Helping a community rebuild what was lost

Almost a year ago in December 2020, Grade I listed All Saints Church in Mackworth, Derbyshire, was destroyed by a fire, leaving the local community devastated and a major restoration project ahead of them.

Our claims specialists have been working closely with the church, diocese and contractors to construct a new access road on site and make the site safe – which included spraying the damaged columns with cement to stabilise them. Amongst all the debris carefully removed, over 8,500 artefacts (around three-quarters of a tonne) were brushed and catalogued including window glass, marble from memorials, carved sandstone, candlesticks, iron hinges and ceramic tiles. Artefacts were labelled with a unique number and grid reference, entered onto a register and safely put into storage boxes. Sadly, much of the stone and marble items are unlikely to be restorable but most items made of metal, including crosses and wrought iron architectural fittings, with superficial damage may be restored and reused.

In July, three 400-year-old bells were removed from the bell tower and taken to the bell foundry of John Taylor and Co in Loughborough for safe-keeping. Their condition will be assessed and that of the bell frame before being safely returned. The church clock mechanism has also been removed by specialists Smith of Derby, and restoration work is being carried out on some of the church registers and records, which were kept in a safe and badly charred in the fire.

Contractors have also been appointed for the next phase of the development, which will start in early 2022. This will include the installation of more internal scaffolding to further stabilise the building and allow access at higher levels to make a detailed inspection of the condition of the stone to determine the level of restoration required.

Ecclesiastical’s claims director, Jeremy Trott, described the project as “complex”, adding “alongside our partners, we’re focused on restoring the church and giving the local community their church back.”

For more information about how our claims team can support you, visit www.ecclesiastical.com/claims
Social media sermons and Zoom communions are here to stay

In a recent survey, 95% of Church leaders said video calls and live streaming have helped their church to stay in touch with their congregations during the pandemic. St. Edmund’s Church in Taversham, Norfolk, was one of them.

Since March 2020, St. Edmund’s have streamed hundreds of hours of footage, helping to keep the local community connected but also welcoming in viewers from much further afield.

“We wanted to make sure our community could still worship and learn together as we had been doing since before the pandemic, and live streaming has been fantastic in helping us to do that,” said Reverend Seabrook.

“At the height of the pandemic, we were getting over a hundred visits to our Facebook page a day, ten times as many as beforehand. We’ve had people tuning in from all over the country and even as far away as Arizona! By using social media, we’ve been able to reach many more people than ever came through the actual church door each week, so it’s definitely something we’re looking to continue offering.”

The popularity of the live-streamed services led to other online ideas including ‘Tiny Tunes’, a music and dance class for young children shared through Facebook, and weekly coffee mornings hosted over Zoom. To help bring the countryside into the homes of those who have been isolating, services have even taken place from locations around the area.

The church has managed to cater to people without access to the Internet too – providing printed sheets of the services to those that couldn’t join in online.

“We’ve seen how effective online services can be and we’ve invested in some new equipment to help us offer a higher-quality experience for everyone tuning in – but we haven’t lost sight of the fact that our church is for everyone, and not everyone can access the Internet. We’re looking forward to welcoming more people to our services as restrictions continue to lift but we will keep streaming services online and look forward to developing that more as time goes on.”

Almost half of churches who participated in the survey who had used digital channels said that they had seen an increase in attendance against their usual numbers, with two-thirds saying they will carry on streaming to their audience after lockdown ends.

Even though many churches are now open again, it is encouraging to see that they plan to continue with these new channels and in doing so welcome their audiences, both new and old, back into their churches.

Helen Richards, Church Operations Director at Ecclesiastical.

There is lots of information and advice about using online equipment safely available on our website: www.ecclesiastical.com/digitalchurches

Keeping churches open

The National Churches Trust works to keep churches in good repair so they can remain open, serving local people.

Last year, the Trust’s grants helped 259 building projects and the good news for 2022 is that its grant programmes will continue to be available to both listed and unlisted churches, of any Christian denomination, throughout the UK.

