

CHURCHES, COVID-19 AND COMMUNITIES

Experiences, Needs, and
Supporting Recovery

March 2021

The Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture
University of York

HOPE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

'I've lost count of the number of Church leaders and congregations from all denominations that have stepped up to support not only one another but also to support the whole local community, people of all faiths and none.'

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, March 2021

THE CONTEXT OF THIS REPORT

For centuries, churches, alongside other faith communities,¹ have provided what could be termed an everyday 'National Wellbeing Service.' This includes:

- providing and hosting 'cradle to grave' activities which provide social interaction and everyday support²
- enhancing physical and mental health by offering wellbeing activities, exercise classes and volunteering opportunities
- creating a spiritual heart for communities (including worship; spaces for reflection and prayer; pastoral care; marking life events)
- hosting community services such as Post Offices, health clinics, cafes, and village shops
- combating disadvantage and supporting 'levelling-up,' through afterschool education clubs, parenting classes, addiction support, debt counselling, homelessness support, etc.
- offering buildings which promote belonging, provide safe places of beauty, peace and comfort, offer access to shared heritage and culture, contribute to tourism and local economies

In addition, churches have a centuries-old record of providing 'Emergency Care' in times of local and national crisis - through longstanding care networks; a deep reservoir of local knowledge, contacts and trusted partnership working; and buildings which often provide the only available public space to host foodbanks or other services, or offer safe spaces in which individuals and communities can address grief and anxiety, commemorate loss, and find perspective, comfort, and hope.

The particular challenges posed by COVID-19 to these well-established patterns of response to community need, have been two-fold:

¹ This report focuses on the role and response of Christian churches. Reports and surveys which relate to other faith communities can be found in Appendix 2.2.2.

² The Church of England alone was hosting 35,000 social care projects pre-COVID. See Church of England 2019 'Statistics for Mission' return.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/2019StatisticsForMission.pdf>

- the pandemic has threatened all sectors of the population and all areas of the country, creating a vast amount of additional need, including among those not previously considered especially vulnerable
- at the same time the restrictions associated with containing the virus have prevented churches (and other faith communities) from delivering much of the everyday and emergency support they would normally provide.

The early phases of the pandemic required very rapid decisions when little was known about COVID-19 and subsequent waves of infection have meant that policy and guidance have constantly had to evolve in response. However, the imperatives of virus control and the need to protect lives have also had the unwanted consequence of suspending social interactions and normal mechanisms of mutual support in ways which have themselves caused significant and widespread damage to mental, physical, and economic wellbeing. In this context, ensuring the future capacity of churches to engage with and support communities, both during the pandemic and in rebuilding and recovery, is of considerable importance.

During the early months of the pandemic, anecdotal evidence appeared to suggest that the effects of closure of church buildings, suspension of normal community activities, and restrictions on churches' ability to operate in 'crisis mode', were being deeply felt. Many church leaders and members also expressed frustration at the limitations on their ability to serve needy communities. The 'COVID, Churches & Communities' research project was therefore set up in August 2020 by the Centre for the Study of Christianity & Culture (University of York), with Historic England, the Church of England, the Association of English Cathedrals, the National Churches Trust, and the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance,³ to gather, analyse, and report on grassroots responses to closures and restrictions across the country.⁴

This report represents views gathered from over 5,500 survey responses and interviews with church leaders, members, non-members and experts in relevant fields. It provides insights into individual and community experience and need on the ground during Autumn 2020 and February-March 2021; assesses developing responses by churches, including new partnerships with other bodies; and looks forward to the contribution churches, their buildings, and their networks, can make to recovery.

CONSULTATION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The project's aim is to provide detailed data from a wide range of respondents to support national and local policy and decision-making in the face of COVID-19, specifically to:

- Examine the impact of closing church buildings and restrictions on activities provided or hosted by churches on the lives and wellbeing of individuals and communities

³ Supported by funding from Historic England; Research England Quality-related Research Strategic Priorities Fund; the Economic and Social Research Council; the Association of English Cathedrals; and the Kirby Laing Foundation.

⁴ Details of the Research Team and Advisory Group can be found in Appendix 1.

