



The Methodist Church

Guidance on Closed Church Buildings

This note was produced by the Conference Officer for Legal, Constitutional Practice, the Law and Polity Committee, TMCP, the Property Development Committee, the Heritage Committee and the Property Support team.

*In this guidance, the word ‘must’ indicates a legal or Methodist constitutional requirement. The word ‘should’ indicates good practice. ‘Highly recommended’ actions are neither legal nor Methodist constitutional requirements which you are nonetheless **strongly advised** to fulfil.*

The word ‘chapel’ refers to the Church building, whereas the word ‘Church’ refers to a Local Church/ society. This guidance covers Methodist constitutional requirements when selling a chapel. It does not cover the legal aspects of selling a chapel.

Legal considerations relevant when closing a Church in the Home Districts outside of England and Wales are beyond the scope of this guidance. Please [contact TMCP](#) if you need guidance on selling property in Scotland, Isle of Man, Jersey or Guernsey.

Queries about or comments on this note can be sent to property@methodistchurch.org.uk.

No.	Action required/ recommended	Date completed	Notes
1a	<p>Discontinuance of worship at a chapel -</p> <div style="border: 1px solid green; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p>There are three distinct and separate steps, which should not be combined:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Discontinuance of Public Worship. SO 943 (1). B. The appointment of successor Managing Trustees. Model Trusts Part II 2 (1). C. The sale or disposal of the Property. SO 918, which will require a Property Consent request. </div> <p>NB Procedure with Local Ecumenical Partnerships will differ. Please consult with the Connexional Ecumenical Officer via eo@methodistchurch.org.uk .</p>		
1b	<p>Church Council decision to discontinue worship - The Church Council must come to a decision to seek approval for the cessation of public worship often referred to as a request to</p>		

	<p>'cease to meet' (though the members may be continuing to worship elsewhere). You may wish to consider whether it is appropriate for the Superintendent to Chair the final Church Council meeting(s) (see SO 502(1)). The Church Council decision should be made by a simple majority of those present and eligible to vote.</p>		
1c	<p>Seeking final approval to discontinue worship – Once the Church Council has voted to discontinue worship, the steps are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Circuit Meeting votes whether to recommend this to Synod; 2. The District Policy Committee votes whether to recommend this to Synod; 3. The District Synod gives final permission. <p>Once this has happened, then the closure is approved and public services can be discontinued, and the Church removed from the Circuit plan. See SO 943(1).</p> <p>It is highly recommended that you write a reasoned statement as to why the request to cease to meet is being made, for submission to the Circuit Meeting, District Policy Committee & Synod (see Appendix B).</p> <p>The Circuit should have discussions about whether closure is the best course of action for the Church. Please refer to the SO 605A on Cessation and Merger as well as the Connexional Property Support Team's Strategic Guidance for the Use of Property in Mission and Our Church's Future Story. Additionally, the Learning Network may be able to assist with encouraging and inspiring different aspects of Our Calling.</p>		
1d	<p>Appointment of a managing group - The Church Council should resolve to whom the managing trusteeship of the building, and the assets and liabilities of the Church should be transferred. This will often be the Circuit, but may be another Local Church.</p> <p>Closing a Church is a huge undertaking which should not be left to one person. It is therefore highly recommended that the new managing trustee body appoint a managing group with the appropriate permissions to deal with the finances (refer to Step 14), the chapel (refer to Steps 3- 10) and the moveable items (refer Step 11).</p>		
2	<p>Pastoral visits – It is highly recommended to make contact with all members and adherents, and ecumenical and other partners. You may wish to make enquiries with other Churches in the Circuit about transferring membership. [For further information, see Appendix C on pastoral considerations.]</p>		