Grants are available to help keep church buildings watertight and windproof, for essential maintenance and to fund the installation of modern facilities. Apply at www.nationalchurchestrust.org/grants

1 The Bible Society research with UK cross-denomination church leaders, based on 508 Anglican / Church of England responses
A change can do you good

Our beautiful churches are central to their community and as the world around us changes, so are our churches.

There are so many exciting ways to diversify and offer different functions to encourage different and new members. During a year where regular church activities have been greatly affected, 49% have embraced diversification – setting up food banks, community spaces, parent/toddler groups, homeless shelters, café’s as well as job clubs and other education functions. And 73% of churches believe they need to diversify to survive.

Some churches used the pandemic as an opportunity to better support those in their communities who were most in need, either by expanding on existing services or developing entirely new ones. Churches have offered home deliveries, ranging from food to medication, to ensure that those isolated from the rest of the community were kept safe, but still able to cope in isolation. Some have also been used as COVID vaccination centres, supporting local authorities and health services in the roll out of the vaccine and helping to protect people at risk from the disease.

Surprisingly, despite the acceptance that diversifying is vital to the future of the church, only half have actually adapted to provide the local community with new services. Two-thirds of those agreed that changes have helped them make an impact on the wider community, outside of their congregation.

Whilst there are likely to be challenges, diversifying can bring benefits too – it’s an opportunity to utilise unoccupied buildings, and can help raise funds.

"With pressure on community services, churches are leading the way in providing vital support to the elderly, the underprivileged and the community as a whole. Despite the challenges facing our churches, church communities continue to find a way to provide vital services of real benefit to local people. Particularly in areas where community resources have been stretched to the limit, the activities and services run by churches provide a lifeline to those in need, so it is important that we continue to champion the work our churches continue to deliver."

Helen Richards, Church Operations Director at Ecclesiastical

1 The Bible Society research with UK cross-denomination church leaders, based on 502 Anglican / Church of England responses

Lucy’s customer services team are second to none

Lucy Handscomb joined Ecclesiastical nine years ago, and has worked in various roles – but she has found her vocation as our customer services manager.

“It’s a wonderful job,” says Lucy – who is married, and unwinds by cooking and walking her Labradoodle, Hazel. “We receive hundreds of calls every week from customers needing help, answering most within 20 seconds and taking as much time as we need to provide tailored support and often peace of mind.”

It’s a policy which regularly wins her team amazing satisfaction ratings of 98% or 99%. “The team share a wealth of experience, so will likely have dealt with most enquiries before,” says Lucy. “But our customers never cease to surprise me. If your vicar wants to abseil down the church to raise funds, we’ll find a way to help make it happen! It’s a privilege to work with our customers and help make a difference.”

If you need to ask us anything, contact the customer services team on 0345 777 3322 (8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday) or email churches@ecclesiastical.com

Information at your fingertips

The Ecclesiastical website is largely an online library of guidance and support for you and your church community. You’ll find information about church and home insurance, risk management, fundraising and grants and lots more. Church Matters’ newsletter is also on there, as is the link to subscribe to our monthly e-news – making it really easy to share with others. Visit: www.ecclesiastical.com/church
Snap, crackle and pop!

The snap of thunder, the crackle of ice, the pop of a firework – the winter months can be dramatic and exciting, but can also cause damage to your church property. See our risk calendar for useful seasonal tips – www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-calendar

Don’t give bad weather the cold shoulder!

Our data tells us that storm damage is one of the most common causes of loss. The best way to limit damage caused by wind and rain is good maintenance. Regularly check and clear gutters, gullies and drains of fallen leaves to reduce blockage and water build up. Replace missing or loose roof tiles sooner rather than needing to replace roof timbers later – a pair of binoculars is the easiest way to spot problems. Keep everyone safe from slipping by ensuring there is at least one clear pathway and keep entrances and exits free of leaves, ice and obstacles. And secure fences and outdoor furniture.

