British Pilgrimage Trust

OFFERING SANCTUARY

A guide to getting started



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The guidance in this document does not constitute legal advice.

WELCOME

Thank you for considering becoming a Sanctuary. You will be joining a network of places all over the country offering basic hospitality to pilgrims and enabling pilgrimage of all kinds.

Every Sanctuary is unique, so you will need to make decisions to make it work for you and your community. We hope the information here helps you make those informed choices, but if you think we have missed anything or you need more help please get in touch.



WHAT IS SANCTUARY?

Sanctuary provides pilgrims with somewhere safe and dry to sleep. This is often on the floor of a church, but it can be in village halls and other community spaces too. In return for a night's shelter, pilgrims offer donations or other useful service, in gratitude. It is not a commercial offer, and it is only open to pilgrims. Pilgrims bring their own bedding, all that is needed is a safe and dry floor, ideally with water and toilet facilities too.

WHY SHOULD WE OFFER SANCTUARY?

Pilgrims bring their cross-pollinating individual personalities and cultural influences. They also spend money on food and accommodation wherever they go, and engage with the local community.

Pilgrims are often at an interesting crossroads in their life, making them more open in spirit. Becoming a pilgrim can mean talking to, befriending and helping out others just for the sake of it. Self-identifying as a pilgrim, they are also likely to be less transactional and demanding than the average tourist who might expect top treatment.

Pilgrims realise that the Sanctuary being offered to them is done out of the kindness of your hearts and is therefore not a normal hotel experience.

There is a lack of affordable accommodation on many UK pilgrimage routes, and this is a financial obstacle for many. Offering Sanctuary can make a big difference and enable pilgrims who wouldn't be able to afford traditional tourist rooms.

For others, it's the opportunity to live a simple life for a while and leave behind the distractions and luxuries of modern daily life.

"It is important in this time of increasing uncertainty we give sanctuary, refreshment and rest to pilgrims"
- Dr Andrea Nicholson, Church Warden, Patrixbourne, Kent

GOVERNANCE

Statutory and administrative responsibilities.



You will have some statutory and administrative responsibilities to consider as part of offering Sanctuary.

These responsibilities may vary depending on the type of building you are using, for example a church, hall, or other type of community asset.

Our guide covers the most common things but bear in mind that your location may have different requirements.

Governing Body

Do you have a governing body, e.g. a committee, council or association? You will need permission from them to offer overnight sleeping. If you are a church, you may also need to consider obtaining a faculty or other relevant permission. You may want to prepare a basic proposal before approaching the relevant authorities for permission. Our FAQ's will help you, and we can put you in touch with a Sanctuary similar to you if you would like to ask someone with first hand experience.



Safety and Security

Consider what safety and security elements you will need to review. This usually means adding Sanctuary to existing documents rather than creating any new ones. An appropriate person will need to review your fire risk assessment, and if you have them, your safeguarding policy and security protocols and other risk assessments.

Your county Fire & Rescue Service may be able to provide standard guidance regarding “sleepovers” that will be helpful, and they often recommend notifying them that the building may be occupied overnight. The Government publishes a series of fire safety guides which provide further advice and information on fire safety and how to carry out a fire safety assessment.

Make sure that pilgrims are factored into any night time procedures such as fire response and any additional things that may be required to alert people to an emergency who are unaware of their surroundings. You may want to consider providing a safety briefing for pilgrims about what to do in the event of an emergency, whether they need to bring a torch etc.

Generally it is considered that occupying a building overnight improves security as it may act as a deterrent on anti-social behaviour and vandalism. If your building is routinely open unsupervised during the day, allowing pilgrims to sleep overnight is unlikely to have a negative impact on your security.

Insurance

You should inform your insurer of your plans.

It is highly unlikely that this will increase your premiums. EIG and Trinitas have issued the following statements:

For places insured by EIG:

"Ecclesiastical Insurance Group – the major provider of insurance to churches in England – is supportive of the project, and has made those churches insured by them this guarantee that no additional premium would need to be charged for hosting as this is automatically included within your policy cover. If another group insures your church, please let us know and we'll see what we can do to help."

For places insured by Trinitas Church Insurance Group:

"Our policy will provide cover for churches who allow pilgrims to stay in their properties that we insure. There will be no additional cost for those churches who participate in this activity and we would ask the client's to ensure the church is suitable i.e. toilet facilities and that there is a risk assessment in place."

While these statements have been given by way of general guidance, churches are advised by both insurers to contact their relevant insurer if they are considering taking up the Sanctuary Project. If you are covered by another insurer, and have had a different experience in their approach to insuring a church for Sanctuary, let us know.

Venues such as village halls may already be covered for this activity as a "sleepover" event under their existing insurance but make sure you check.