<p>3</p>	<p>The chapel – Prior to closure the Church Council may wish to vote to make a non-binding <i>recommendation</i> to the Circuit Meeting about whether the chapel shall be retained.</p> <p>NB Steps can only be taken towards a sale once a request to cease to meet under Standing Order 943(1) (see step 1c above) has been approved. Steps to sell a property must not be taken until consent is granted in accordance with Standing Order 930. A project must be entered on Consents site of the Online Suite of Applications. Further information about sales can be found in Appendices A and B.</p> <p>As noted, the legal aspects of selling a chapel are beyond the scope of this guidance. Please refer to TMCP’s sale guidance, including the guidance on Streamlining Sales and contact TMCP so that specific guidance can be provided (email: legal@tmcp.org.uk or telephone 0161 235 6770).</p> <p>General legal questions relating to the sale can also be referred to TMCP’s panel firms who will be happy to help you as required. Please refer to the Panel Solicitor page on TMCP’s website for contact details.</p>		
<p>4</p>	<p>Insurance matters – Methodist Insurance (unless insured by an alternative company) should be informed.</p> <p>If the chapel can continue to be hired out to user groups until sale, this will help keep the premiums down. If this is not feasible, a lower premium could possibly be agreed on the basis of ‘demolition and clearance only’, which means that if the chapel burned down, it would not be rebuilt.</p> <p>If the closure will significantly increase the cost of the policy, the negotiations will be the responsibility of the Circuit (or, where appropriate, of another local church). [See Appendix D for information on Methodist Insurance’s requirements].</p>		
<p>5a</p>	<p>Listed Buildings & Buildings in Conservation Areas</p> <p>A photographic record of the exterior and interior of closed chapels should be taken before sale. A copy of the photographic record should be sent to Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History. The email address is admin.ocmch@brookes.ac.uk and guidance on how to accomplish this can be found on https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/2397/archivecondition.pdf.</p> <p>Ecclesiastical Exemption for Listed Buildings ceases once the chapel is no longer used for ecclesiastical purposes. The managing group should be aware of this, as the Local Authority</p>		

	<p>becomes the statutory authority for the chapel and can use their enforcement powers of urgent works and repair notices once the exemption ceases if required. If required, the managing group should contact the Connexional Conservation Officer (conservation@methodistchurch.org.uk) or Heritage & Collections Officer (heritage@methodistchurch.org.uk) if they have queries or concerns.</p> <p>If works are proposed to the exterior of the chapel as part of the sale, then these should be included in the project description on your 'requesting permission for advertisement to sell', or forward details to the Connexional Conservation Officer before the works commence.</p> <p>Removal of any item without permission from a listed building is a criminal offence. Before offering by auction or entering into a contract of sale of a chapel for secular use, (and in the case of item (i) before worship ceases) the Trustees must:</p> <p>(i) If the chapel is a listed building or in a conservation area, obtain the prior consent of the appropriate Connexional authority (that is the Connexional Conservation Officer) to the removal of any object or structure fixed to the chapel or within its curtilage;</p> <p>(ii) Give attention to the preservation in situ of external foundation stones and other public indications of the Methodist history of the chapel;</p> <p>(iii) Seek guidance from the Connexional Conservation Officer as to whether internal memorials and other internal items (whether or not part of the structure of the chapel) should for historical or aesthetic reasons be preserved in situ, in other places of worship or elsewhere, and make decisions and arrangements in those matters in the light of that advice.</p> <p>(iv) If any item being removed has a dedication on it, then it may first be offered to the relatives of those who gifted the item, otherwise it should be offered to a local church, community facility, museum or public space where it can be appreciated; a record of this should be kept for audit purposes.</p> <p>(v) All Organs: there is practical advice on www.methodist.org.uk/property/a-z/ on what to do with organs following closure, this includes the following:</p> <p>For a church with a larger or mechanically complex organ, prolonged lack of use will result in long-term problems with its performance. If an organist is available in the neighbourhood,</p>		
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	<p>then they can practise to keep all the action parts moving. If an organist is not available, then the person performing the weekly inspection could carrying out the following steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Switch the organ on (consult with your regular organist, as every instrument is different) 2. Pull out all the stops (or press them down, if the instrument has stop tabs) 3. One at a time, press every key (black and white) on each keyboard of the instrument, and all of the pedals. Note that the organ operates differently from a piano; keys should be pressed rather than struck. 4. If any faults occur, such as notes not sounding, or continuing to sound after the key has been released, make a note and consult with your organist or organ tuner. 5. Cancel all stops by pushing them in (or up for stop tabs). 6. Switch off the organ. <p>The purpose of this is to run through all the stops on all keyboards, and the pedalboard to keep leatherwork from sticking and keep electrical contacts clean.</p>		
<p>5b</p>	<p>War Memorials and Burial grounds - The matter of war memorials should be handled carefully and sensitively with a preference for retaining memorials in situ. If this is not in the best interests of the memorial and its historical significance then it should be offered to a local Methodist or other church, community facility, museum, local school or public space where it can be appreciated.</p> <p>All war memorials should be recorded on the following database for National War Memorials Record – www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk, even if kept in situ. If you need any assistance with this then please contact conservation@methodistchurch.org.uk .</p> <p>If any item being removed has a dedication on it, then it should first be offered to the relatives of those who gifted the item in the first instance before considering other alternatives, such as a local primary or secondary schools.</p> <p>Managing trusteeship of any burial grounds on the Local Chapel’s site must be formally transferred to the Circuit, or whichever managing trustee body is best equipped to maintain it. For guidance on the property and legal aspects of burial grounds, including closure of burial grounds and sales, please consult TMCP’s Guidance Notes on Burial Grounds available on the TMCP website, including the general Burial Ground Guidance and Burial Ground Sale Focus Note or contact legal@tmcp.org.uk.</p>		

