

Church Guidance Note

Working alone



Those who work or volunteer for the church are often required to complete various tasks on their own. This could be in the church itself and the surrounding churchyard, or while visiting others.

Working alone can present a number of additional hazards; for example, using access equipment (such as a portable ladder) or lifting heavy objects could be too much for one person on their own. Here, it is important to check that the tasks can be done safely.

Another important consideration for churches is the risk of violence and/or aggression where people are completing tasks on their own. While incidents of assault are thankfully rare, physical or verbal attacks can have serious and traumatic effects for those involved where they do occur.

Legal requirements

Where you are an employer, you will need to comply with health and safety law. In particular, you will need to:

- Complete risk assessments
- Implement adequate precautions, providing information and training for any employees and volunteers on what they need to do
- Make periodic checks that your arrangements remain adequate
- Document your arrangements and responsibilities for preventing accidents when working alone, perhaps as part of your health and safety policy
- Keep records of what you have done.

This is to meet your duties under the Safety, Hazard and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Regulations.

Risk Advice

Should you have any additional questions on this topic or other risk-related matters, as a valued Ecclesiastical customer you can contact our Risk Management Team on 01 619 0300 (Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm, excluding bank holidays) and one of our in-house risk professionals will be able to assist.

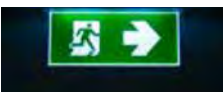
You may also have to report physical injury to any employee resulting from violent incidents under the Reporting of Accidents and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations. Acts of violence towards a member of the public by an employee or another member of the public would not be reportable. However, it is worth remembering that incidents involving acts of violence may need to be reported to the Gardai whether or not they are reportable to the HSA under these regulations.

Beyond this, you also need to meet your common law duty of care, ensuring that volunteers are not injured as a result of working alone because you have acted negligently.

Hazards to look out for*

				
After dark or early in the morning	As a church steward	In the community, particularly where people are emotionally or mentally stressed	With people who are under the influence of drink or drugs	Handling cash or where there are valuables on the premises
				
When emptying safes or taking cash to the bank	With cash transits involving large amounts of money or regular patterns	At cash collection points taking entrance money or dealing with sales (in shops, bookstalls, refectories, crypts, treasuries, etc.)	At remote cash collection points where they are some distance from other buildings or where there are likely to be fewer people around	Concealed spaces such as, church porches

Precautions you can take*

				
Using personal attack alarms	Providing coded security locks on all doors	Using mobile telephones or two-way radios	Ensuring that there are always two people on duty in the church or on any tower tour at any one time	Requiring mobile staff to report their whereabouts and keep in touch
				
Making sure that emergency arrangements are adequate	Providing good levels of lighting	Selling tickets from a secure central point	Seeking advice from the local Crime Prevention Officer, who can be contacted via your local Garda station	Providing training in managing challenging behaviour, including de-escalation techniques

*This list is not exhaustive.

Making a start

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1. Identify situations where working alone takes place.

Check that the precautions you have taken are adequate to protect against the risk of assault. If they are not, identify any additional ones that are needed.

Make a note of these and any additional precautions that might be required, detailing who will be responsible for taking each action.

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If you have completed formal risk assessments, these should do this for you.

In particular, think about the risk that can arise from working alone:

- In the church itself
- In other church buildings, for example a church hall
- Other areas that are concealed, for example crypts, porches, etc.
- At home
- When travelling or visiting parishioners in the community
- When hosting tower tours or other fundraising events
- When hosting charitable activities, for example night shelters, foodbanks, etc.
- When carrying cash, or there is cash or other valuables on the premises.

The precautions that you will need to take will depend on your own particular circumstances.

In general, you could consider some of the following where people are working alone:

In the church (for example, opening or closing up the church):

- Always having two people on duty at any one time
- Providing a suitable means of communication (for example, a mobile telephone or two-way radio)
- Issuing personal attack alarms connected to an alarm system, ensuring the correct response if such an alarm is activated
- Only admitting those who have pre-booked for tower tours or other events
- Obtaining specialist help from your local Crime Prevention Officer.

In the church hall (for example, opening up in the evening for lettings or church events):

- Avoiding the collection of cash at events
- Providing a suitable means of communication, for example a separate telephone
- Ensuring entrances, including paths and car parks, are well lit
- Ensuring adequate supervision and stewarding of private parties and events

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At home (for example, occasions when people call at the home of any church member*). It is quite common in many churches to have a 'key card' near the entrance advising where the key may be obtained if the church is locked. The addresses given are often remote and the key-holders are often elderly.

