

DIOCESE OF CHESTER

Guidelines on Lone Working and Personal Safety for Clergy

Date policy began	October 2011
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Relevant to	Church House Staff Clergy ✓ Parishes
Version number	Version 2
Date of last change	January 2026
Next review date	April 2027
Approved by	Central Services Committee Jan 2026

Introduction

Clergy may find themselves working alone for several hours of their working day – this may be less if there is a parish office out of which they work, or more if they operate entirely from home.

Clergy working alone will of course face the same risks in their work as others doing similar tasks. However, the work of clergy does carry additional risks and it is important that these are fully understood and that sensible precautions and adequate arrangements are made to ensure they are as safe as possible.

These guidelines seek to provide guidance on how clergy can protect themselves from allegations. Avoiding lone working where possible will protect clerics as well as protecting others.

Potential hazards of lone working

There are a number of areas where risks may be greater when working alone:

- Accidents or sudden illness when there is no-one to summon help or 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, e.g. heavy lifting, or use of certain equipment.

- Lack of safe way in or out of a building (e.g. danger of being accidentally locked in).
- Loss or damage to property e.g. theft of laptop from parked vehicle.

Assessing the risks of lone working

The perception of what is a risk and the actual risk itself may be seen differently by individuals. For example, an inexperienced curate may underestimate the risks of an activity; some clergy especially those in urban parishes may feel particularly vulnerable to violence after dark; or a medical condition may make it unsafe for an individual to work alone.

Equally, consideration should be given to the safety of others when lone working, for example, the risk to the person to whom the cleric is ministering.

Clergy should consider these factors and assess the particular risks in their parish environment. Appropriate steps should be taken to reduce the risk, particularly where the environment around the vicarage or church plant is lonely, poorly lit and / or in an area where criminal activity is more likely.

Consideration should be given as to whether it is appropriate to visit alone. It is best practice to reduce lone working as much as is possible, working in pairs wherever that is possible.

Further information can be found in the Church of England Code of Safer Working Practice:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/code-of-safer-working-practice-02.07.2021.pdf>

Measures to minimise the risks of lone working

There are a number of things which can be done to minimise risks when clergy work alone. The risk assessment guidance found at Appendix 1 highlights actions clergy can take to improve the working environment, and practices and procedures which can be implemented to enable them to go about their daily work in relative safety.

The most important precautions you can take are:

- Know as much about as possible about any potentially risky situation
Consider whether you need to go alone
- Ensure you have a mobile phone with you
- Do not put yourself into a situation where you are very vulnerable
- Let someone else know where you are if you feel you must go into that situation alone.

The Church of England National Safeguarding Team has produced a useful document: “Safer Environment and Activities”.

The document can be accessed via the link:

https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/safer-environment-and-activities-oct19_0.pdf

Risk Assessment

A risk assessment should be conducted for each situation to ensure that the individuals are not being put at undue risk. This would include the potential risk or concern to a visitor as well as the person being visited.

A Risk Assessment template can be found on the diocesan website:

Church House menu: HR, Policies and Procedures

[Chester Diocese | HR | Policies and Procedures](#)

Under the heading Lone working and personal safety, document called ‘Lone Working Risk Assessment’

[Lone Working Risk Assessment \(4Rs Framework\)](#)

Templates for personal risk assessments and risk assessments for home visits can be accessed from the Church of England website:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/policy-practice-guidance/templates-and-resources>

Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy

The 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, which are on the Church of England website, and can be accessed also through this diocese’s Clergy Information document. They comment:

“At the heart of ministry is risk. Faced by a pastoral situation the minister has to take immediate decisions about what to say and do”.

The clergy will often find themselves in the powerful position of meeting people at the limits of their vulnerability. The Guidelines for the Professional Conduct seek 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.

The guidelines can be accessed via the link:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/clergy-resources/guidelines-professional-conduct-clergy>

The Clergy Information document can be found at:

https://f8dcd631-0dc9-4a3d-8669-5b44fa3dd8b2.usrfiles.com/ugd/f8dcd6_14c598666b6346b3b39afdecca3dc29d.pdf

Reporting incidents

Please report any incidents that happen to you, so that you can be supported and so that we can learn any lessons and improve practice in this difficult area. If you have any concerns, please talk to your Rural Dean and safety risk assessments for clergy and / or their vicarage are available by contacting Church House.

The Housing team contacts can be found at:

<https://www.chesterdiocese.org/content/clergy-housing>

In Conclusion

Establishing safe working practices for lone working is similar to organising other safe systems, but the risk assessment should take account of any extra risk factors, and then implement the safest ways of working.