For more tips to being ready for winter, visit www.ecclesiastical.com/cold-weather

Turn the taps on escaping water

Just a small fracture in a pipe could release gallons of water, causing damage to masonry, plaster and carpets, rendering your building unusable for services or your community. But there’s lots you can do such as lagging pipes, regular boiler and heating system services, clearly labelling the stopcock, using a certified contractor for works, and considering installing a leak detection system.

Our recent claims data suggests many causes of water escaping including frozen pipes, the result of poor workmanship, general wear and tear, and changes in temperature of the water pressure. If you find a frozen pipe, act quickly. Turn off the water supply and gently thaw the pipe using indirect heat, e.g. a hairdryer or hot water bottle. If you have a burst pipe, turn off the water supply and try to catch any excess water in a bucket or other container. Don’t use the electrics if you think the escaping water might have flooded them – ask a professional electrician to make sure things are safe first.

For more information and some top tips, go to www.ecclesiastical.com/leaks

Stay safe at your church fireworks display

Fireworks at this time of year can be a great way to bring new people into the church family and raise funds. However, if not properly planned and managed, it can result in accidents and injury. Here are a few tips for a safe and fun event:

• Identify the risks and put measures in place to mitigate them.
• Inform us and ensure your planned activity is covered.
• Get written confirmation from any third party organiser of their Public and Employers’ Liability Insurance.
• Make sure the display is well away from buildings, trees and other hazards such as overhead cables.
• If you’re including a bonfire, ensure it is well stacked and stable and will not fall to one side as it burns.
• If you’re running your own display, keep fireworks in a metal box and take them out one at a time – replacing and firmly closing the lid each time.
• Check the wind direction to make sure smoke does not drift across any main and busy roads.

For further information, visit www.ecclesiastical.com/bonfiresafety

Merry Christmas

Review your safety and escape procedures. Check all Christmas lights, power cables, extension leads and precautions for candles and extra equipment.

www.ecclesiastical.com/church-christmas

Water pipes and heating

Check that your water pipes are lagged, the stopcock is clearly labelled, and your heating system has been serviced by a registered engineer.

www.ecclesiastical.com/church-heating
Training support for your church

Have you found yourself trying to understand how health and safety, cyber security, risk management and more relates to your church? It can be a big task to coordinate the right people who understand your local needs and issues to deliver the right kind of training.

Our Church Insurance Consultants are a mobile team based in regions across the UK. They are a friendly and approachable team of insurance experts available to your church free of charge. Find out who your local Church Insurance Consultant is on our website – www.ecclesiastical.com/cic – where you can also find out a bit more about them.

Our Church Insurance Consultants run workshops and training on a variety of topics including security, fundraising and fire risk assessments as well as the topics mentioned above. This training can be as simple to understand or as in-depth as you need it to be. Our Church Insurance Consultants can deliver the training and talk you through all the resources we have to support you and where to find them.

Where possible, and as long as you are comfortable, they love to meet face to face to deliver training but if this isn’t desirable or possible, online training can also be provided, all of which is free of charge.

They’re here to help, so please do get in touch if you have any training requirements. An email to meetus@ecclesiastical.com is all it takes and your local Church Insurance Consultant will be in touch. Please include your contact details, the name of your church and parish, and policy number if possible.

“At a time when so many of our church customers are struggling financially due to temporary closure of the church buildings and the phased re-opening through the pandemic, the take up on training has been really positive. I think that indicates how useful parishes have found the resources and it has been great to offer this free of charge support to our customers.”

Heather Ford, Church Insurance Consultant
Church competition

Never alone in Cornwall

The tip of Cornwall can seem remote at the best of times – it felt even more isolated in the depths of lockdown, especially for older people whose families have moved away.

The Penlee Cluster Churches – serving Penzance, Newlyn and the village of Paul – quickly set up a ‘Never Alone’ initiative, delivering meals with a smile to the elderly and medically vulnerable.

They also set up a ‘Parcel Pets’ arts and crafts scheme to help build community spirit for local children and families.

Following Jesus into our community

St Gabriel’s Church in Greystones, Sheffield, used lockdown to take the good news to their area and build bridges with parishioners.