Lone Female Pilgrims

As Sanctuaries offer shared sleep space for pilgrims who may not know each other, many can be concerned about how to best accommodate lone female pilgrims.

Bear in mind that lone women can camp, book youth hostels, take a room in someone's house as an Airbnb and stay in a number of unsecured venues on their own, so Sanctuaries would not be unique in allowing lone female pilgrims to stay.



Some suggested options already in practice elsewhere are:

- Have a single gender space available on request - e.g. a vestry or hall attached that can be separated from other pilgrims.
- Ensure all pilgrims are aware at point of booking that accommodation may be shared and/or mixed gender and they undertake this option at their own risk.
- Adopt a first come, first served rule. If a lone female pilgrim books no other bookings will be taken, if male pilgrims are already booked the lone female would be refused.
- Adopt a no lone female pilgrim policy. Generally the BPT does not recommend this, as it discriminates against adult women who are capable of making their own decisions about their personal safety. Consider instead how you can manage this to achieve a fair balanced approach, or how to keep pilgrims informed about what to expect so they can make their own decisions. You may even be able to work with a neighbouring location to create separate spaces when required.

We suggest you do a risk assessment and consider what is reasonable for that individual location. If you decide you are unable to offer Sanctuary to lone female pilgrims we recommend that you clearly state this in your restrictions, and that you have a list of alternative nearby accommodation available,.



2. OPERATIONS

How you go about running your Sanctuary

Access

What building will pilgrims use to sleep, and how will they access it? You may be in an area where you can leave the building unlocked for them, or if the building is easy enough to open they can arrange to collect a key nearby. You may prefer to meet them in person.

More secure options include installing a small key safe where pilgrims can use a pin code to access a securely kept key. Prices for these start from around £15 and there are lots of different options.

Whatever you decide to do, make sure that pilgrims know what the arrangements are for closing when they leave or returning the key the following day too.

There is a lot of flexibility in how you go about running your Sanctuary. Keep it easy and simple for you and the pilgrims.

Opening arrangements

If your building is in use for other purposes, consider how pilgrims can fit around these. You may wish to put time arrival and departure restrictions in place. You can also specify the days of the week or the times of year, but the more flexible you are the more likely you will be to receive pilgrims.



Facilities

Sanctuaries are not required to provide any special facilities, other than somewhere safe and dry to sleep. A toilet and clean drinking water are preferable, but some Sanctuaries do operate without these, dropping off a water container and ensuring pilgrims know where they can find toilet facilities nearby. You may opt to install a compost loo.

You can become a more popular Sanctuary option by offering facilities such as power to charge mobile phones, a kettle or even basic refreshments. You can expect larger donations in return for more comprehensive facilities.



Taking bookings

How would you like pilgrims to get in touch with you? Think about how much time you realistically need to make arrangements - 2 weeks? 48 hours? Some pilgrims may still contact you at short notice but this will enable you to manage their expectations. You can display an email address, ask them to complete an online contact form or simply call you. It's best to have one contact coordinating bookings to avoid mix-ups but if that isn't possible a shared email address might be the best option for you. Churches can opt to direct enquiries through their "A Church Near You" contact form if they want.

Some Sanctuaries email a briefing when confirming bookings which includes information such as the fire evacuation procedure, where to find the nearest food, shops or chemist, any restrictions and arrangements for access and egress, how to donate etc. Others prefer to chat on the phone or meet pilgrims in person. Many others don't do this as their arrangements are straightforward and don't require this level of detail. Think about what is right for you.

Donations

We know that Sanctuaries can incur some small utilities costs by allowing pilgrims to sleep overnight and pilgrims expect to donate in return. Pilgrims often want to ensure that they are offering an appropriate amount, so setting a recommended minimum donation helps them to do this. This amount is entirely up to you. Generally Sanctuaries with minimal facilities (floorspace to sleep, water and toilet facilities) tend to ask for £10 - £15, those with kitchens, underfloor heating and more may choose to recommend a higher amount. Sanctuary should always be more cost effective than staying in a hostel or airbnb.

Some Sanctuaries ask pilgrims to pay a donation in advance of their stay, but the usual practice is on the day. If you accept donations via contactless or card let your pilgrims know. Don't forget to enable Gift Aid too.

Capacity

Every Sanctuary is different, from tiny chapels to large community halls. Generally most Sanctuaries will usually have a greater occupancy limit than they will receive pilgrims in one night, but it is worth thinking about what is manageable and comfortable, particularly if your sleeping space is small. Your fire risk assessment will indicate a safe number of people for evacuation purposes, but most occupancy limits are based on sitting or standing people, so start with that number and reduce it down. Some ways you may wish to approach this are:

- Take your existing occupancy limit and divide it by 5
- If your Sanctuary is in a church, allow one pilgrim per pew.
- For open floor space, a good rule of thumb is to allow enough space for a 90cm/3ft gap between pilgrims as a minimum. It may help to imagine this as a large double bed sized space per single pilgrim plus a “corridor”.

