

Your church as a film location

Hosting a film or TV shoot can be a rewarding opportunity for your church. It can raise the church's public profile, attract visitors, and generate additional income. However, it's important to be aware of potential risks, including inappropriate content, negative publicity, damage to the building or furnishings, and legal issues such as copyright infringement.

To ensure filming is beneficial and well-managed, careful planning is essential. These guidelines (adapted from the Diocese of London) are designed to help incumbents, PCCs, and churchwardens assess filming proposals and oversee shoots effectively.

Key Considerations Before Agreeing to Filming

1. Format & Scope

- Is the project a feature film, TV programme, documentary, or advertisement?
- Will the church feature prominently or appear briefly?

2. Audience & Platform

- Which channel or platform will broadcast the content?
- Who is the intended audience?

3. Programme Category

- Is it a drama, news segment, soap opera, sitcom, or commercial?
- The type of production may influence the fee you charge.

4. Content & Message

- Request a written synopsis to understand the central message and tone.
- Editing choices can significantly affect how the church is portrayed.

5. Storyline & Script

- For dramas or sitcoms, ask for a storyline overview and, if relevant, the full script.
- This helps identify any potentially inappropriate or misleading content.

6. Advertising

- If the shoot is for advertising, obtain details about the product and a copy of the script.

7. Location & Permissions

- Will filming take place inside, outside, or on church grounds?
- Filming within the church or its curtilage requires permission.
- External shots from public land do not require consent and are not subject to copyright.

8. Duration

- How long will the church be needed?
- News items may take 30 minutes; dramas or films could require several days.

9. Church Services

- Filming during services (e.g. baptisms or weddings) requires consent from those involved.
- The PCC is entitled to a fee, even if the couple receives a copy of the footage.
- For programmes like Songs of Praise, agree on camera positions and filming plans to avoid disrupting worship.

10. Facilities & Logistics

- Will the production need access to the hall, car park, toilets, or dressing areas?
- These can be used as negotiation points when discussing fees.

11. Layout & Furnishings

- Will any changes be made to the church's layout or furnishings?
- Moving fixed items may require a faculty from the Diocesan Chancellor; minor changes may be approved by the Archdeacon.

Make sure all agreed points are clearly outlined in the contract to protect the church and ensure a smooth filming process.

Contracts and Legal Considerations

Always insist on a contract

This protects both the church and the production company from misunderstandings. The contracting party should be the PCC. Permission to film must be granted by the Incumbent and PCC, or by the PCC and churchwardens during an interregnum.

Copyrights

Ensure copyright terms are clearly defined. Avoid granting rights to images of church property unless absolutely necessary (see Location section above).

Legal Review

For substantial filming projects, consider asking the Diocesan Registrar to review the contract.

Risk Management and Insurance

Fire Safety

Comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Precautions) Order. Both the church and the film company must appoint a 'Responsible Person' and carry out fire risk assessments. A written risk assessment should cover all equipment, sets, special effects, and facilities.

Insurance

The PCC must be indemnified against damage or accidents. Church insurance may not cover filming, so confirm coverage or require the production company to provide its own insurance. Always inform your church's insurer.

Fees and Payment

Fee Structure

Fees depend on the type and duration of filming. Clarify what constitutes a "day" to avoid disputes over overtime. Charging by the hour is increasingly common.

Typical rates:

- Feature films, TV dramas, commercials: £500–£600 per hour
- Photo shoots, magazine features: Around one-third of that
- Documentaries, educational programmes: Somewhere in between
- News items: Usually no fee, but offer valuable exposure
- Broadcast services: Often free, but commercial contracts should be charged at market rates

Deposits

Consider requesting an upfront deposit and pre-payment of up to 50% of the total fee. The deposit does not need to be refundable.

Planning the Film Shoot

Pre-Planning

Time is critical for film crews. Arrange a recce (site visit) with key personnel such as the Director, Location Manager, and Set Designer. This ensures a smooth shoot.

Method Statement

The production company should submit a written method statement outlining the shoot plan for your approval.

Access and Equipment

- Plan vehicle parking
- Assess lighting needs and wiring routes
- Ensure protection for floors and furnishings (e.g. spreaders, tennis balls on tripod feet)
- Avoid taping cables or using materials like gaffer tape or blak-tak, which can damage surfaces

Special Effects

Test effects like fog machines on a small scale first. Naked flames should be strictly prohibited.

During and After the Shoot

Supervision

Ensure someone is present during filming to oversee compliance with the contract. For longer shoots, two supervisors may be needed.

Inspections

Conduct a walk-round inspection with the Assistant Director before filming begins. Take detailed photos. Repeat the inspection immediately after filming and report any damage promptly—film crews often disband quickly.

Record Keeping

Keep detailed notes for future reference. If the experience is positive, the company may return for future shoots.