

Installing kitchen or servery facilities in your church

The sharing of food and drink has been a vital component of Christian fellowship and hospitality since the earliest days of the church. PCCs today may wish to install kitchen facilities to support the provision of hospitality in their church building. These may range from a simple cupboard type servery to a full-blown catering kitchen, depending on your building and the needs of your community. This guidance note explores these options, and the basics of the installation process.

Note that this guidance is intended to supplement the advice of the DAC and your architect or design professional, not to replace it.

1. Exploring your specific needs

The first step in making any change to your church building is to conduct a thorough assessment of your needs - those of the congregation, specific user groups, and the wider community that uses the building. This is done through the drafting of a **statement of need**. [Statement of Need Guidance](#) which will act as a brief for your architect or other design professional. Be sure to be as precise as possible in this document; include the numbers of people you expect to provide hospitality to, and exactly what that will entail. For example, do you only need to provide hot drinks and cold snacks, or do you need to be able to reheat food? If you wish to offer a meal, what kind of meal would that be? Do your volunteers need to be able to work in the kitchen space whilst a service or other event is taking place in the church? Resist the temptation to define solutions in this document - as in a kitchen of x size, in y location - that is a task for your architect or other design professional. Your task is to provide a detailed brief to guide their work.

2. Understanding your church building

It is vital that any new work to your church is guided by a comprehensive understanding of your church building - which elements of it are so important that they cannot be changed, which are detrimental to the building, and what its significance is. This is done through the drafting of a **statement of significance** [Statement of Significance Guidance](#). You or your project group can produce this, or you can commission a consultant to do so. It is important that this document is as objective as possible and is written in advance of any design work so that, together with the statement of need, it can provide a brief for your architect or design professional. These two documents will also assist the DAC and the Chancellor to assess your application for faculty permission in due course.

3. Approaching the DAC for early-stage advice

Once you have a statement of need and significance, even if they are in draft form, we encourage you to **contact the DAC office** to discuss your proposals and, if appropriate, arrange a site visit to discuss possibilities for the church building. This early-stage advice will help you and your architect understand the parameters for the design work and avoid any potential pitfalls later in the process. It will also help you understand what kind of design professional you need for the project. This would also be a good point at which to visit other churches who have installed kitchen facilities, to learn from their experiences.

4. Appointing an architect or design professional

Armed with your statement of need and significance, and early-stage advice from the DAC, you can now go about appointing a design professional for the project. For small scale projects that use existing drainage systems and water supplies, and are in ancillary areas of the building, a good furniture maker or carpenter may be all you need. For larger scale projects, where the work is going to be visible to the public and will affect historic material, you will need an architect or surveyor.

It is good practice to approach at least three professionals when seeking tenders for design/building work. A good place to start is the diocesan list of approved **quinquennial inspectors**, as many of these architects and surveyors specialise in development work as well as repair. Be sure to ask your current inspector to tender, as they will already be familiar with the church building and should have a good working relationship with you. Talk to other churches in your area who have done recent work, as they may be able to recommend a professional.

When tendering for design services, be sure to include your statements of need and significance in the tender pack. You should also request references from clients, or at least a portfolio with client contact details. Visit complete works by your shortlisted professionals and talk to their clients about their experiences. Finally, remember that you are not obliged to choose the cheapest professional. Consider instead who seems to give you the best value - this will be a combination of several factors including the quality of their work, their experience, their references, and their cost.

For detailed guidance on tendering and appointments, **contact the DAC**.

Once you have appointed a design professional your project will follow the same procedure as any other reordering or development project; for more advice on these later stages please see the DAC guidance [here](#).

Frequently asked questions:

❖ What level of catering are we permitted to do in a church building?

There is no restriction in ecclesiastical law on the level of catering you can do in a church; rather the restrictions are practical and related to secular regulations. Practically, you are unlikely to gain permission for a large catering-style kitchen that takes up a substantial space in the church, to the detriment of its appearance and function as a place of worship. However, a kitchen or servery carefully designed to fit the available space and complement the interior is unlikely to be controversial. You should note that any facility will be subject to secular building and public health regulations: if you intend to have a kitchen for cooking from scratch you will need to make sure your volunteers have the appropriate hygiene certificates, and that there are separate facilities for handwashing. The local authority will need to approve these.

Any catering activity you do in the church must be to support its primary function as a place of worship. This can include, for instance, a servery for after-service refreshments, a community cafe operating a few times a week, or a kitchen providing daily meals to homeless people. Anything operating as a business, or unrelated to the mission and ministry of the church, may require changes of the pastoral status of that part of the building, or a licence under faculty.

