



The **Methodist Church**
Plymouth & Exeter District

GUIDANCE ON 'LONE WORKING' FOR THOSE WHO SOMETIMES UNDERTAKE WORK UNACCOMPANIED

Employed staff in these situations together with their supervisors/managers may refer to Lay Employment Advisory Information [http://www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/employees-and-volunteers/church-\(lay\)-employees/lay-employment-advisory-info](http://www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/employees-and-volunteers/church-(lay)-employees/lay-employment-advisory-info) regarding Lone Working [Section 13.3]. Additional guidance in respect of Home working may be found in the adoption by Methodist Council of the Connexional Team Homeworking Policy [MC/10/61] <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/coun-1061-homeworking-policy-290310.pdf> . Both are available on the Methodist Church web site.

This guidance is primarily for **those working voluntarily** for a church, Circuit or the District who on occasion work alone. It aligns closely with the advice to employed staff.

Starting from the principle that **'If it isn't safe don't do it'** this guidance encourages:

- Anticipating vulnerabilities and risks
- Assessing identified risks
- Taking steps to eliminate or minimise risks

Anticipating vulnerabilities and risks

As part of the *Safer Recruitment* policy of the Methodist Church everyone undertaking a voluntary role or task needs a written description of the role they are undertaking and a named person who regularly reviews the work undertaken and any changes which need consideration. It follows from this that the anticipation of any vulnerabilities or risks will be made when the role is first assigned and be repeated at each review. **This task is a joint one never one to be undertaken by the volunteer alone.**

The Church Council, Circuit Meeting or District Policy Committee has a duty of care to everyone undertaking a volunteer role on their behalf. The volunteer has a responsibility to give attention to their own safety.

Assessing identified risks

It is not possible to provide a comprehensive list of the risks which will be encountered in undertaking work alone. Each situation needs to be considered separately. The following points are intended to help identify reasonably foreseeable risks:

- Insecure facilities: e.g. can callers be identified before they are invited onto premises or into an office?
- Unnecessary isolation: e.g. if there is a problem, can the volunteer call for help and receive it speedily?
- Poor communication: e.g. when a volunteer is working alone, who knows they are safe and how?
- Unnecessary lone working: e.g. has consideration been given to more than one person undertaking the work? Can a home visit be done by two people?
- Misuse of social media: e.g. are volunteers clear about how to respond to invitations to use *Facebook* or other social media?
- Poor preparation: e.g. has work been planned?
- Health and Safety concerns: e.g. have any H&S matters been identified? Does the volunteer know when and how to complete the Accident Book? Is insurance cover in place?

Taking steps to eliminate or minimise risks

The supervisor on behalf of the church, Circuit or District has a responsibility to put in place arrangements which support volunteers' safety. It is helpful to consider the following points:

- The remoteness of the work place
- Potential communication problems
- Potential for verbal and physical abuse
- Vulnerability of lone workers to feelings of isolation, stress and depression
- Whether or not all the plant, equipment, materials to be used can be handled safely by one person
- Whether or not the person is medically fit and able to work alone
- How the lone worker will be supervised
- How the lone worker will obtain help in an emergency such as assault, vehicle breakdown, accident or fire
- Whether or not there is adequate first aid cover

The responsibility of the volunteer is to support their own work and that of other volunteers'. Individuals should consider the points below and any other matters they can identify which will anticipate predictable risks.

- Take reasonable care for your own safety
- Report any incidents of violence or aggressive behaviour

- Arrange to meet unknown individuals in a public place and preferably with another person present
- If making a home visit, make sure that someone knows where you are going and that you have a mobile 'phone with you that is turned on
- Tell someone where you are going and when you hope to be back
- Consider a 'buddy system' when you let a colleague or friend know that you have arrived at a visit/premises and when leaving a visit/ premises
- To consider carrying a Personal Shriek Alarm
- To always be 'streetwise' and vigilant, taking note of what is going on around you

Scenario for consideration:

The following scenario offers opportunity to reflect on appropriate responses to situations where lone working, appropriately or inappropriately, is one of the options.

Pat and Maria

Pat is a pastoral visitor for her church. She has been visiting some church members on and off for three years. It is generally acknowledged that she has a gift in this area and, as she lives alone and with few family commitments, she has the time available to do this.

Over the last year the church congregation has been steadily growing and the need for pastoral visits has increased. Pat was recently asked by the Minister to visit Maria, a relatively new person to the church after the Minister had received a 'phone call to say that this person was feeling low.

On arrival, Pat found that Maria had not been taking good care of herself. She was invited in and offered a cup of tea. Maria had locked the door behind her and seemed agitated. As time went by, Pat became increasingly uneasy. Every time she mentioned leaving, Maria got up and barred the way to the door. She noticed that her pupils were dilated. When her hands were not in her dressing gown pocket where she had the door key, she could see that her hands were shaking.

Eventually, with the promise of going to get Maria a pint of milk from the local shops, she made her escape. No one knew Pat was doing this visit at this time and no one was expecting her home at any specific time.

What issues arise and how may they be addressed?