- Explore how churches have been able to respond creatively to COVID-19 challenges and adapt their provision to meet new circumstances and needs
- Assess the potential of church buildings and networks to support recovery and societal resilience in the future
- Identify the key resources needed to mobilise these assets fully

Surveys and semi-structured interviews were undertaken from September to December 2020, and from February to March 2021. Over 5,500 people responded to the surveys, providing multi-layered insights into the evolving impact of lockdowns and other restrictions at grassroots level. Respondents were invited to self-identify broadly as 'Church Leaders', 'Church Members', and 'General Public'. This differentiation is helpful in identifying particular perspectives on the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, but it is also necessary to remember that *all three* groups are members of the wider community, with common needs for support and provision. To ensure this aspect is taken into consideration, these groups are referred to as 'Church Leaders,' 'Members,' and 'Non-Members'⁵ in this report.

The large body of qualitative data gathered and analysed gives voice to the primary deliverers and recipients of the wide-ranging work of churches across the nation: Church Leaders, Church Members, and, very importantly, those who do not identify as 'Members,' but nevertheless rely on and greatly value access to church buildings and networks of activity.

The surveys and interviews provide grassroots insights which are illuminating, and often moving, as individuals detail the impact on their lives of COVID-19 and the loss of core support structures; the challenges they now face; and the key factors that will help their communities recover. Data has been contextualised by interviews with experts in key fields such as Public Health and Bereavement and national church leaders, and the collation of related reports from an extensive range of church and secular organisations.

This research has been undertaken against the background of a very rapidly changing situation. Nevertheless, clear themes have emerged which are reinforced by conclusions drawn by other researchers in related specialist areas. The analysis presented here illustrates the essential contribution places of worship make to societal wellbeing and community cohesion in normal times and during crises.⁶ It highlights the potential of churches to make a major contribution to national recovery; outlines the support which will be needed for this to happen; and makes important recommendations for future action at national and local level.

KEY FINDINGS

This section collates the research data and conclusions under three headings, focussing on churches and their communities in relation to provision of:

⁵ See Appendix 1: Methodology.

⁶ This finding is supported by the conclusions of the APPG *Keeping the Faith Report* that, 'Faith groups and faith-based organisations are integral to the immediate civil society response to the pandemic. Local authorities regard them as integral and essential to the COVID-19 response.'

- social care
- well-being, place-making and heritage
- support for people suffering grief and loss

Churches and communities: provision of social care

The closure of church buildings, and restrictions on church-based activities, have clearly had a very serious impact on individual and societal wellbeing. Churches play a vital role as community hubs, bringing people together for a wide range of interactions and social care provision. They offer 'cradle to grave' activities - from early years support (such as parenting classes, toddler groups, and pre-school nurseries), to youth clubs, and support for older adults through coffee mornings, lunch clubs, exercise classes, etc. Such activities promote wellbeing and play a vital role in reducing isolation. The impact of their removal has been profound.

Church buildings offer spaces which bring multiple organisations together, providing access to a broad spectrum of everyday and specialist support. Churches also play a key role in combatting major disadvantage and promoting levelling up. They have a long record of supporting the most vulnerable in society and provide refuges where those experiencing poverty, homelessness, debt, disability, mental illness and addiction can safely seek support.

During COVID-19 restrictions, many churches showed great creativity in finding new ways to meet the additional needs triggered by the pandemic. They have partnered with other organisations and agencies to host foodbanks and provide local help to those struggling with increasing isolation, anxiety, financial stress, and the pain of bereavement. They have sought to maintain contact with the vulnerable through socially distanced visits and phone calls, and to move other activities online where possible. Churches and cathedrals have also hosted testing and vaccination centres.

'Our church has developed a partnership with six others to form a Community Help Hub offering shopping, prescription collection, befriending, food and gift packs, meals for school kids, money courses, wellbeing courses, prayer ministry, listening, crisis response, and referrals to agencies.' Church Leader

The pandemic has demonstrated the speedy, locally relevant, entrepreneurial, and creative ways in which faith groups can respond as partners in an emergency.⁷ Nevertheless, survey respondents also make it clear that both access to church buildings and in-person contact and support must be swiftly restored and maintained if the rapidly-growing societal problems of loneliness and isolation and the adverse impact of the pandemic on mental and physical wellbeing are to be addressed.