	<p>If the burial ground includes any Commonwealth War Graves or you are unsure, please contact TMCP and we will contact the Commonwealth War Graves Commission on your behalf to notify them of your intentions and/or clarify whether the burial ground contains Commonwealth War Graves.</p>		
6a	<p>Utilities - Gas and electricity should remain connected, with bills paid up to the date of closure, then responsibility transferred to the Circuit (or, where appropriate, to another local church). You will need to contact your providers to update your contact details to those of the Circuit.</p> <p>Water should be left running, however, depending on your insurer's instructions (as to Methodist Insurance's requirements, see Appendix D), it may require draining down. If there is a sprinkler system in place, please discuss with your insurer and request guidance.</p> <p>Heating should be switched off and the draining system disconnected, again, depending on your insurer's instructions.</p> <p>Some water companies will not charge water rates for closed places of worship: advise the company and ask if this is possible.</p>		
6b	<p>Ongoing maintenance - The Property Steward or Managing Group (if appointed) should be aware of on-going maintenance issues and repairs, as part of a weekly chapel check it will be important to be pre-emptive and look for problems. Refer to the Empty Property Guidance for further information.</p> <p>It should be noted that fire and security alarms need to continue to be 'on contract' and be inspected and maintained by the contractor.</p> <p>If a Quinquennial Inspection is due, the Circuit must adhere to Standing Order 952 and arrange for an inspection as it will highlight any defects.</p>		
7	<p>Groups which hire the chapel (if any) – The groups must be informed if the chapel and any associated buildings will no longer be available for use, including the dates from which alternative arrangements will need to be made.</p> <p>The Circuit may make the decision for the chapel and any associated buildings still to be available in the short term for user groups and licensees. In this case the Managing Trustees must ensure that none of the third party users have exclusive use of the property and the property should also be used by the Circuit.</p>		

	<p>The chapel should also continue to be used by the (new) Managing Trustees. If the premises are to be sold, then advice should be obtained from the solicitors acting on the sale on how best to manage third party use to ensure that vacant possession can be given on completion of the sale.</p> <p>If the chapel and any associated buildings will no longer be available for use, the managing group (if appointed) may wish to put them in touch with others in the Circuit, or other denominations in the area, to see if any other space can be made available. The steps required will depend on plans for the chapel once the request to cease to meet has been approved. If the chapel is to be sold, user groups and licensees must be dealt with sensitively.</p> <p>If groups store equipment, they must be given notice to remove and make alternative arrangements by a specific date as the Managing Trustees may wish to empty the chapel.</p> <p>Even if the church is not being used, it may be worth making cleaning arrangements in order to keep the building in good order.</p> <p>If a chapel is listed or in a conservation area, a photographic record of the interior and exterior of all the chapel and associated buildings must be undertaken. This should then be forwarded to the Connexional Conservation Officer for the Methodist Church's archives.</p>		
8	<p>The chapel and site – It is very important that the chapel and premises associated, including parking areas or open spaces are made secure to reduce the risk of vandalism, theft or trespass. You should seek confirmation on who is the Property Steward* for this stage and require them to request and collate the log book, records and all the sets of keys.</p> <p>If it cannot be confirmed that all keys are retrieved then it may be more suitable to change external locks as part of any security planning. Care must be taken to ensure that all moveable items, such as wheelie bins, are brought inside the property to reduce means of higher level access or vandalism such as breaking windows; all letter boxes and similar openings should be sealed up.</p> <p>In addition, it is important that any further recommendations or requirements of the property insurers are followed exactly or this may nullify the insurance policy. Any public notices referencing church services, for example, or similar public events should be removed to avoid confusion; it may be useful to add new contact details to the main church sign board if needed for emergencies.</p>		