Further details on Personal Safety can be obtained from:

Suzy Lamplugh Trust <http://www.suzylamplugh.org>

National Churchwatch <https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/get-support/support-organisations/national-churchwatch>

Local Police Force websites:

Cheshire police: <https://www.cheshire.police.uk/>

Merseyside police <https://www.merseyside.police.uk/>

Greater Manchester police <https://www.gmp.police.uk/>

1. General Advice

When clergy are working alone they should consider these suggestions and determine which is practical in their situation.

- Have an arrangement with other people whereby they know what your plans are for the day.
- Tell people how you may be contacted and/or when you plan to make contact with the parish office or a colleague. If you change your plans let your contact know immediately.
- Let other people know whom you are meeting, when and where, so that someone is looking after your welfare.
- Liaise with other professionals in the community so that you are aware of houses or other places where there is potential for violent behaviour.
- Ensure that transport is in good working order.
- Carry a mobile phone, which should always be kept as fully charged as possible, and have it readily to hand in the case of an emergency. A mobile phone should never be relied on as the only means of communication however as signal strength may be poor in some areas.
- Refrain from attempting to do any work which would normally require more than one person e.g. heavy manual lifting unless/until other colleagues arrive to assist.

2. Personal Security

2.1. *Being alone in Church Buildings*

The area round the church and associated buildings – do they present any special risk if you are alone? It is sensible to do a risk assessment on the environment around the Church and associated buildings, both for yourself and for any others who may be there at times when there is no other activity taking place eg organists, parish administrators, cleaners, and consider the practicality of the following:

- Ensure that doors are locked behind those alone in the buildings at specific times.
- There may be a need for a security lock and access phone on some buildings.
- Ensure that someone else stays with you in Church until the end of the service.
- Do not respond to alarms in the middle of the night alone.

2.2. *Safety in the house*

Whilst working alone in the house there are a number of things you can do to minimise risks to personal security:

- Ensure that all windows and doors are secured to prevent unauthorised access, so that the house is as safe as possible.
- Be careful not to tell anyone that you are alone. This applies to people who telephone or e-mail you, as well as to visitors.

2.3. Callers to the house

It is sensible to determine what the parish's policy is about giving money and/or food, and then ensure it is consistently applied when callers come to the door asking for money. Useful tips are:

- Have a list of resource centres to which the caller can be directed, both local authority and charities.
- Decide whether to make an arrangement with local cafes/shops about exchanging goods for vouchers, or keep a stock of food to hand out.
- Set times and boundaries when help is available and do not make “knee jerk” responses on demand.
- Think carefully before inviting any caller inside especially if you are alone.
- 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 the visitor, ‘X’ has left. This acts as both an information call and a deterrent.

2.4. Making a Visit

The level of risk posed by home visits depends as much on the circumstances surrounding the visit as to the environment.

- Will the nature of a visit or the person being visited likely to increase the risk of violence?
- Will you be alone and/or in a remote location with the person you are visiting?
- Has the person being visited had a history of unbalanced behaviour?
- Do you require training in risk assessment or in dealing with difficult people?
- Will your visit increase the person's risk?

Other useful tips would be to:

- Ensure that you 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.
- Park as close to the building as possible in a well lit area.
- Ensure that you carry identification and be prepared to identify yourself.
- Carry out a “10 second risk assessment” when you first arrive at the premises and the front door is opened. If you feel that there is a risk of harm you should have an excuse ready not to enter the house and arrange for an alternative meeting.

- Make sure that when you enter the home that you shut the front door behind you and make yourself familiar with the door lock in case you need to make an emergency exit.
- Wherever practical avoid being in a situation where the person being visited is between you and the exit, whilst also being aware of the safety concerns of the person being visited.
- If there is a known problem with animals at a particular address or location, you should ask the occupants to remove or secure the animals before arrival.
- If you are confronted by an aggressive animal on a first visit to an address you should not put yourself at risk.

If you are making a visit to a parishioner you have concerns about, a system should be in place so that someone ensures that you have returned back to your home at the completion of the visit. If a problem arises, a system of code words or phrases should be agreed and used that will help you convey the nature of a threat to your colleagues so that they can provide the appropriate response such as involving the police. Remember that best practice is that you would not visit alone wherever possible.

Systems need not be overly complicated. It may be as simple as telling a colleague where you are going and when you are expected back; arranging to ring the parish office or churchwarden at the conclusion of a visit or call; having a mobile phone to enable someone to contact you if your return is overdue. Use of diary systems or noticeboards to indicate whereabouts may form part of this system. However, the system should ensure for risky visits that your return or a call from you is actively expected and waited for, and that action is taken to contact you if you do not return or the call is not made.