⁷ 'The pandemic has given rise to a significant increase in the numbers and depth of relations between local authorities and faith communities. The often hidden or unnoticed contributions that faith groups make to the resilience of local communities have become much more visible. Local authorities say they have discovered a new appreciation of the agility, flexibility and professionalism of faith groups and faith-based organisations in their responses to the pandemic.' APPG *Keeping the Faith Report*.

'Keep churches open at all costs. Don't abandon us when we need you most.' Non-Member

'Online is not the same as face to face when trying to combat loneliness.'
Church Leader

'Our mental wellness group hasn't been able to meet ... A group for people with developing Alzheimer's hasn't met.' Church Leader

Alongside other faith groups, churches have proven capacity to aid national recovery through long-term networks and hubs of social care in every community.⁸ They have built longstanding relationships and public trust and are experienced in meeting complex needs through both 'light touch' and specialist support. Church Leaders and Members are now articulating a clear commitment to addressing the increased needs triggered across society by COVID-19, through expanded provision and partnership working:

'Desire for connection and social contacts are going to be huge. So we are thinking of some form of community cafe space ... as a business or community enterprise.'

'Create partnerships with other organisations to offer community support e.g. debt advice, to stimulate activities with social benefit and inclusivity.'

'Drop-ins for folk who are lonely, bereaved, unemployed or experiencing mental illness.'

To mobilise these extensive assets fully, churches and other places of worship need greater recognition from both national and local government of their key roles as already established community hubs. Dedicated financial support will be required to ensure buildings have necessary facilities and are COVID-safe. Clearer, more easily applicable guidance is essential to allow buildings and activities to be re-opened with confidence and to remain resilient in the event of further waves of virus transmission. Further training and support for leaders and volunteers will also be needed.

Churches and communities: buildings, wellbeing, place-making, and heritage

Church buildings have multiple functions in promoting individual and community wellbeing. Access to worship (including weekly services, festivals, and the marking

⁸ ... from medieval times until the industrial era the Christian churches were the safety net for most of society. Many of our public services - our modern health, education and probation systems in particular - have their origins in Christian institutions. Today, faith communities in general remain an enormous resource for society ... Their values, their concern for the spiritual wellbeing of individuals and society, provide a motivation and commitment that often exceeds that of paid professionals. They have deep roots in local communities and are there for the long-term. Indeed they often have big buildings in the heart of communities, including the poorest, and they operate both nationally and at the hyperlocal level. The networks of a faith community, the relationships within a congregation or faith group, are a source of huge resilience and opportunities for the people they seek to help.' *Levelling up our communities: proposals for a new social covenant*, A report for government by Danny Kruger MP, September 2020, p. 35.

<https://www.dannykruger.org.uk/new-social-covenant>

of life events through baptisms, weddings, and funerals), is much valued both by members and non-members.

Church buildings are also greatly prized as places of solace and sanctuary by the communities in which they sit. Many are sites of shared heritage, offering inspiration and beauty through architecture and craftsmanship, playing an important role in local tourist economies, and providing access to much-needed green spaces in their churchyards and burial grounds. Churches are often the main or only public building in their community, hosting social and cultural events which build community cohesion.

Survey data and interviews reveal that locking or restricting access to churches during the pandemic caused great distress and anger, particularly amongst non-members who felt shut out of churches in their hour of need. Respondents report a resultant increase in anxiety and loneliness.

'Quiet reflection and comfort at a time of crisis was the most important reason for me to use church buildings - but they were locked.'

Non-Member

'As an extremely vulnerable person, it would have been comforting to sit alone safely in the church.' Non-Member

'I have been through domestic abuse and [the church] is the only place I feel safe.' Non-Member

Many churches responded to closure with creative ways to move services and other interaction online, growing virtual congregations and developing new skills in reaching out to communities through social media. Some churches also found ways to engage with remote visitors via virtual tours. However, these initiatives have also highlighted the digital inequalities which separate individuals and communities. In some rural areas, little or no access to Wi-Fi has hampered moves to online provision and church members elsewhere have also struggled to access online platforms, due to digital poverty among user groups. These factors are also perceived to exclude non-members.