	<p>Once it has been agreed to sell the property, all external signage should be removed so that the chapel is no longer identified with the Methodist Church (unless carved into stonework). This is crucial to avoid possible future reputational risk (refer to Step 17).</p> <p>For any advice regarding media enquiries about chapel closures, please contact the media team on mediaoffice@methodistchurch.org.uk</p> <p>*Please Note: A Circuit Steward or any other member of the Circuit can act as the Property Steward, taking responsibility for the chapel and associated premises (alternatively the Circuit may appoint a management group). As previously noted, the trusteeship of any burial grounds and/or other ancillary buildings on the site must be formally transferred, not just that of the chapel itself.</p>		
9	<p>Contracts (for photocopying, cleaning, initial services, etc.) - Managing group should review and consider cancellation of all contracts.</p>		
10	<p>Signage/ miscellaneous – if the chapel and/or associated buildings are to be sold then on the day of the sale completion, the Property Steward, appointed management group or Circuit representative should arrange the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove all remaining signage and notice boards not removed previously; • Remove temporary signage referenced previously; • Take final meter reading for all utility connections; • Ensure all relevant keys are handed over the relevant person dealing with the sale. <p>Close any social media accounts and websites</p>		
11	<p>Moveable Items - An inventory of moveable items such as communion tables, furniture, safes, etc. should be produced, then offered to the Circuit and District. If any item being removed has a dedication on it, then it should first be offered to the relatives of those who gifted and/or given the item, otherwise it should be offered to a local church. Alternatively, you may wish to sell the items, giving the proceeds to the Circuit to help to defray the costs of the maintenance of the unused chapel.</p> <p>NB: If the chapel is listed, please refer to Item 5a above, as permission may be required before the items are removed – this could include items such as pews, organs and communion rails etc.</p>		

	<p>There may be some objects, art works or documents that have historic or heritage value – they may have local or Connexional significance regarding our shared Methodist history or even be contemporary objects that look to the future, they may still have missional value. The Assessing Significance and Significance Assessment Grid documents should be consulted in the first instance for guidance.</p> <p>An inventory of items should be compiled and shared with either or both the Liaison Officer for Methodist Collections (objects) and the Liaison Officer for Methodist Archives (documents). These are Council appointed peoples can help to determine the future for church contents alongside the Methodist Heritage & Collections Officer.</p> <p>Other objects may be determined as fit for disposal - guidance on disposal of historic artefacts written by the Methodist Heritage & Collections Officer can be found here.</p> <p>As per standing order 337(1)ii / 936 objects and documents with significant heritage value must not be sold, leased or disposed of without approval of the Methodist Heritage Committee.</p> <p>Guidance on the retention and disposal of records within the church safe, please refer to section 12 and the Retention Schedule that can be found on www.methodist.org.uk/archivists.</p> <p>Guidance on retention or relocation of pipe organs can be found on www.methodist.org.uk/property/a-z. It includes links to the Methodist Church’s Organ Advisory Service (MCOAS) who can provide advice on re-homing.</p>		
<p>12</p>	<p>Records – Church records tell the story of the people called Methodists in the locality in which the church is based, who we were, the buildings we worshipped in and the stories surrounding and involving these buildings. Just because a Church closes, its story doesn’t end so the records of a closed church are important both for remembrance, heritage, local history and a building which was often a focal point in its community.</p> <p>When determining whether archives are worthy of permanent preservation under Standing Order 015 (1) (a), the advice of the Liaison Officer for Methodist Archives and the District Archivist must be taken into account together with that of the Liaison Officer for Methodist Objects. Under Standing Order 015(2), the Church or Circuit Archivist (or if none, the Superintendent) is responsible for depositing archives with Local Authorities where necessary.</p>		

	<p>The Retention Schedules for Methodist Churches, Circuits and Districts and Connexionally Owned properties, which can be found on www.methodist.org.uk/archivists, contains practical advice and guidance on which church records should be archived and preserved and take into account the requirements of data protection and other legislation. Key sections relevant closed churches include: Church meetings, Employment, Finance, Membership, Property, Health and Safety, Safeguarding, Publications, and Legal Documents.</p> <p>Within each section, certain categories of documents must be retained at Circuit or District level either permanently or for specified time periods. These include finance, Trust Deeds, Title Deeds, Burial Registers, Data Protection Records, historic insurance policies, gas safety certificates and quinquennial reports.</p> <p>Baptism Registers and unframed Cradle Rolls are particularly important for family history / heritage enquiries and should always be preserved and deposited in Local Authority Archives.</p> <p>The first point of contact should be either the Liaison Officer for Methodist Archives or the Heritage & Collections Officer via heritage@methodistchurch.org.uk.</p>		
13	<p>Police and Fire services - Both should be advised of the situation and provided with key holder information for emergencies.</p>		
14a	<p>Finances – The TMCP Finance Team must be contacted if any questions arise. For any questions on trusts, please refer to TMCP Legal. Also, please refer to SO 654 Cessation, which specifies how the balances on various accounts should be applied.</p> <p>At least one further meeting of the church council must be held after the closure, to agree and approve the final accounts and, if a separately registered charity, approve the submission of the final accounts to the Charity Commission and arrange for the ending of the registration. It is recommended that TMCP Finance Team should be consulted before any final meeting of the local church, especially if there are trusts or restrictions, etc.</p> <p>Managing trusteeship of the chapel must be formally transferred to the Circuit (or, less frequently, to another local church) under Model Trust 16(k) and according to SO605A after the closure. A clear and detailed record should be taken for the benefit of the Circuit, and a Church Council Resolution passed to this effect (TMCP or the Charity Commission may require certified copies of a resolution).</p> <p>The Church’s bank account should remain open, with responsibility transferred to the Circuit (if this is where the managing trusteeship was transferred) in accordance with SO 654</p>		