In October 2020, they launched their ‘Bless Greystones’ initiative – arranging fun activities for youngsters, delivering food to the elderly or self-isolating, and sending well-being packs to every member of staff at the local primary school.

In May, they put on a ‘Parents’ Night Out’ event, providing two hours of free childcare for local youngsters so that parents could have a break with a discounted meal at a local pub and restaurant.

Regional winners named!

Congratulations to our five regional winners – now it’s time to vote for your national winner!

Earlier this year, we launched our ‘GOOD NEWS!’ Church competition – the chance for you to win thousands of pounds for your church.

We asked you to send us a newspaper-style story capturing the essence of your parish or congregation – a triumph over adversity in difficult times, perhaps, or a tale of selfless volunteering – together with a headline and a photo or video to illustrate it.

We received a huge number of moving and heart-warming submissions, and our judges have now whittled them down to these five regional winners. Each will receive £1,500 towards church funds.

Who will be the national winner?

Don’t forget to vote!
New toddler group brings community together

With their city going through one of the country’s toughest and longest COVID-19 lockdowns, mums and their young children in Leicester were really suffering.

St John the Baptist Church stepped into the breach.

They set up an online club for mothers with babies, and a toddler group for under-fives and their carers.

It has played a vital role in helping to support parents and socialise youngsters through a very difficult time.

Tranquillity garden: peace after the storm

When COVID-19 hit, the worshippers at Holy Trinity Church in Penrhyndeudraeth, in Bangor Diocese, North Wales, were undaunted.

They organised a Christmas Tree Festival and Star Trail to bring residents together during Advent, and a Rainbow Flower Festival to raise money for NHS charities.

They’re also working to develop a Tranquillity Garden for residents and visitors – an accessible area with flowers, herbs and vegetables, and a pond for newts and frogs.

Vote for your favourite!

It was incredibly hard for our judges to choose five regional winners from a long list of outstanding entries.

Now it’s your turn – our judges would like YOU to help them to decide the overall national winner, who will receive a further £6,000. You’ll see part of their amazing stories on this page – you can read their full inspirational tales on our website.

Please vote for your favourite at www.ecclesiastical.com/churchcomp

Touchscreen learning and sunshine all year round

With children forced to learn from home, worshippers at St Luke the Evangelist in Glenrothes, Fife, met teachers at the nearby school to see how they could help.

It led to Father Gerry Dillon sourcing funds to provide 50 tablets for youngsters without computers.

It was just the latest initiative at the church, which recently finished an ambitious £450,000+ renovation project to establish a community kitchen and social hub which now serves a number of local groups and charities.
Legal peace of mind

Caring for your church and its community is a great joy and an honour – and there’s huge peace of mind in knowing that you’re abiding by the many rules and regulations which govern our modern world.

Our knowledge of the church sector extends far beyond insurance, so we’ve produced a simple guide to your legal obligations in areas like health and safety law to help you navigate those often-daunting areas outside your insurance arrangements.

There’s valuable advice on risk assessments, safety checklists, and more – all laid out in an easy-to-follow, step-by-step style. For more, please visit www.ecclesiastical.com/healthandsafety

Arson – a real threat

Arson continues to be a very real threat to churches across the country. Over the past 5 years, we have seen just under 150 arson attacks on church buildings, causing millions of pounds of damage. Of course, your insurance is there to help protect against these losses, but churches are of significant importance to the communities they support, and the loss of use of an important community building together with the loss of heritage can have a much greater impact.

Arson is basically a security issue; by taking some simple steps you can help greatly reduce the risk for little or no cost. For example, make sure waste bins are kept secured and at least 10m from buildings – over half the arson attacks recorded were started using waste bins.

For more guidance on protecting your church buildings from arson, visit our website www.ecclesiastical.com/churcharson

Helping churches to raise vital funds

Churches have been directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic with buildings closed for worship and community activity severely limited (or moved online). The impact on spiritual life and community outreach has been significant, and fundraising – from Sunday collections to rentals from regular clubs – has been hit particularly hard.

Although society is starting to reopen and community activities are returning to our churches, fundraising income has not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels. To help our church customers to address this challenge, we have produced a range of simple, effective fundraising ideas.