Churches have huge potential to contribute to national recovery at the local level by offering individuals and communities free access to special places which can enhance wellbeing and belonging, rebuild community cohesion and contribute to local tourism. However, to fulfil this potential, they must have the means to maintain buildings and develop the facilities required for local communities and visitors. Churches will also need specialist support and training to help them develop a mixed provision of online and in-person worship and visitor engagement, and to generate income to sustain these initiatives.

Churches and communities: supporting grief and loss

COVID-19 has exposed the whole nation to an experience of individual loss and collective trauma which is unprecedented in its nature. The sheer number of deaths in such a short time has placed huge pressures on health professionals, causing significant stress - and distress. It has also prevented families from visiting and/or caring for the dying, frequently resulting in an enduring sense of pain and guilt.

Restrictions have also impacted severely on the normal rituals associated with death and bereavement and separated the grieving from the networks of support and comfort which normally help them to rebuild their lives.

'I need the church as a physical space to focus on processing grief/feelings from COVID.' Non-Member

'Unable to see brother before he died & unable to attend a service. Still have his ashes to inter.' Non-Member

Churches and crematoria have sought to alleviate the sense of deprivation by harnessing online tools to livestream funeral services, alongside limited in-person attendance. Nevertheless, the very severe restrictions imposed on physical attendance at funerals have meant that families have often had to choose which members should attend; have been unable to comfort one another; and have frequently felt a continuing sense of guilt that they have been unable to commemorate loved ones appropriately.

'We had to leave many members of our extended family standing outside during the service and we couldn't safely meet afterwards.' Non-Member

A recent report cites a bereaved sister saying, '[The] funeral was small and [I] still feel we haven't properly said goodbye ... [it] feels as though her life has gone and [she has] not been fully recognised for the person she was.'⁹

These factors, together with lack of access to church buildings as spaces for processing grief and finding comfort, have contributed to the emergence of a 'pandemic'¹⁰ of unresolved and unsupported grief and loss, the effects of which will take years to heal. The shock of the scale of deaths, many of otherwise healthy people, has been compounded by other experiences of loss, as people have seen their incomes, businesses, homes, education, and hopes for the future, taken away.

The consequent widespread levels of anxiety, together with the potential for the increased incidence of 'complex' and 'unsupported' grief to trigger long-term mental health issues, have serious implications for wellbeing and the ability of individuals to continue to function successfully within their families, social contexts, and work environments. It is likely that the full effects of the pandemic on mental health will not be seen until the immediate crisis is over. The impact on the mental health of young and old causes great individual suffering; it could also have significant social and economic implications, if depression and ongoing anxiety prevent people from fully resuming their roles within their families and society at large.

Open spaces, especially churchyards and burial grounds, have found renewed significance as spaces for quiet reflection and prayer. When permitted, churches have offered simple but effective tools such as memory trees, with ribbons, baubles or labels, offering individuals and communities a place to remember lost loved ones. The need for human contact and in-person support has never been more apparent,

⁹ Harrop E., Farnell D., Longo M., Goss S., Sutton E., Seddon K., Nelson A., Byrne A., Selman L.E. 'Supporting people bereaved during COVID-19: Study Report 1, 27 November 2020.' Cardiff University and the University of Bristol, p.3. <https://www.covidbereavement.com/post/supporting-people-bereaved-during-covid-19-study-report-1-27-november-2020>

¹⁰ 'A Nation in mourning.' <https://www.coop.co.uk/funeralcare/nationinmourning>

and there will be increased demand for rituals to remember those who been lost and opportunities for individuals and families to work through their grief. It is vital that churches should be allowed to expand such provision within buildings and in outside spaces, in order to support mental and emotional recovery and future wellbeing.

This research has shown the extent to which churches are frequently sought out by those seeking informal comfort and solace as well as more structured support and counselling. To meet this increased and urgent need, it is imperative that the time-critical role of funerals and associated mourning rituals in the grieving process are specifically addressed by Government and Public Health experts and ways found to balance the need to provide better access to these with the need to avoid virus transmission. Once again, clearer and more enabling guidance is needed to ensure churches can remain open to fulfil these vital functions. Church leaders and members will also require additional training in bereavement support as they complement the work of other professionals in the fields of healthcare and counselling.