	<p>and SO605A and new signatories assigned as per Standing Order 012(1). Responsibility for its CFB account should also be transferred to the Circuit). If the church was an unregistered charity, please refer to the Legal and Constitutional Practice team at lcp@methodistchurch.org.uk for support in liaising with the bank.</p> <p>Please note that while the Church continues to exist the general church fund and local model trust income can, in effect, each be used for the purposes of the other (see SOs 650(6)(iA), 605A and 917(1) - (2).</p> <p>Bear in mind when completing final accounts (or upon sale of the chapel) that there may be returnable grants.</p>		
<p>14b</p>	<p>Bequests / Trusts – Resolutions should be passed in respect of bequests (gifts left to a Church in a will), bearing in mind that the intentions of the deceased should be fulfilled as closely as possible. It is most helpful to also pass a resolution referring to the possibility of any further bequests and where they should be directed and it is recommended to contact TMCP Legal to help prevent the resolutions from failing.</p> <p>Good record keeping will help to prevent disputes which result in the Methodist Council having to determine where managing trusteeship of funds should sit (see Book VI, Part 2, of CPD ‘Model Trust -Consultation Regulations.’)</p> <p>For restricted Trusts or those which are held as a permanent endowment, you contact TMCP Legal as soon as possible to ascertain what those restrictions are and the procedure for dealing with them before the Church ceases to meet.</p>		
<p>15</p>	<p>Certificate for Public Worship/ deregistration of the Church for marriages (England and Wales only) – If a Church stops using its chapel, there is a legal obligation under the Places of Worship Registration Act 1855 to inform the Registrar General.</p> <p>A Notice of Disuse of a Certified Place of Meeting for Religious Worship (Form 77) can be accessed on the Government’s website here. It can be completed by any person who represents the Church.</p> <p>The form must be submitted to your local Superintendent Registrar. You will only need to fill in the form if the Circuit does not wish to use the chapel for worship, or allow other denominations to do so.</p> <p>The appointments of any Authorised Persons at the chapel will be cancelled and they will no longer be authorised to conduct marriages. It is recommended to not de-register the building for</p>		

	worship or wedding until the time of sale of the building. If the building is being purchased by another Christian congregation, please contact the Legal and Constitutional Practice team for guidance about de-registration.		
16	<p>Statistics for Mission – The change of status must be reported via the ‘REPORT CHANGED STATUS’ button within the church’s profile under the Statistics for Mission tab on the Online Suite of Applications. Please refer to the guidance on ‘Web Profiles: Reporting a Change of Church Status’ found on https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/methodist-online-suite-of-applications/help-guidance/.</p> <p>Once the Connexional Database has been updated, the closure will be reflected throughout the Online Suite of Applications.</p> <p>Data should be collated and membership statistics completed in the year of closure and for the year after closure [i.e. to record closure]. The membership roll must be kept up to date then transferred to another Church if there is a merger or marked on the system as having ‘ceased.’ For more information, please refer to the Statistics for Mission Guidance and the Statistics for Mission FAQs on https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/methodist-online-suite-of-applications/help-guidance/.</p>		
17	<p>Final services – It is highly recommended to liaise with Superintendent and District Chair, as appropriate. Offer a service of celebration. You may wish to use the Methodist Church’s suggested liturgy for closing a place of worship. You may wish to look at the resources on endings that is found on www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/equipping-circuits/endings/.</p>		

APPENDIX A – Standing Order 943

943 Closure of Chapels. (1) Public services may not be discontinued in any chapel or preaching-place, nor any preaching-place removed from the circuit plan, until permission has been given by the Synod on the recommendation of the managing trustees, the Circuit Meeting and the district Policy Committee. The Circuit Meeting shall submit any such recommendation to the district committee before any steps are taken to carry the intention into effect.