Then consider if this number feels manageable and comfortable to you. If it still feels quite high you can put an upper limit on it, bearing in mind you may get requests from guided pilgrimage groups which can be just over 30 people.

Restrictions

Sanctuary-seeking pilgrims are by their nature respectful of the places where they sleep, but you may need to put some restrictions in place to provide assurance that no issues will arise. Different Sanctuaries have a variety of restrictions such as no candles, no alcohol, no dogs etc.

Damages

It is highly unlikely that those seeking Sanctuary will be responsible for an additional risk of damage or theft to property over and above usual patrons. Of course this cannot be guaranteed and accidents do sometimes happen.



TESTING IT OUT

If you are not sure if your arrangements will work, why not try it out by arranging a one-off sleepover. Invite trusted members of your community or people from a Sanctuary further along the route to test it out as experimental pilgrims and see how it runs.

Alternatively please contact us and we can discuss what you have in place and share best practice or even put you in touch with other Sanctuaries already welcoming pilgrims.



MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR PILGRIMS

Evidence of use by pilgrims can be used to support funding applications from various grant-giving bodies, so don't forget to keep track of the numbers of pilgrims using your Sanctuary.

Many pilgrims also carry passports or "credentials". It is a good idea to provide a stamp so they can record their stay. There are lots of ways to get one made and the BPT can help with this.

3. PROMOTION

Attracting pilgrims to your Sanctuary



The British Pilgrimage Trust will create a brochure-like entry on its website.

Our Sanctuary listings are available to any visitors to our website, keeping the service free to those who need it most. Pilgrims must register to receive access to booking information. While the BPT cannot vouch for the bona fides of pilgrims or accept any responsibility for their actions, this provides some reassurance that your pilgrims will normally be traceable.

Photographs

As a minimum, an exterior photo of the building pilgrims will sleep in, and an interior photo of where they will sleep. You will benefit from providing additional images of what the experience is like too, so if you can include images of any features of the building and what is in the area. Photos should be in colour, in landscape orientation, and in high-resolution.

Sanctuary Information

We will ask you to complete this form to capture your contact details, and information about the Sanctuary. You can find a list of the information at the end of this document so you know what to prepare. If you can't answer every question that's ok, we can always update and add information later on.

Updates

We ask that you keep us updated with any changes about your Sanctuary such as a change in contact as soon as possible. Once a year, usually over the winter months, we'll ask you to review all your information and ensure it is still correct.

Checklist	
Permission from governing body to offer Sanctuary	
Review Fire risk assessment and procedures and inform local Fire & Rescue Service	
Review relevant risk assessments and inform any relevant bodies/individuals	
Review relevant policies such as Safeguarding	
Review relevant Security assessment and protocols and inform any relevant bodies/individuals	
Assess occupancy limit	
Create lone pilgrim policy	
Inform insurers	
Set access arrangements	
Set opening arrangements	
Set restrictions and requirements	
Set booking arrangements	
Take photographs	
Complete Sanctuary Website Set-Up Form	
Other:	
Other:	

SET UP FORM

What you need to have ready to complete your set up form

Name of your Sanctuary

Contact information for the use of BPT staff, including:
- name of primary contact,
- their email
- their preferred phone number,
- details for any secondary contact.

This information won't be shared with pilgrims and is for internal use only.

Sanctuary Information
- Sanctuary address
- Type of Sanctuary (e.g. church, hall, other type of building or camping)
- Short description. This should include the character of the place as well as any relevant details
- Facilities available and what is nearby
- Recommended minimum donation
- Maximum number of pilgrims per night
- Season (e.g. year round, April to October)
- Arrival and departure times
- Restrictions
- Anything else pilgrims may need to know

Booking Information
- How would you like the BPT to enable pilgrims to book and what contact information we can share with pilgrims.
- How much notice is required

If there is anything you are not sure of or you don't want to put in place like arrival times you can leave them blank. This information will be used to create your Sanctuary entry but you will get to check it before it is attached to the route. Once it has been published we can make changes with reasonable notice.

BENEFITS OF OFFERING SANCTUARY



Generate an income

through donations, by creating a complementary use for churches, halls and empty buildings.

Share and celebrate

the places that make your village special, connecting with other communities

Enrich your community

connecting with different people who value what you have to offer

Drive footfall

to local businesses and facilities, access a network of pilgrims and helping to sustain and grow the rural economy

Improve wellbeing

helping others can benefit our own mental health, improving mood, self esteem and happiness.

