

# Candlelit services and votive candles - Guidance Notes

The use of candles in church is a very important part of worship. However, it is important to remember that they can be the cause of major fires and serious injuries if not used correctly. Simple precautions should mean that candles can be used safely.



Fire extinguishers must always be readily available where candles are being used.

## **Choice of candle**

Good quality slow-burning candles are best. Cheaper, catering-quality candles will burn down quickly, and the flame may soon get dangerously close to foliage or decorations.

## **Hand-held candles**

Great care needs to be taken where people are given candles to hold, especially where large numbers are involved. Apart from the risk of igniting flammable materials, molten wax can cause damage to clothing and is very hot. Purpose-made candles are available, and should be used with proper slide-on card drip trays.

Even greater care is necessary where children are involved. Children should be properly supervised and care taken to ensure that they do not stand too close together and, in particular, not too close behind one another as there is a risk of both clothing and hair being set alight. Processions while holding candles are probably best avoided.

## **Placing of candles**

Candles must be kept clear of all combustible materials including flammable decorations, foliage and electrical equipment. Ideally candles should be placed in metal holders on non-combustible surfaces such as stone or brick.

## **Fire extinguishers**

Fire extinguishers must always be readily available where candles are being used. Water extinguishers are the most suitable for dealing with burning foliage, paper and wood. Church members must know where the extinguishers are and how to use them. Training can be provided either by your fire extinguisher supplier or the local Fire and Rescue Service. Water should not be used on electrical equipment.

## **Fire blanket**

A fire blanket may be a better way of dealing with certain fire situations, and you should have at least one available. They are particularly suitable for dealing with burning clothing.

## **Means of escape**

If a fire should start you must be certain that people can get out of the building quickly. All doors must be unlocked and be capable of being opened quickly.

## **Lighting**

Stewards should have torches so that any minor problems can be dealt with, without turning on the main lights. In the event of a fire or other serious emergency the main lights must be turned on immediately.

### Procedures

It is strongly recommended that a team of stewards is appointed and that each person has specific duties in accordance with a list of written procedures. A specific steward should be appointed to each door and must ensure that it opens easily before the service starts.

Similarly fire extinguishers should be allocated to specific stewards, who should know how to use them. For large services, a trained first aider with first aid equipment should be available.

### Announcements

The person leading the service should be aware of the fire risk, and in the event of an emergency be ready to ask everyone to leave in an orderly fashion following the directions of the stewards.

### The safe use of votive candles

Votive candles of the 'tea light' type can burn for a long time, become very hot and are self-supporting. Our advice would be to avoid this type of candle and to use the type which has to be supported either on a pricket stand or placed in sand. This would also avoid someone maliciously placing them under or near combustible material, beginning a fire without the candle falling over and self-extinguishing.

One of the greatest risks with votive candle stands is persons reaching over already burning candles to place a new one in the stand. This usually happens because

the front rows fill up first and there are only empty spaces at the back of the stand. Where possible we suggest that a church official, vergers, welcomer etc. supervises use of the votive candle stand and carefully moves lighted candles from the front to the back to ensure that there are always empty spaces at the front of the stand.

A church should not be left unattended with candles still burning. When the church is locked up at night, any candles still alight must be extinguished.

A fire extinguisher and fire blanket should be kept close at hand to deal with any emergency.

Combustible materials should be kept well away from the votive candle stand which should also be placed on a non-combustible floor (not carpet). Slips of paper are often used to make requests for prayers and sometimes are placed on a 'Prayer tree'.

These must be well away from the votive candle stand. Curtains should not be allowed to blow into a lit candle.

Ensure that any box used to collect money for votive candles is placed so that people putting money in the box are not likely to come into contact with a burning candle.

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