As to the closure of redundant chapels see para. 23 of the Model Trusts in Book II, Part 2 and refer to connexional guidance published on the Methodist Church website. All chapel closures should be notified to the Connexional Team to enable the central database to be updated.

(2) No steps are to be taken by trustees towards the sale of a chapel until it has been decided that services shall be discontinued in accordance with the provisions of clause (1) above.

(3) When offering any chapel or former chapel for sale, lease or other disposition the trustees shall have regard to any authority from the Methodist Council under paragraph 20(2) of the Model Trusts and shall, if so authorised by the council under the said paragraph, take all possible steps, by the exaction of suitable covenants and otherwise as they may be advised, to secure that the premises shall not be used for the manufacture, distribution, sale or supply of intoxicating liquors, nor for any purpose in connection with the organisation or practice of gambling in any of its forms, nor as a public dance-hall, nor (subject to the proviso to paragraph 23(2) of the Model Trusts) for such religious purposes as may be specified in any such authority, nor for any trade for gain on Sundays.

For para. 20(2) of the Model Trusts, see Book II, Part 2.

(4) Before offering by auction or entering into a contract for the sale of a building for secular use, (and in the case of head (i) below before worship ceases) the trustees shall:

- (i) if the building is a listed building or a building in a conservation area which in either event is a chapel, obtain the prior consent of the appropriate Connexional authority to the removal of any object or structure fixed to the building or within its curtilage;
- (ii) consider the appropriate time for the removal of notice boards associated with the Methodist use of the building, and make arrangements accordingly;
- (iii) give attention to the preservation in situ of external foundation stones and other public indications of the Methodist history of the building;
- (iv) seek guidance from the Connexional Team as to whether internal memorials and other internal items (whether or not part of the structure of the building) should for historical or aesthetic reasons be preserved in situ, in other places of worship or elsewhere, and make decisions and arrangements in those matters in the light of that advice;
- (v) identify any sanctuary furniture or other structural or non-structural items (not to be preserved under (iv) above) which they wish to exclude from the sale of the building and which are to be sold separately or transferred to other places of worship, and make arrangements accordingly.

The 'appropriate Connexional authority' is the Methodist Council or its delegates (S.O. 909).

S.O. 332(4) provides for the Connexional Team to keep a register of listed chapels, manses, etc.

There are legal constraints on the removal of certain items from a listed building once worship has ceased; hence the requirement to consult the Team.

Standing Order 943: See Appendix A above

Sale of Methodist Chapels – from the Strategic Guidance for the Use of Property in Mission

Before consent to sell a property is sought Managing Trustees should have considered the above questions as posed by the Strategic Guidance for the Use of Property in Mission , the purpose of which is to enable the establishment of new Methodist communities, before making a final decision to dispose of Methodist property.

The Strategic Guidance for the Use of Property in Mission can be found at: www.methodist.org.uk/property/mission/.

Steps to sell a property must not be taken until consent is granted in accordance with Standing Order 930. A project must be entered on the on-line [Consents System](#).

Appendix B - Suggested template for a request for cessation of worship
(Standing Order 943(1))

This form is in Word version so it can be prepared and saved online and printed.

1	Name of Church	
2	Circuit	No ___/___
3a	Reasoned statement, explaining why the Church Council and members believe that public worship should cease.	
3b	What conversations have there been with the District? (e.g. Chair, Mission or Evangelism enabler). In this section please address what ongoing mission opportunities there may be and that you have addressed the questions raised in the Strategic Guidance for the use of (Methodist) property in mission on the Connexional web site.	
4a	Present membership and change in membership over the past five years.	_____ adults _____ children & young people (under 18 years)
4b	Number of people on the community role.	_____ adults _____ children & young people
5a	Church finances, funds held including general fund and reserves (this includes money at the CFB & TMCP).	£
5b	Please state if any of the money noted in 5a has restrictions or is endowed.	
5c	Please enclose a copy of the latest 'standard accounts'.	
6	A brief summary statement of the current state of the chapel and associated premises.	
7a	Date of the Church Council decision and details of the voting.	_____ 20____ Present and able to vote ____ For cessation ____ Against ____ Abstention ____
7b	Date of the Circuit Meeting decision and details of the voting.	_____ 20____ Present and able to vote ____

		For cessation ____ Against ____ Abstention ____
7c	Please explain how the proposed closure fits within the Circuit strategic policy plan.	
8a	How close is the nearest Methodist Church?	
8b	What other churches are close by and have there been discussions with other denominations?	
8c	In addition to Worship what other activities take place in the chapel and on the associated premises?	
9	If permission to cease public worship is granted what pastoral provisions will be put in place.	
10	If permission is given to cease public worship what is the Church and Circuit's preferred option for the future of the chapel, taking into consideration Connexional and District strategic advice? Please give reasons for that view.	

