

Dear Churchwarden,

As this will be the last update of the year, I would like to wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. This update once again gives you some bits of information that I have come across which I hope you may find useful as you look after your church buildings. I appreciate that it is not just churchwardens and clergy that are involved in looking after our buildings, so if other people in your parish have this responsibility please forward this information to them.

### **Preparing for Christmas and Winter**

As we begin advent and our preparations for the Christmas period and the winter beyond. Below are a few things to consider.

Candle Lit services – Are the candles securely held? Are they away from any flammable materials? Is water available in case something sets alight? Who is responsible for keeping an eye on all of the candles?

Christmas lights – Have they been tested by a competent person? Are the cables secured effectively to prevent people tripping over them?

Larger Services – Are all facilities and exits clearly marked? If you are having significantly more people in the building than usual, many of whom that may not know the building layout. Do you have sufficient seating easily available?

Churchyard Paths – Are they cleared regularly of leaves to prevent people slipping? Is a shovel available to clear snow? Is salt available to clear paths on frosty mornings?

Roofs – After the recent storms have you carried out a visual check of your roof to check that no slates have moved or been damaged?

Gutters – Have the gutters and gullies been cleared of autumn leaves and debris? The heavy rain and any snow, means that gutters need to run at their full capacity.

Heating – If your heating system is coming to the end of its life, do you have a backup plan for Christmas services? Have you started to investigate heating options so that if it fails, you are able to move forward quickly with a replacement proposal?

Pipes – Are all water pipes in unheated parts of the building fully lagged to prevent freezing?

Obviously there are lots of other things that we need to check on our buildings but hopefully these points are useful reminders.

### **Contractor & Supplier Lists**

Thank you to those who have sent me details of contractors that they have used and for those that have told me of companies that are no longer trading. I have attached the current contractor directory based on the information that has been shared with the diocese throughout 2023.

As I receive information from parishes throughout the year if you can't find the details that you need please let me know and I can check if any new details of contractors have been received.

### **Training Opportunities 2024**

I am currently finalising the calendar of events and hope to have this out to you by the end of the year. The sessions confirmed so far are as follows.

#### **Achieving Net Zero in your Church Building**

Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2.00pm - Holy Trinity, Southwick

Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> March 7.00pm - All Saints, Lobley Hill

#### **Faculty Workshop**

Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2.00pm - Crawcrook Holy Spirit

Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> February 7.00pm - Wingate Holy Trinity

I am still looking for venues for the sessions later in the year (they can be repeated in different parts of the diocese), so if you are able to host one or more of these please let me know.

### **Durham Diocese Churchwardens Forum**

We have an online Churchwardens Forum using Google Groups to allow you to ask questions and share information with other Churchwardens. If you would like to sign up and you can do so by clicking on the following link. [DDChurchwardenForum - Google Groups](#)

If you are already on the Churchwarden Forum, why not ask a question. The more it is used the more useful it becomes.

### **Governments Autumn Statement: 22nd November 2023**

One element of interest for places of worship was the announcement of VAT relief for the installation of energy saving materials will (following consultation) be expanded to include additional technologies such as water-source heat pumps for both residential and charitable premises. Full details will be published shortly. The new VAT reliefs for energy efficiency measures in charitable premises is likely to be beneficial for charitable heritage organisations renovating their buildings, and for owners and occupiers of historic buildings interested in these technologies.

I will let you know as soon as I receive any further details.

### **Levelling-up Act – parish council spending**

I previously shared details that the Levelling-up Act had received Royal Assent. The provision of the act that clarifies that Parish Councils can fund works at Parish Churches ([section 82](#)) comes into force on 26 December 2023.

### **Faith security training**

This is an opportunity to be part of a trial of new faith-specific training to support churches respond to security risks that may make them feel threatened while meeting to worship or practise their faith in other ways. This is experienced in different ways by different religions and faith groups. By taking part in this trial, you can help the Home Office provide training that will support churches. You can register by clicking [here](#).

Finally if you need any support regarding work on your buildings, please get in touch with me and I will do my best to find you the information that you require.

Kind regards

Martin

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