Improve security

occupation of otherwise empty buildings reduces anti-social behaviour and vandalism.

USEFUL CONTACTS

British Pilgrimage Trust

info@britishpilgrimage.org

Sanctuary Set Up Form:
https://forms.gle/RfZM2UinjaeC1ryY8

Safety and Security

www.gov.uk/government/collections/fire-safety-guidance
www.firelawscotland.org/
www.communitymatters.org.uk/
www.nationalchurchestrust.org/get-support/buildings-maintenance/security

Insurance

www.ecclesiastical.com
www.trinitaschurchinsurance.co.uk

FAQ'S

Do we have to pay to join the scheme?

No. There is no fee for joining the Sanctuary scheme.

Does the BPT take a cut of the donations?

No. Sanctuaries keep every penny of the donations from pilgrims. Don't forget to enable Gift Aid.

Do I need planning permission?

No. In England and Wales you will not need planning permission as Sanctuary does not qualify as commercial accommodation. In Scotland, you should not need permission under the new short term let regulations but you will need to be careful about how you set up and describe the scheme to avoid misunderstandings about the offer. Contact us for help.

How is this different from Champing?

Champing is run by the Churches Conservation Trust, and is a commercial offer for tourists. Similar to a Glamping experience, members of the general public can book exclusive hire. It is not about fulfilling a practical need, but generating an income through the short break holiday market. As such Champing churches have a customer service based approach and set fees. They provide bedding, chairs, cushions, and all sorts of creature comforts.

Sanctuary is about providing the most basic of hospitality to pilgrims, fulfilling a practical need within an ancient tradition. Pilgrims may not know each other and will share the space. It is a different offer aimed at different people.

How many pilgrims will we get?

This will vary a lot depending on your capacity, the facilities and the route you are on. A very popular Sanctuary may receive around 60 pilgrims every three months, as individuals or as small and large groups. Your attendance is likely to start much lower and increase over time with word of mouth.

Are all the pilgrims Christian?

Not necessarily! The pilgrim community is made up of people of all faiths and none. You should expect to receive people walking a variety of spiritual paths. Pilgrims by their nature are respectful of places offering Sanctuary and each other.

Can we restrict who comes?

Some of our Sanctuaries have opted to only be available to Giving Pilgrims/Friends of the BPT. This means pilgrims have a to pay an annual registration fee. We do not encourage this as it limits access to the people that need it most, and you are likely to receive fewer pilgrims. We can talk you through the pros and cons of this approach.

What if there is a problem with a pilgrim

Sanctuary has been running in a number of locations for several years without issue so far, but in the highly unlikely event there is a problem with an individual please let us know. As pilgrims are registered with us we are able to send them warnings or withdraw their registration, as well as warning other locations not to accept their booking if contacted.

We don't have a toilet or running water - can we still join?

Possibly, it will depend on your location. Some have opted to install a composting loo, but if this isn't an option for you, there are some alternatives. Contact us and we can help you find the best solution.

Do we have to provide camp beds or bedding?

No. Pilgrims should expect to bring their own. You could make some available for an additional donation, but that is entirely up to you.

Do we have to be on an official pilgrimage route?

You are unlikely to receive many pilgrims if you aren't within reasonable walking distance of a known route, waypoint or destination. If your nearest route isn't on our map let us know and we can add it.

Do pilgrims have to be a Giving Pilgrim or Friend of the BPT?

Pilgrims must register to access booking contact information on our website, but there are no fees to pilgrims. Some Sanctuaries are only open to Giving Pilgrims (see below).

Is there funding available?

Some routes have dedicated grants. Other places have been able to use Sanctuary as part of a business case alongside other elements to secure funding from regular grant giving bodies. We'd like to assemble some specific guidance on this so please contact us.

Do we have to adhere to BPT rules and regulations?

No. Every Sanctuary is different; you know your building best and the requirements that are involved. The basic offer for pilgrims is very simple and easy to achieve. We are happy for each location to manage their Sanctuary as best suits their needs. We will provide recommendations and best practice. Bear in mind that pilgrims vote with their feet - the more you meet their needs, the more popular a Sanctuary you will become.

How long do we have to commit for?

There is no set timeframe, but bear in mind that word of mouth is important to pilgrims. It may take a little while to get going. If you decide it is not working for you, we can amend or remove your entry with reasonable notice.

Can I talk to an existing Sanctuary?

Yes, please contact us and we'll put you in touch with a Sanctuary similar to yours.

Have more questions?
Please contact us and we'll be happy to help.

The British Pilgrimage Trust is a registered charity that aims to promote pilgrimage in Britain by helping to develop and publicise new and old paths as well as the practice of pilgrimage itself by making it open to all.

British Pilgrimage Trust



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