Signatures:

_____ Church Council Secretary, date _____ 20/____

_____ Minister in pastoral charge, date _____ 20/____

_____ District Chair, date _____ 20/____

APPENDIX C – Dealing with pastoral concerns when closing a church

Rev Dr Bonni-Belle Pickard with Deacon Gail Morgan, March 2021

In addition to the practical, legal, property and financial aspects of church closures, we are mindful of our responsibilities to care for the pastoral needs of all those affected. The following are a few of the pastoral considerations to keep in mind:

Changes are never easy, and even those changes which are recognised as necessary and ultimately beneficial can also be difficult.

As Methodists, we seek to approach each situation with pastoral care, and this certainly extends to the challenge of church closures. Ministers and all those with pastoral responsibility will need to respond with sensitivity and reminders that God, 'the Alpha and the Omega', is with us in our endings as well as our beginnings. Good pastoral care involves allowing the congregation to collectively and individually have a time for lament and grieving as they move on to new ways of living as God's people.

For some involved with church closures, there will be feelings of anger and sadness. There may also be feelings of guilt for perceived 'shortcomings'. Opportunities to express these feelings, as well as to forgive and receive forgiveness, are important. In turn, the changes can be viewed with some gratitude as an opportunity to lay down responsibilities which had become too heavy. For some, the opportunity to work through the practical details of church closure will be therapeutic and give some 'ownership' of the process.

Conversations will be needed which recognise opportunities to worship and fellowship in new circumstances and about how pastoral care will continue for the congregation. In some cases, the church will become a class of another Methodist church; in other situations, members of the church which is closing might disperse to become members of several other churches (including those of other denominations) because of geographical or other considerations.

It will be important to help persons think through what links of previous church identity can or should be retained and what needs to be set aside. Details about service timings etc., of proposed 'receiving' churches can be distributed to enable visits to happen *before* the church closure takes place so that members feel they can make informed choices about where they might want to continue their spiritual journey.

It can also be helpful if those from the 'receiving' churches attend one or more services of the closing church so that the local practices of 'how we do it' can be noted; attending each other's fellowship gatherings also helps develop a sense of mutual care.

Good pastoral care means that members of both/all congregations get to know each other and talk through what new working patterns might be established. Details of how membership/baptism documentation will be passed on and pastoral care continued should be agreed. Conversations with 'receiving' congregations can also be helpful in ensuring that the gifts and graces of the 'newcomers' are celebrated rather than just assimilated. In the

case of a church becoming a class of another, a service of welcome and /or recognition of new status/relationship would be helpful.

Some whose church is closing may decide not to join with any other congregation; pastoral listening and journeying with them is equally important. Their ongoing journey could be acknowledged with a card and something for the journey such as a holding cross.

Just as a funeral as a celebration is an essential part of pastoral care for a bereaved individual, so a service of celebration to mark a congregation's closing is vital for all concerned. Indeed, there might be more than one service – one of lament and grief for the immediate congregation and another of thanksgiving and celebration of the congregation's history and heritage for the wider circuit and community.

At a service of Lament, several of the psalms, especially Psalms 60 and 85, can help the congregation join with God's people of all ages who have felt free to express their laments to a God who grieves with us. Perhaps the congregation will want to compose their own Lament. Ecclesiastes 3 also gives an opportunity for remembering that 'for everything there is a season'. Expressions of confession and forgiveness might also be helpful for the congregation to consider in its more 'private' service.

The 'public' service of church closing would naturally include thanksgiving for the congregation's history and heritage, so some might want to compile a written and/or pictorial history. Inviting previous members, ministers, lay workers, adherents and members of the community and circuit to attend and/or take part could be helpful. Testimonies from people of different ages and perspectives could be included. Circuit and ecumenical partners could be invited to offer prayer.

Prior to the service, conversations will have taken place about how various items of furniture, banners, hymnbooks, etc. will be redistributed. Some might usefully go to another church or project; some members might want to purchase them for their own personal use. During the service, these tangible items, especially the church furniture such as pulpit, baptismal font, and communion table can be recognised as symbols of the congregation's preaching and liturgical life. How these will be used in the future can help remind those gathered that everything is not just ending but rather becoming redistributed with the potential to bring new meaning into people's lives.

