

Tips for filming services



Many churches choose to film or live stream services. Online services can be a good way to reach people who cannot physically come to church and can be a digital doorway for people exploring the Christian message and interested in coming to church. Here are some tips if you are considering filming.

Respect worship and the sacred nature of the service

- Avoid moving around excessively during the service.
- Do not distract clergy, readers, musicians, or congregation.
- Use quiet equipment and silent shutter modes if possible.
- Be sensitive when filming private or intimate moments like:
 - Communion.
 - Personal prayer.
 - Pastoral ministry or confession areas.

A general principle is that filming should never disrupt worship.

Consent and GDPR

Under UK GDPR, appearing in church media can reveal someone's religious belief, which counts as special category personal data.

Adults:

- Written photo/video consent forms should be obtained.
- The form must explain where the footage may be used (website, livestream, social media).
- Regular members may sign once but should renew every few years.

Children:

- Parent or guardian consent is required for anyone under 16.

Visitors:

- Visitors should be informed before the service begins.

Provide a "Film-Free" area

Church guidance strongly recommends creating designated areas where people will not be filmed.

Typical approach:

- Back rows or a side aisle.
- Clear signage.
- Camera framing positioned away from this area.

This allows people who do not consent to participate safely.

Inform the congregation clearly

People must know filming is happening.

Good practice:

- Display signage at entrances saying filming or livestreaming is taking place.
- Mention it in the service welcome or notices.
- Explain where the footage will be published.

Avoid identifying people without consent

If consent is not obtained:

- Frame shots so individuals are not identifiable (e.g., backs of heads).
- Focus on clergy, choir, lectern, or altar rather than congregation.

Many churches livestream with only the front of the church visible for this reason.

Safeguarding (children & vulnerable adults)

Follow Church of England policies and practices regarding safeguarding.

- Avoid filming children unless necessary and consented.
- Never film safeguarding-sensitive activities.
- Be careful with close-ups of individuals.

Technical filming considerations

Churches often present filming challenges:

Lighting:

- Churches are often low-light environments so you may need extra lighting.
- Flash photography is distracting and should not be used.

Common camera placements:

- Rear of the nave

- Side aisle
- Balcony/organ loft
- Fixed camera near the pulpit

Avoid blocking:

- Aisles
- Fire exits
- Procession routes.

Protect privacy and data

You should also consider:

- Secure storage of recorded footage
- Data protection policies
- Ability to delete footage if consent is withdrawn.

Copyright and licensing

Music and liturgy often involve copyright restrictions.

For example:

- Hymns
- Choir performances
- Sheet music
- Service orders

Churches often need licenses from organisations like Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) or other copyright holders to legally stream music.

Without the correct licences, livestreaming music may be copyright infringement.