There’s a dedicated Fundraising Hub on our website www.ecclesiastical.com/churchfundraising full of useful links and expert advice. The hub contains specific ideas for fundraising this Christmas, which is an especially important time to reach out and connect with your communities.

Earlier this year, we also sent our Church customers a ‘Fundraising in a Box’ toolkit – simple, printed brochures packed with tips and suggestions.

If you need further ideas or guidance, our locally based Church Insurance Consultants can help via our dedicated fundraising helpline – 0345 601 9959 – they’ve also been holding online webinars taking attendees through the toolkit and helping to answer questions. You can also email them – meetus@ecclesiastical.com

Some elements are universal when fundraising: making sure you keep in touch with existing supporters, applying for grants, and taking advantage of Gift Aid. But we understand that not everything that works for a big city church will apply in a rural or small church.

That’s why our resources provide guidance for a variety of churches and can be applied in various settings: urban, rural, large and small. You can pick and choose what works for you, with our help if needed.

If your church needs to raise funds to continue its important work and mission – we’re here to help.
Don’t slip up

Slips and trips are the most common causes of injury in churches, both inside and outside – in church halls, churchyards and car parks. Where buildings have been shut for some time as a consequence of successive lockdowns and with the winter months approaching, these hazards can become more of a problem. So it’s a good idea to update risk assessments, check the precautions you have in place and revisit staff training.

Most slips occur in wet or contaminated conditions, frequently as a result of weather or spillages. Commonly, trips are caused by worn paths, steps or floor coverings (for example, carpets and rugs) and trailing cables. You are probably already taking straightforward precautions that can make a real difference; for example, promptly cleaning up spillages or making sure that electrical cables are not left trailing across the floor. Following a period of closure, it’s wise to check all areas for deterioration and maintenance needs as well.

In some situations you may need to do more, particularly if you employ staff. This could include preparing a health and safety policy. Whatever the case, it is a good idea to carry out periodic checks for slip and trip hazards, so that sensible precautions are taken.

For more information about simple things you can do, visit www.ecclesiastical.com/documents/church-slips-and-trips.pdf

For more comprehensive detail, visit www.ecclesiastical.com/churchslipsandtrips

Looking after our natural friends

Beautiful trees often surround our churchyards bringing many benefits as well as adding to the overall aesthetic of your church premises. However, they can become your enemy during stormy weather and as they age if not properly managed.

Trees can lose their branches onto neighbouring property during high winds, cause structural damage and subsidence as their roots spread, and can trip people up where they disturb footpaths. On very rare occasions, branches have been known to fall on people.

There are various things you can do to allow these otherwise peaceful sentries to flourish, depending on quantity, species, condition and any specific hazards they present. Typical precautions could include reducing or removing branches, topping and pruning, or bracing branches.

To read more about your responsibilities and the precautions you can take, visit www.ecclesiastical.com/documents/tree-maintenance-guidance.pdf

Movement for Good

We’ve donated £25,000 to church-related charities through our Movement for Good awards

We are delighted that 25 church-related charities have each benefitted from a donation of £1,000 through our recent Movement for Good awards.

We hope that these donations will make a great difference to each of those charities.

You can read how a selection of these have used their £1,000 donations, and also see a full list of the benefiting charities on our website www.movementforgood.com
Top tips for establishing a community business in a church

Ecclesiastical’s charitable owner, Allchurches Trust, is funding Plunkett Foundation to provide specialist support for churches, to help them set up new community businesses in places of worship. Community businesses such as bakeries, cafés and local shops provide employment and training opportunities and bring communities together. By working with each other, the business can provide an opportunity to generate income through rent, attract more people to church, and open up new avenues for funding.

In Allchurches’ recent blog, Plunkett Foundation’s Aimee Evans shares her simple steps to getting a community business started:

1. Create a vision and consult with the community to decide what would benefit local people
2. Engage with the community regularly, survey local residents and gather support
3. Set up a steering group and elect a committee to drive plans forward
4. Create a business plan, including legal structure and raising finance
5. Consider how the place of worship can accommodate a business
6. Raise money through fundraising, loans, grants and community share schemes
7. Recruit and check that you comply with regulations and legislation
8. Open up and celebrate your new business!