In all our endings and beginnings and our journeying together, the Alpha and Omega God cares for each of us: lamenting, consoling, encouraging, celebrating as we move on to Christian Perfection.

ooOoo

A prayer offered for use at a final service:

“Blessing:

Living God;

in this building, used to the sound of singing;

this building which has seen baptisms and funerals;

this building where people have come to be married,

or to celebrate the birth of a child;

this building where people have wept and been filled with joy;

this building where people have wrestled with the deep things of life,

have prayed urgently, been stirred and changed;

in this building where you have often been with your people,

be with us now,

and so Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless us now and be with us

this day and for evermore.

Amen.”

Reprinted from *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship* (1991), worship book of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, by permission of the Oxford University Press.

APPENDIX D – Insurance considerations



Please see Methodist Insurance's [webpage](#) on unoccupied buildings, and its unoccupied buildings [guide](#).

Philip Rawson, Technical Underwriter, Methodist Insurance:

When we are notified of a closed chapel, we do try to encourage the Church or Circuit Trustees to find an alternative use of the premises so that the chapel is considered 'in use' rather than closed (this could be allowing the building to be used by a third party for community use, maintaining a regular prayer group or even using the chapel for Circuit admin or similar).

The reason we do this is to try and avoid the premises being **unoccupied** which attracts an increased premium and reduced cover in terms of the perils we can provide (restricted to fire, lightning, explosion, aircraft and impact). Of course, an alternative use is not always appropriate if for example the building is in disrepair or unsafe for occupation, and at this point we would have to consider the premises unoccupied.

Ideally we should be notified ahead of any chapel becoming unoccupied, which gives us time to line up an appropriate quotation and discuss the cover options ahead of time. It is a condition of the policy that we be informed as soon as reasonably possible of any change in circumstances (including a change in the use of a building), so any major delays in informing us could lead to the policy not responding in the event of a claim, a situation we all wish to avoid.

Following the initial notification, Trustees will then have to abide by the general conditions for unoccupied buildings. These conditions apply to each and every unoccupied risk and the key requirements are:

- All utilities (gas, electricity and water) must be turned off at the mains and the water system is drained down. However, if such are required to maintain an intruder alarm, fire alarm or other risk protection system, we are able to agree for these to remain on.
- All waste and unfixed combustible materials must be removed from the buildings

- A weekly internal and external inspection must take place and a record kept of the inspections
- The letterbox must be permanently sealed shut
- The insured party must notify us as soon as they become aware of any incident that may result in a claim, or of any illegal entry to the premises

In terms of the cover we provide, the standard approach is to restrict the insured events to fire, lightning, explosion, aircraft, earthquake and impact. This is standard in the insurance market but it does of course leave an exposure to the Church/Circuit Trustees in respect of damage/claims brought by malicious damage, theft and escape of water to name the main ones. We do make this clear in our correspondence but it is important for Trustees to be aware of this exposure as it should prompt them to do all that is possible to protect the building from these risks.

Aside from the conditions it is also useful for the Trustees to focus on securing the boundaries and the building. Key things here to consider would be cutting back trees, installing security lighting, potentially boarding windows and doors and/or installing intruder and fire alarm systems.

We do always look to carry out a free survey on all newly unoccupied buildings and we endeavour to resurvey these on a yearly basis. Our surveyors would discuss and comment specifically on risk protection measures bespoke to each individual risk which we would hope be useful to protect the buildings. Underwriters are happy to discuss any concerns at any time.

Finally, under normal circumstances we would insure the full reinstatement value of a chapel, in order that the building could be fully reinstated in the event of a total loss. This is not always appropriate or necessary on unoccupied buildings, for example:

- If the chapel is in a poor or derelict condition
- If the Trustees would have no intention of rebuilding the chapel in its current form
- If the sale value of the site derives from it's potential as a redevelopment opportunity rather than the building itself

The lowest possible level of cover would be to insure just the cost of demolition and debris removal for example, to clear the site and make it safe in a worst-case scenario. We would not recommend dropping to a figure below 25% of the full sum insured for this (unless you have obtained an estimate for the cost of demolition from a contractor).

It is also possible to choose a 'first loss' sum insured set below the full reinstatement value. This sum insured could represent the cost of building a smaller more modern building for example, or could be set to cover the loss of sale value that would result if a fire at the premise. All circumstances are unique and underwriters are of course available to talk this over.

We would always suggest that any decision to insure less than the full reinstatement of a property be agreed by the Connexional team, as this is essentially a decision not to rebuild the chapel in it's current form.