Here, you could:

- Make the key available from a local shop, Post Office or garage
- Not divulge the details of parishioners' names and addresses where keys can be obtained
- Display church opening times in the church porch or on the noticeboard
- Establish safety guidelines for dealing with people in difficulty or distress that can be followed by parishioners (for example, you may decide to have a policy that you do not give cash to casual callers but have vouchers available that can be used in a local shop or café)
- Make information sheets available that can be given to callers detailing local shelters, social services, emergency social workers and other voluntary organisations
- Identify fixed times and places where members of the clergy or others with specialist skills would be available to help people in need. These details could then be entered on a card that can be handed to callers
- Keeping a log of callers with brief details of name and reason for the call
- Provide guidelines for parishioners advising them to never allow callers indoors unless they are well known to them, not to attempt to become involved in counselling unless they are trained to do so, and security tips (for example, keeping the door to the house locked and conducting any discussions in the porch, etc.).

* The challenges presented to the clergy arising from callers to the vicarage or rectory is already well covered in the Christian Action & Response In Society publication, 'Knocking at Heaven's Door'.

When travelling between home and church, advising employees and volunteers to take care of their personal safety by:

- When out walking, keeping to busy, well-lit routes where possible, avoiding alleyways, subways and shortcuts through back lanes or wooded areas
- Carrying a mobile telephone and a personal attack alarm if necessary
- When driving, keeping car doors locked and valuables out of sight, parking as close to the church as possible
- Telling someone where they are going and what time they expect to arrive.

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When cash is collected or transferred:

- Holding collections from Sunday services and other monies in a safe
- Involving more than one person in any cash transits to the bank
- Varying cash transit routes and times
- Implementing suitable precautions where there are any cash collection points (for example, shops, bookstalls, refectories, crypts, treasuries, etc.). If these are remote, this could include ensuring that there is an adequate means of communication, providing personal attack alarms, ensuring that there is adequate lighting, etc. Alternatively tickets, etc. could be sold from a secure central point.

2. Ensure that the precautions you have identified are taken and remain in place for as long as necessary.

Make a note of any checks you make.

3. Provide employees and volunteers with any necessary information and training on the precautions to be taken.

Make a note of any information or training that is provided.

The level of information and training required will vary depending on your particular circumstances and the precautions to be taken.

If you have completed formal risk assessments, these will help you determine what will be necessary.

Remember to keep details of the nature and content of the training provided, when it was provided and who received it.

4. Document your arrangements and responsibilities for managing the risks from working alone.

Review these where necessary, particularly if you suspect that they are no longer valid.

Retain records of the notes you have made in steps one, two and three.

If you have prepared a health and safety policy, record these as part of it.

These could include your arrangements for responding to and reporting/investigating any incidents of violence, as well as any necessary victim support.

In the event of a claim, paperwork will be important. So, for working alone you should retain the records mentioned. Where you prepare other documentation you should keep these as well. This could include information gathered at the scene of the accident (for example, sketches/photographs and witnesses' statements), investigation documents (for example, an accident book), or specific health and safety documents (for example, risk assessments, records of maintenance, inspections and other checks, records of information and training provided, policy, etc.).

Want to know more?

Other useful health and safety information is available at

www.ecclesiastical.ie/risk-management

Further guidance and resources are also available at: www.hsa.ie

Need to report an incident involving an injury?

If an incident occurs that may result in a claim for injury, please retain any accident investigation records, e.g. accident book entry, photos etc. and contact our specialist claims team on **01 619 0300** (Monday to Friday 8am – 6pm) for advice. Where you have received correspondence about a claim being made against you, it is important that you notify us immediately and email a copy to our experts on Ireland_claims@ecclesiastical.com

Policy cover queries

For queries about your policy cover, call our specialist church team on **01 619 0300** (Monday to Friday 8am – 6pm, excluding bank holidays)

Alternatively, please visit www.ecclesiastical.ie/church

This guidance is provided for information purposes and is general and educational in nature. It should not be used as a substitute for taking professional advice on specific issues and should not be taken as providing legal advice on any of the topics addressed.



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