Visit www.allchurches.co.uk/advice-and-resources to read the full blog and for more expert advice and resources.

Giving support to clergy sabbaticals

For more than 30 years, the Ministry Bursary Awards (MBAs) have supported over 1,000 members of the clergy with £1.35 million towards their sabbatical breaks. In 2020, 28 applicants received a grant of between £200 and £1,500 to help fund their quests, including a pilgrimage by bicycle from Canterbury to Rome on the Via Francigena, and a study into rewilding projects to help make the church greener.

Rev Rachel Dale from Staffordshire received £730 in 2020 to take part in a silent retreat, to study a theology of dementia, produce new materials for young adults on the autism spectrum and join local charity Link for Life on their trip to South Africa to support Christian charity Hands at Work with their work in vulnerable communities.

Rev Dale said, “It was a wonderful experience, especially visiting the Hands at Work Care Points where our youngsters were involved in preparing meals, helping with maintenance projects, organising play and craft activities and visiting families in their homes. I have taken the time to refresh my understanding of God’s calling and how others experience and engage with God. And, although I didn’t realise it at the time, I believe God was equipping me for some of the challenges we would face during the pandemic. I’m grateful for the support the MBAs has provided me and would encourage others to apply to the scheme.”

Ecclesiastical’s 2022 Ministry Bursary Awards have now closed but you can read more about them at www.ecclesiastical.com/mba
Trust130 helps keep the heating on

Since 2017, we have donated over £430,000 to churches around the UK chosen by our customers through our Trust130 promotion. Even the smallest amounts can make a big difference.

St Mary Magdalene in Cowden, Kent, is typical – it is in a small village, and it has a small congregation, but heating oil needed to keep the beautiful old church warm during the winter months costs a small fortune.

The COVID-19 crisis has only made a difficult situation worse, so a £650 donation from Ecclesiastical Insurance’s Trust130 scheme was ‘very helpful’, according to Treasurer Stephen Boakes.

“We’ve been lucky that many of our supporters and members of the congregation have continued to make donations, even without services,” said Mr Boakes. “But the Trust130 donation was much appreciated. It went into funding those weekly and monthly running costs – like heating oil – that keep the church going.”

How to support your church

Take out a home insurance policy1 with Ecclesiastical and we will donate £130 to the church of your choice. And of course the more people who take out home insurance policies, the more funds that are raised.

If you would like a quote or more information, simply call 0800 7830 130 and quote CHMAT21. Or visit www.ecclesiastical.com/trust130 for more information.

1 Subject to terms and conditions – please visit www.ecclesiastical.com/trust130

Funeral planning

Ecclesiastical can help you make financial provision for your funeral, reducing the worry for your family and ensuring your wishes are provided for.

Call: 0800 055 6503
Email: info@epsfunerals.com
www.funeralplans.co.uk

Car insurance

Our Clergy Motor Insurance is tailored specifically for the clergy and includes benefits such as business use, no admin charges and up to £500 cover for church goods in the car.1

Call: 0345 450 9396
www.ecclesiastical.com/church/car-insurance

1 Subject to terms and conditions.

Keeping safe at Christmas

Christmas is a time for celebration and coming together and fairy lights, candles and gifts are all part of the fun. Unfortunately, some of the most common causes of fires over the festive period are faulty electrical lights and candle flames. Your home insurance may cover you for damage, but your house may be filled with many more valuables over the Christmas period.

That’s why our home insurance policy increases your cover by 20% for 30 days before and after Christmas. The policy also includes automatic cover of up to £2,500 for a guest’s portable belongings, ideal if you have friends or family staying with you in December.

For more information about home insurance, please visit our website: www.ecclesiastical.com/homeinsurance
For more information:
Call: 0345 777 3322
Email: churches@ecclesiastical.com
Facebook: Ecclesiastical
Twitter: @churchmatters