CONCLUSION

The first phase of the pandemic required very swift decisions when little was known about COVID-19, or the length of time for which restrictions might be needed. Survey responses, including a significant degree of feedback from the general public, reflect deep frustration and anger about closure of churches, the loss of key 'cradle to grave' social provision, the resultant lack of safe, comforting spaces, and the damaging effects on the bereaved of the restrictions on funerals and pastoral support.

Subsequent periods of restriction and lockdown have meant ongoing challenges in terms of balancing the requirement to prevent virus transmission with the growing risks to mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health if increasingly needy communities continued to be deprived of the national network of support normally provided by places of worship.

Throughout the pandemic, uncertainty on the ground about the meaning and interpretation of guidance, anxieties about risk assessment and potential liability, and the existence of a strongly risk-averse culture, have hampered the ability of churches to offer spaces and activities which could have helped to address need and restore wellbeing. These issues must be addressed urgently to maximise the capacity of churches to support recovery.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS¹¹

Keeping churches open and maintaining their contribution to wellbeing, community cohesion, social care, and heritage tourism, is vital for both emergency support and long-term recovery.

Recognition of the multi-faceted contribution made to society by churches

1. Greater recognition is needed from government, local authorities, and policy and decision-makers, of the contribution made by church buildings and associated green

¹¹ Further details on these recommendations are set out, beginning on page 96 of the full report.

spaces to the wellbeing of the whole community, both during a pandemic and under normal circumstances. Funding and other support measures need to address and balance the multiple roles of church buildings as places of worship and spirituality, spaces of shared heritage, and community hubs

2. Closing church buildings and suspending activities have substantial negative effects and should be a last resort. Every effort should be made to keep buildings open to support emergency social care, mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing, and other community benefits.

Supporting churches in their contribution to community wellbeing and recovery

3. It is critical that churches have the financial means to make and keep them fit for purpose in a context of increasing need.
4. Churches and other places of worship need authoritative up-to-date guidance on Covid-19 which local communities can confidently interpret and implement for their own situation. Government guidance therefore needs to be informed by wider consultation with practitioners and transmitted to and through denominations in a timely, simple, and easily applied form.
5. Churches need better training and support for enhanced partnership working.
6. More flexibility according to each particular situation is needed in the regulations for provision of weddings and funerals and keeping churches open for private grieving. Expanded support for the sick, dying, and bereaved should include allowing church ministers to operate as key workers in the community and greater investment in hospital chaplaincy to support patients and NHS staff.
7. Summer 2021 must be used for consultation with grassroots practitioners; clarification and simplification of policy and guidance; and establishing more effective channels of information dissemination; so churches can fully support recovery and wellbeing, even in the event of further waves of virus transmission.

