

Bulletin 76: FOOD SAFETY

The Help & Advice Group was set up by Synod in 2009, to support local churches in being informed and effective in their life and mission. The group was disbanded in 2014, as part of a simplification of Synod committees, and its work continues through the Trust Officer, under the oversight of the Trust's Property Subcommittee. We are willing to try to provide specific advice on particular topics. Please get in touch if you have questions or suggestions.

This article is part of a series giving an overview of particular subjects of interest for local churches. We also circulate general updates from time to time. Bulletins are also posted on the website <https://www.urc-northernsynod.org/resources/legal>, with direct links to other websites.

Where readers are directed to web-based resources, the Synod Office is willing to respond to reasonable requests for printed out information for readers without web access, although they may find it more satisfactory to follow up their interest through their local library's web access.

Food Safety

The Churches' Legislation Advisory Service (CLAS) has pointed out that the Food Standards Agency has recently updated its guidance on food allergen labelling and information: <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/food-allergen-labelling-and-information-requirements-technical-guidance-introduction>. Whilst churches that do no more than serve coffee and biscuits after worship would not be classed as "food businesses" under the Food Information Regulations, 2014, paragraph 6 of the guidance nonetheless states:

"Individuals who occasionally provide food at charity events or voluntary cake sales, for example, may ... need to follow the legal requirements. If you are a charity or community food provider and unsure whether you should be registered as a food business, you should speak to your local authority's environmental health department. Further guidance is also available in the FSA's guidance on providing food at community and charity events which is available on the FSA's website."

The FSA's guidance on providing food at community and charity events is worth reading: <https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/providing-food-at-community-and-charity-events>. This page gives a good reminder of general advice on food hygiene, as well as specifically on allergen labelling. There are 14 allergens that should be included in labelling:

- Cereals containing gluten
- Crustaceans
- Eggs
- Fish
- Peanuts
- Soybeans
- Milk
- Nuts
- Celery
- Mustard
- Sesame seeds
- Sulphur dioxide and sulphites
- Lupin
- Molluscs

Whilst Natasha's law may not apply to all churches or in all circumstances, it is recommended as a matter of good practice and caring love for our neighbours that we should give as much allergen information as possible. Indeed, the FSA also recommends that *the more information you can provide about allergens orally or in writing for customers, the better it is, so that they can make safe choices, particularly for those with allergies.*

(Churches that are registered as food businesses with their local authority environmental health department ought to comply with the regulations. This would normally be because they regularly provide food that requires more complex safety control, such as cooking hot meals at least once a month, or for vulnerable customers (eg, pre-school age, elderly, ill or expecting). Those that serve food only occasionally or that provide only biscuits or packaged foods would be exempt from the regulations.)

Note that all food supplied, sold or provided at charity or community events must comply with food law and be safe to eat (regardless of whether you are running a food business).

This bulletin supplements and updates previous issues 29, 38 and 48.

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