

Cathedral and Church Buildings Division

To Diocesan Secretaries

Janet Gough
Director

18 July 2013

Security of church premises

The Archbishop of Canterbury recently received a report from HM Coroner for the Southern District of Greater London following an inquest into the death of Mr Arthur Jacobs. The report was made under Rule 43 of the Coroners' Rules, which allows a Coroner to report the circumstances of a death to a person who may have power to reduce the risk of death in similar circumstances.

Mr Jacobs tragically died of hypothermia, his body was found in a locked WC in the church hall of Christ Church, Bexleyheath in January this year. The hall had been in use on the previous day for a letting, but those who locked the hall had not checked the WC before leaving.

I should be grateful if you would take any opportunity to remind parishes of the importance of ensuring that those responsible for any events held on the premises are aware of the need to make proper checks before locking up. Although this tragic case involved a church hall, it is quite possible that someone could be accidentally locked in a church. All areas to which the public might have access should be checked, including WC cubicles.

When considering proposals for new WCs, Diocesan Advisory Committees should ensure that doors can be opened from the outside in the case of emergency. In addition it may be desirable for the design of WCs to allow for a gap above or below the door, or a vision panel, to assist in checking for occupancy.

We will be publishing brief guidance for parishes on this area on www.churchcare.co.uk.

I should be grateful if you would pass on a copy of this letter to archdeacons and DAC Secretaries.

Janet Gough

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Director, Cathedral and Church Buildings Division

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