



Reconnecting

Support and Guidance for Branches

Introduction

Any arrangements put in place MUST conform with

- government regulations which pertain at the time
- advice provided and restrictions imposed by the Church of Ireland, and
- requirements stipulated by the rector and the select vestry of the parish

- 🌐 Ensure that the branch conforms with up-to-date regulations and regularly check for possible changes
- 🌐 Communicate with members in advance of meeting up again to reassure them. Let them know how you will ensure their safety (e.g. full risk assessment carried out in advance, sanitisation, entrance arrangements, socially distanced seating) **Remember “Hands, Face, Space”**
- 🌐 Branch committees should work as a team to ensure all protocols are met – **do not** leave this solely to the Branch leader. Be clear about what is expected of all who attend meetings
- 🌐 Try beginning with several smaller “social” meetings at different times to suit members (e.g. those working, elderly) so members can feel reassured
- 🌐 Members may be anxious. Be kind, welcoming and encouraging to all

Preparing for meetings

- Remember – usual venues may not be suitable. Look at alternatives/outdoors
- Communicate with all members initially by a phone call and follow up with a letter. Find out how they feel about coming to meetings
- Share responsibility - appoint committee members specific jobs e.g. contacting members, showing members to and from their seats, marking a roll book (track and trace),
- Follow parish/church guidelines on catering
- Complete risk assessment: check that cleaning has taken place if venue has been used in the last 72 hours
- Have hand sanitiser near the entrance, space out seats, have a few spare masks available, check Covid 19 safety signage is in place
- Have a list of names of members which can be ticked off by someone acting as a 'receptionist'. Only this person should use the pen. Write visitors' names and contact numbers on same sheet. The branch leader should in addition have contact details for all members for track and trace purposes.
- Understanding another person can be difficult when wearing masks. Keep seats near the front for those with hearing difficulties if a microphone is not available
- If meeting outside a church setting, inform the All Ireland insurance through the Finance and Central Services Coordinator in your diocese

During / After meetings

- Safety for all – Remember **HANDS, FACE, SPACE**
- Initially meetings might be without an outside speaker, meaning more inhouse meetings e.g. members sharing, quiz, social evening
- Fellowship is vital, so allow time for socially distanced chat
- Show members to seats; members to remain seated for the duration of the meeting



- 🌐 After meeting, ask members to remain seated until it is their turn to leave the building. This will prevent queues or congregating
- 🌐 Leave the room clean and tidy in preparation for sanitisation
- 🌐 Retain records for track and trace

Ideas and suggestions for Reconnecting

- 🌐 Think alternative venues to have enough space to spread out
- 🌐 It is not necessary and - certainly just when we are re-opening - not advisable to have a speaker at meetings. Short, social, information-sharing sessions would be better and make everyone feel more at ease. Members need to bond again after not meeting together for so long
- 🌐 Preferable to begin the next season with a short act of worship - essentially counting our blessings, while also remembering those who have suffered in any way during the pandemic
- 🌐 Over the summer and early autumn, it might be feasible to hold some meetings outside e.g. prayer gatherings or short prayer walks, to make reconnecting easier
- 🌐 Consider holding some meetings on mornings or afternoons and ensure that they are relatively short
- 🌐 Reminisce about the COVID experience, share your stories, and create a record
- 🌐 Some members may not be ready to return to branch meetings. Think about pairing them with a 'buddy' who is ready, and who can regularly inform them about branch activities and rebuild their confidence. When they are ready to return, their 'buddy' can accompany them to their first meeting
- 🌐 Some members might prefer not to return to physical meetings and, if they have IT capacity, perhaps Zoom gatherings could be organised for them to keep them connected to other branch members
- 🌐 There are lots of good ideas for re-opening and reconnecting on the central MU website - worship, activities, crafts www.mothersunion.org/how-can-we-meet-autumn-2020

Frequently Asked Questions

Can we car share?

Car sharing is not advisable at present. If it is necessary to accommodate an individual member, it is up to the discretion of the driver. Remember to wear face masks, to ventilate the car well and to sit as far apart as possible

Should we hug our MU friends when we meet for the first time?

NO. It is not safe to do so

What do we do if we know that someone is not vaccinated?

While we are all encouraged to protect ourselves and others by being vaccinated, it is a personal choice. The branch leader may wish to ask members privately whether they are vaccinated and encourage those who are not to be particularly careful about social distancing.

What do we do if someone refuses to wear a mask?

There is nothing we can do because to challenge the person could be perceived as a breach of human rights. In the introductory material to members, branches should stress that the wearing of masks indoors is required (if this is still a state/church requirement)

Can we pass around an attendance book or anything else?

NO - one person only should handle any necessary lists or other material and the single pen which is used. Such items might include attendance lists, birthday cards, volunteer lists etc.

What about refreshments?

This should be at the discretion of the rector/select vestry and in line with current government regulations. However, there should be no "buffet style" arrangements; one member should serve drinks to the socially distanced, seated members and another carry/offer food; everyone else attending the meeting should remain seated and those serving obviously must wash their hands beforehand and afterwards. For the foreseeable future, and to gain members' confidence, preference should be given to using disposable cups and plates.

**Contact your Diocesan President if you have any queries
at all in relation to meeting up**