❖ What is the difference between a servery and a kitchen?

A servery is a small facility for providing drinks and serving food brought in from elsewhere. These often take the form of a “kitchen-in-a cupboard” at the west end of the church, and because they are small, they are very discreet when not in use. A kitchen is a larger space for making food from scratch and will normally need to be in an ancillary area not visible from the main body of the church. The distinction in function between the two is important, as public health regulations (and local authority approval) are unlikely to apply for a servery; this means you may not need separate hand washing facilities and that your volunteers are unlikely to need hygiene certificates. Your architect and/or DAC officer will advise you further.

❖ Where should we site our servery/kitchen?

The specific location in your building is a matter for your architect/design professional, but here are some general guidelines:

1. Use discreet ancillary areas, such as the base of a tower, where possible. If you don't have any of these, the west end of an aisle is a viable alternative, as it is not in the eyeline of the congregation.
2. Avoid proximity to fragile parts of the building fabric or historic features, in particular monuments, historic timber, and wall paintings - all of these can be severely damaged by water vapour from kettles, sinks, and water urns.
3. Place your serving point as close as possible to circulation and gathering spaces, to prevent bottlenecks.
4. Remember that your serving point can be moveable - many churches have a servery unit, containing crockery, which can be stored under a counter when not in use, then wheeled out to wherever it is required. This gives you the flexibility to serve several different event layouts without relying on folding tables.

5. Think about where people will eat/drink their refreshments. For hot drinks you are likely to need a mixture of sitting and standing space; if you are serving food, you are more likely to need space in which to lay out tables. Remember to allow space for any moveable furniture to be stored.

❖ **Do we need an extractor fan?**

This depends on the location of your facility and the level of catering taking place. Kitchens where you are cooking from scratch and there is no natural ventilation will require a mechanical extract (extractor fan). This will usually go through the wall of the building, or, if possible, up and out through your tower. The detailing of these vents on the exterior face of the wall should be carefully considered - a plastic vent cover is unlikely to be appropriate unless your church building is a modern construction. For stone-built churches a small opening with stone slate louvers is an inconspicuous solution; for 19th century brick-built churches a cast iron cover or a terracotta venting brick will be a better fit.

Serveries located at the back of your church, intended just for drinks and cold snacks, are unlikely to need an extractor fan; they do not produce much water vapour or cooking odour and can vent to the main body of the church. Just be sure to site them away from any vulnerable building material or features such as monuments and wall paintings.

❖ **What drainage options are there?**

Your best option is mains drainage where present. If this is not feasible on your site, a soakaway is a sensible alternative that should be adequate for a servery that is only used once or twice a week. More intensive use may require a larger soakaway or a tank. Remember that in most churchyards any excavation will require archaeological oversight; drainage routes should follow existing disturbance (i.e. existing drains, paths etc) where possible to minimise the disruption of burials and other archaeological features.

❖ **Can we use a stock kitchen from a supplier?**

If your kitchen or servery is to be sited in an ancillary area not visible from the main body of the church it may be possible to use units from a supplier such as Howdens, rather than bespoke work. However, most stock kitchen units are made of veneered chipboard, mdf, or plywood; none of these materials cope well with the internal conditions of historic church buildings. This is particularly the case where your building is only heated when in use, and where you have problems with damp. The production of these materials can be energy and chemical intensive, and therefore damaging to the environment. Bespoke units made from quality solid timber do cost more, but will last substantially longer, use natural materials, and may be recycled at the end of their life.

For a servery in a public area of the building it is likely that you will be required to use bespoke units that have been designed to fit with the church interior; these are usually in solid timber stained or dyed to match other timber in the building.

❖ **Can we have a vinyl floor?**

Vinyl and other non-breathable floor finishes should be avoided in buildings that do not have damp proof courses; in historic buildings these will trap moisture and drive it up the walls. Existing stone or tile surfaces are usually extremely hard wearing and should be retained and repaired, if necessary, rather than covered.

❖ **How can we reduce the ecological impact of our new kitchen?**

There are two things to consider here - reducing the impact of construction, and the impact of use. For construction, use sustainable materials that are sourced as locally as possible. Timber should be FSC certified or equivalent; avoid energy hungry man-made materials such as laminates and MDF. New appliances should have as high an energy efficiency rating as possible. In use, make sure appliances are turned off when not required, that water is not wasted, and that waste food/teabags/coffee grounds are composted. You may also wish to consider greywater harvesting given the increasing prevalence of summer droughts.

❖ **Where can I see good examples of church kitchens/serveries?**

Please contact your Church Buildings Team for suggestions of good examples.