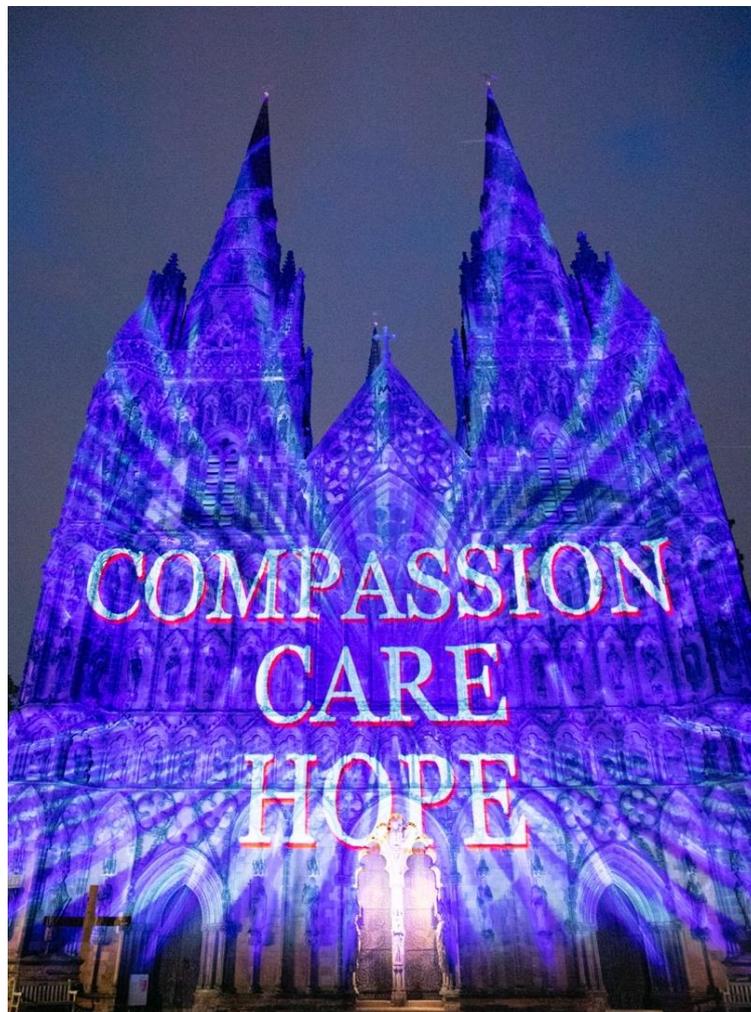
'I come to this role fully aware of the massive contribution that listed places of worship make to their communities and indeed to the nation as a whole. From large towns to rural communities, they provide a strong sense of place and history and it is not surprising that many people form strong attachments to them.

They are primarily places of worship and yet they also provide refuge during tough times. They are also centres of community activities and support hosting meetings and events. They are often the first to co-ordinate charity relief and can often provide meaningful contacts for the lonely and isolated. This has all been especially true during the coronavirus pandemic. Time and again, we have seen listed

places of worship and the people who run them making a massive difference, from making phone calls and keeping in contact with vulnerable people, to hosting blood donation and testing and vaccination centres, to helping with child support, to shopping for food and medicine for those who are shielding. The work you have done under the such challenging conditions has been astounding.

And I think this has highlighted to everyone, the continuing value of faith and the unique buildings to our national life.'

Caroline Dinenage MP
Minister of State for Digital and Culture, DCMS.¹²



**FIGURE 1 - LICHFIELD CATHEDRAL
(CREATED BY LUXMURALIS AT LICHFIELD CATHEDRAL)**

¹² Part of a pre-recorded speech given to the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance's Big Update on 10th March 2021.

Social Care	Community Hubs	Wellbeing	Need	Isolation	Anxiety
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A Space to Mark Life Events

A Space for Comfort

A Space for Compassion & Support

A Space for Conversation

A Space for Culture

A Space for Fun

A Space to Explore Heritage

A Space for Worship

A Space for Everyone

"Church coffee mornings were a highlight of my isolated existence"
Non - Member

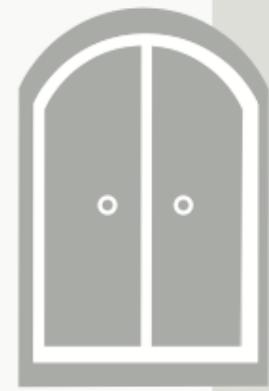
"Old folk have to balance the risk of coming out with the horror of another day alone"
Church Member

"I've struggled with mental health & loneliness. I have needed somewhere to go, but I can't access it"
Church Member

"The church was running a course to support new parents...I no longer have this support"
Non - Member

75% of Non-Members wanted churches as places of quiet reflection & comfort

79% of all respondents identified social isolation as a key issue in their community



Creativity

Growing Need

Extended Provision

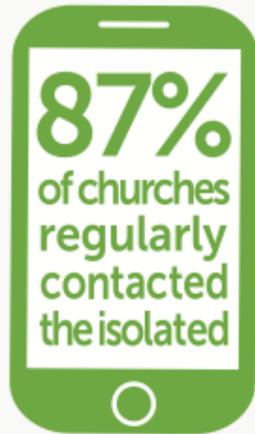
Recognition

Guidance

Funding



91%
of churches
offered online
engagement



"We've provided takeaway meals for homeless people & others & food parcels for individuals and families."
Church Leader



Churches Can Help Recovery Through Providing:

- Community Partnerships Learning Hubs
- Family Support Performance Spaces
- Social Enterprise Spaces Drop-in Centres
- Depression & Addiction Support Safe Spaces
- Social Groups Heritage Centres Debt Advice
- Job Centres Grief Support



Support & Recognition
as key community
hubs and centres of
wellbeing



Dedicated Funding
for building repairs
& improved
facilities



Clearer Guidance
up-to-date,
evidence based &
user friendly



Increased Training
for enhanced
partnership
working



59%
of Church
Leaders stressed
the need for
financial support
for buildings



RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Investigators

Dr Dee Dyas is Reader in the History of Christianity and Co-Director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity at the University of York. She has led several major funded research projects on cathedrals and oversees the Centre's heritage interpretation partnerships with cathedrals and parish churches. Her recent publications include *The Dynamics of Pilgrimage: Christianity, Holy Places and Sensory Experience*. Routledge, 2020; and *Pilgrimage and England's Cathedrals, Past, Present and Future*. (co-edited with John Jenkins), Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Dr Kate Giles is Co-Director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity at the University of York and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Archaeology. She is an expert in the history and archaeology of medieval and early modern community buildings on which she has published widely. She was former York Minster Archaeology Fellow, is a trustee of Yorkshire Historic Churches Trust and joined the CSCC team in October 2020.

Project Research Associates

Dr Rob Barward-Symmons recently completed his PhD in the Sociology of Religion from the University of Kent based on an ethnographic study of an evangelical youth group in London looking at processes of religious formation within these spaces. Previously Rob earned degrees in Theology and Religion & Society from Durham University and worked as a research assistant for Cranmer Hall, Durham and the Bible Society. While undertaking his PhD, Rob was a tutor and lecturer at Ridley Hall College, Cambridge.

Dr Joshua Heyes is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Learning about Science and Religion at Canterbury Christ Church University, where he works on interdisciplinary education initiatives. He has degrees in philosophy, theology and social research. His PhD in Education from the University of Birmingham examined the relationship between sexuality, education, and religion.

Dr John Jenkins is a historian who has published work on aspects of English church life from the medieval period to the modern day. For the COVID and churches project he was responsible for researching and writing the historical overview (Appendix 4).

Historic Places of Worship Consultant

Becky Payne spent 18 years with Historic England before serving for 7 years as Policy Officer in the Cathedral and Church Buildings Division (CofE), promoting and enabling the potential of church buildings as a resource for the whole community. She now works as a freelance consultant undertaking projects on sustaining historic places of worship (including developing online resources for congregations; evaluating various sector initiatives- most recently the NLHF's Grants for Places of Worship and the National Churches - and acting as consultant to university-led research projects. She is a member of the London Diocesan Advisory Committee and Development Officer at the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance (Heritage Alliance).

Project Advisory Board

Representatives of the following organisations have supplied advice and information as members of the Project Advisory Board.

[Historic England](#) is the public body responsible for protecting and championing the historic environment, understanding and managing change within historic places and providing expertise to government and local communities.

[The Association of English Cathedrals](#) is a registered charity interested in promoting the role of cathedrals in national and church life, supporting and sharing good practice, conducting research, liaising with government departments and agencies, national ecumenical bodies, issuing guidance and providing training.

The [Historic Religious Buildings Alliance](#) is an independently-funded group within The Heritage Alliance which brings together those working for a secure future for historic religious buildings. It is a non-religious organisation which provides regular briefings for members. It is independent of government but where appropriate provide a channel of communication with government on matters affecting historic religious buildings in Great Britain.

The [National Churches Trust](#) is a charity dedicated to supporting places of worship of historic, architectural and community value used by Christian denominations throughout the UK. It promotes the benefits of church buildings to the public and encourages their discovery through the online portal [ExploreChurches](#). It encourages good management and regular maintenance of buildings, connecting communities with high quality builders and craftsmen through its Maintenance Booker tool. It provides grants for urgent repairs and community facilities.

The Research Team also acknowledges, with thanks, the information and support received from many other sources. These include national and regional church leaders in the Church of England, the Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church of England, the Baptist Union of Great Britain, specialists in bereavement (CRUSE; National Co-op Funeralcare), and experts in Public Health.