3. *On the Move*

3.1. *By Vehicle*

If you are a vehicle user there are some simple precautions you can take to minimise the risks to your personal safety. These include:

- Making sure items such as bags, cases, laptops etc., are never left visible in the car.
- Always holding the vehicle keys in your hand when leaving the premises in order to avoid looking for them outside which could compromise personal safety.
- Checking the inside and outside of the vehicle for possible intruders before entering.
- Ensuring all doors are locked especially when travelling at slow speed and when stopped at traffic lights.
- Always trying to park as close as possible to your location.
- Parking in a well lit area at night, and facing the direction in which you are leaving.
- If driving alone, especially after dark, not stopping even for people who may seem to be in genuine distress or requiring help. Stop as soon as is practicable and safe to do so and contact the emergency services as appropriate.

- If followed or if in doubt as to whether you are being followed, driving to the nearest police station or manned and lit building such as a petrol station to request assistance.
- Using your car horn to attract attention or help if needed.
- In the event of a breakdown, where it is a safe to do so staying in your vehicle, putting on the hazard lights and calling for assistance.

3.2. Cycling

In addition to paying particular attention to everyday road hazards, you should take sensible precautions by:

- Avoiding unlit areas and quiet roads.
- Securing your bicycle near the premises in a well lit area if possible.
- Always holding the bicycle lock keys in your hand when leaving the premises in order to avoid looking for them outside which could compromise personal safety.
- Fitting and using front and rear lights on your bicycle when dark.
- Avoiding making repairs to your bicycle in isolated areas – where possible push the bike to the nearest safe place e.g. petrol station, guarded car park, to make repairs.
- Not compromising your safety by attempting to stop someone stealing your bicycle.

3.3. On foot

Whilst most areas are perfectly safe to walk about on foot, you can do a lot reduce risks of harm:

- Plan your route beforehand to avoid going through underpasses or taking short cuts through areas which may be less safe e.g. parks, especially after dark.
- Walk briskly if possible and physically able to do so and do not stop in areas that are unknown to you, for example to look at a map or ask for directions. Instead go to a 'safe' place such as a petrol station or shop and ask for directions.
- If you think you are being followed, trust your instincts. Cross the street - if you are still being followed head for a busy area.
- If you feel attack is imminent, use your voice to make lots of noise. Shouting an instruction like "Call the Police!" makes it very clear to anyone within earshot that you are in danger and need assistance. Thinking about what you would do in advance will help you to think more clearly in an emergency situation.
- Avoid using mobile phones overtly in any area. If it is necessary to use your phone or respond to a call/text message, where possible do this in a safe place such as a shop.
- Remain alert to people around you and stay in the centre of the footpath facing oncoming traffic.

- Hold bags and briefcases under your arm with the clasp close to your body; don't wear rucksacks over your shoulders as they make it easier to be pulled to the ground.
- Don't wear headphones or iPods, always be aware of your surroundings and make sure you can hear if someone is behind you and shouting to you.
- Where possible avoid overtly displaying valuables on your person such as jewellery or iPods. However, if someone attempts to steal your belongings, you should let them have it immediately without challenge.
- Consider keeping your house keys and mobile phone in your pocket or somewhere separate from your handbag or briefcase.
- Wear sensible low heeled footwear with non-slip soles.
- Try not to stop at cash point machines.
- Avoid passing groups/gangs of people who may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Carry a torch.

3.4. Public Transport

3.4.1. Taxis

You should always seek to use a reputable company; unlicensed mini cabs pose a particular risk and should *never* be used. Additional tips which will help you to stay safe are:

- Wherever possible book a taxi in advance from a reputable company. If no taxi has been booked go to the office of a reputable company or to a recognised rank to hail a cab.
- Always make sure that the driver knows your name and destination before you get into the car but do not give out any other personal information.
- Sit in the back behind the driver's seat and have a mobile phone readily accessible.

3.4.2. Buses, Tubes and Trains

Whilst much has been done to improve safety on public transport, simple measures can be taken to minimise risks:

- Where possible wait for transport at a busy stop or station that is well lit.
- Try and sit near the driver of the vehicle or in an aisle seat.
- Familiarise yourself with the emergency alarm on the vehicle and sit near it.
- Avoid empty upper decks on buses or empty train compartments.
- If threatened by other passenger/s inform the driver or guard.

October 2025