy and up to date, but also informative and attractive.

Display eye-catching publicity like photographs of star attractions such as a magnificent roof or colourful stained glass windows. Don't underestimate the power of good signage: a notice saying 'Please feel free to walk around' will put visitors at their ease and ensure they don't peer quickly through the door before walking away.

Look at the approach to the building. Do the front door, the steps, the path, the churchyard look well-maintained? Does the building look like it's regularly used and cared for? If not, then it's off-putting to potential visitors and many won't even bother to find out whether they can get in.

Keep the door – or at the very least the outer door – physically open. Does the interior look clean and cared for? Is there clutter that you could tidy away or dispose of?

Is there an area set aside for quiet prayer and contemplation? Is it clearly identified as such?

**SEE: 'ASSESSING YOUR CHURCH WELCOME' SHEET – discuss the outcomes with each other. This is also a useful tool for use at any time.**

How to share information

You might want to think about producing a detailed booklet for visitors who want in-depth information and a brief leaflet to guide people who just want to see the highlights.

Put up information boards next to notable features such as tombs, stained glass windows and important furnishing: make sure they're easily legible and easy to digest.

**Open just part of the building that you can easily control, such as an entrance lobby, side chapel or transept.**

This can work well if your church building is well frequented during the day but you still want to be able to provide a quiet space open to everybody at all times. It's good if you can choose a part of the building from which the rest of the interior can be clearly viewed.

Church buildings bear witness to the Christian faith. They offer a sign and celebration of the presence of God in a community. A locked door is a universal symbol of exclusion, while an open church expresses God's welcome, His presence, His creativity, His justice, His healing and His forgiveness. Allowing friends and strangers to enter your building freely is a simple but always effective act of hospitality.

If you need any help or further guidance in keeping your church open, email: [adult.formatiom@dioceseofnottingham.uk](mailto:adult.formatiom@dioceseofnottingham.uk)



“The Church which “goes forth” is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father's infinite mercy. Let us try a little harder to take the first step and to become involved. Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. The Lord gets involved and he involves his own, as he kneels to wash their feet. He tells his disciples: “You will be blessed if you do this” (Jn 13:17). An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and

it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the “smell of the sheep” and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be. It is familiar with patient expectation and apostolic endurance. Evangelization consists mostly of patience and disregard for constraints of time. Faithful to the Lord's gift, it also bears fruit.” (EG24)

# Assessing Your Church Welcome

## DETAILS OF WHEN YOU ASSESSED:

TIME	DATE	LOCATION (e.g. if more than one church/mass centre in the parish)
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## The view from the pavement

Are the church grounds tidy?

- Excellent     Good     Average     Poor     Terrible

Comments

## *The Notice Board*

Can the main notices be read from the street?

- Yes     No     Only during the day

Comments

Is the board tidy, in good repair and up-to-date with service times?

- Yes     No

Comments

Are the phone numbers of the parish priest and the parish office clearly displayed?

- Yes     No

Comments

## *The Porch/Church*

Is the porch/church tidy?

- Yes     No

Comments

Are notices kept up-to-date and well displayed?

Yes  No

Comments

Are the posters friendly and colourful?

Yes  No

Comments

Is there plenty of information to show the activities of the parish?

Yes  No

Comments

Is there information about people responsible for various activities - their names and telephone numbers?

Yes  No

Comments

Are prayer leaflets available and easy to find?

Yes  No

Comments

Are 'quiet spaces' signposted?

Yes  No

Comments

Are valuables locked away outside service times?

Yes  No

Comments