

The Releasing of Buildings for God's Mission

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| Status of Paper | Final |
| Action Required | Discussion and decision |

Summary of Content and Impact

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| Subject and Aims | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Amendments to SO 605 and SO 612 2. Amendment to the Model Trust |
| Main Points | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too many church buildings and finite resources – release resource and energy for ongoing mission • Use of SO 962 Development Plan |
| Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function) | <p>'The Releasing of Buildings for God's Mission – An Ecumenical Approach' SRC/13/16</p> <p>General Secretary's Report to the 2012 Conference God's properties and our stewardship – resources of discipleship and mission</p> <p>General Secretary's Report to the 2011 Conference God's properties and our stewardship Resolution 2/4: 'The Conference directs the Methodist Council to establish a working group to consider the issues raised in the section of the report entitled "God's properties and our stewardship" and "a fluid 'mixed economy'" and bring recommendations to the Conference as soon as proves possible.'</p> |
| Consultations | <p>Strategy and Resources Committee Officers leading on Fresh Expressions & Venture fx District Chairs</p> <p>The content will be discussed by the Connexional Leaders Forum ahead of the Council meeting</p> |

The Releasing of Buildings for God's Mission

Background

This report builds upon that of the Joint Property Strategy Group (commissioned to develop the strategic approach to the closure of Methodist and URC church buildings and the releasing of resources for mission) to the SRC in April 2013 'The Releasing of Buildings for Mission – an Ecumenical Approach', SRC/13/16. The SRC welcomed the work of the JPSG but said that effective measures now needed to be considered separately within each of the churches' governance structures.

As a paper which now concentrates solely on the Methodist context of facilitating ways in which the Church can evaluate and undertake the closure of church buildings, it was presented to the SRC in March 2014. The SRC welcomed the report and recognised the importance of this work. Therefore, the Council is now asked to make recommendations, outlined in the report, to the Conference 2014.

1. Barriers that may exist to the closure of church buildings will be focussed on, such as the technical/legal requirements that are necessary before a church building can close and most importantly creating good endings, including appropriate liturgies and worship materials for churches once the decision has been made to cease worship and close a building.
2. The process by which a local church, managing trustees and other governing structures can respond appropriately to these changing circumstances may be eased by recommending that a specific district group be set up to undertake this. In some places, this response will be to re-shape ministry and mission within existing buildings; in other cases, the most appropriate response may be to dispose of the building and develop the mission of the Church in other ways. In all cases, our priority should be to strengthen the mission aims of the church.

The Conference Receives General Secretary's Reports – 2011 & 2012 – God's Properties

3. The 2011 Conference received the General Secretary's report 'Contemporary Methodism: a discipleship movement shaped for mission' which highlighted issues regarding 'God's properties and our stewardship: resources of discipleship and mission'. It observed that in order to fulfil its mission in the future, the Church must be "people-centred and flexible"¹ (9). The General Secretary stated that "we spend too great a proportion of our finite resources of people, time and money on maintaining our many buildings" (48) whilst recognising "that our church buildings are a great treasure, rightly to be loved and cared for." (49) The report concluded that "we almost unquestionably have too many church buildings, meaning too many in the wrong place, too many unfitted to sustain our life as a discipleship movement shaped for mission today."
4. It was clear from the report that a strategic approach was needed. This should include the possibility of fewer and more appropriate buildings in order to release resources and energy for ongoing mission. To this end, the General Secretary raised the possibility that the "decision-making about the life, ministry and future of local chapels could and should not remain primarily in the hands of those chapels." (55)
5. The report indicated some areas where further work in this field is required. These areas included:

¹ General Secretary's Report 2011

- Assisting congregations in achieving ‘good ending’ when the decision has been taken to close their building
- Developing ‘Centres of excellence’, reflecting good practice (52)
- Reconsidering the sustainability of the widely accepted “dependency model of poorer chapels being helped by wealthier ones in cases when long-term dependent chapels are unresponsive to the discipleship/mission priority of the Connexion (53)”
- Further developing partnerships in mission including community, secular and statutory partnerships

The report warned against any strategic approach to church buildings based only on the size of the worshipping congregation, reminding us that many very small churches are active in mission and have crucial roles in the communities that they serve. Similarly there are situations where two reasonable sized churches within the same locality could be even more effective in mission if they combined their membership, financial and property resources.

6. The General Secretary’s report to the 2012 Conference said:

‘Some of the sharpest observations in the 2011 report concerned our properties, concluding that we had too many church buildings, meaning too many in the wrong places, too many unfit to sustain our life as a discipleship movement shaped for mission, and urging the need for both centres of excellence and ‘fewer, better buildings’.(30)

These issues had “struck a chord with many”² and it was reported that “local Churches and Circuits are increasingly reflecting on the use of their property assets, sometimes continuing as capital and sometimes made liquid, to fund projects for the sake of deepening discipleship.”³ (30).

Not a New Situation

7. There have been some attempts in the past to look at the closure of church buildings from a strategic perspective. These have tried to ask questions such as ‘What kind of buildings are needed?’ ‘Where are they best located?’ ‘How can ministers be released from the burden of property to serve in strategic appointments?’ In a report to the 1948 Conference it was stated that “the closure of chapels is seen as important in assisting the ministers in their work”⁴ establishing the principle, even then, that chapels should serve the ministry (perhaps understood in more narrow terms than we would today), and not the other way around. In 1961, the Conference directed that every District should set up a Redundancy Commission.⁵ Although these were not universally effective they did serve to encourage a review of the opportunities and challenges already facing congregations over fifty years ago.

Church Buildings and Church Communities

8. Although they are closely linked, the existence of a church congregation is not the same as the existence of a church building. Church building closure can be a difficult process for a local church to accept or for a minister or stewards to implement if closure of the church building is seen, in the mind of the local community, as the closure of a church as a worshipping community.

² General Secretary’s Report 2012, paragraph 30

³ General Secretary’s report 2012

⁴ Report ‘Ministerial Man-Power’, 1948

⁵ David P. Easton, ‘Ceased to meet’, 2002, p. 30f.

Standing Orders offer the church an objective way forward for dealing with closure of church buildings in an appropriate way, with pastoral sensitivity, that enable God's mission to be discerned.

9. As this report focuses on the releasing of buildings for mission, the standing orders that are referred to here, largely relate to the closing of church buildings, however it is noted that there is far less information that relates to forming new churches in standing orders and it is acknowledged that this is an area of work that needs to be explored.

Standing Orders

SO 601 determines the size of a local church and SO 605 the formation and cessation of a church.

SO 612 sets out the minimum size of a church and SO 962 refers to the development of church buildings including existing or proposed local ecumenical partnerships.

Church Attendance and Membership

10. Over the past decades, external and internal factors have led to a significant shift in church attendance and a decrease in membership for many traditional churches. Increasing mobility, digitalisation, diversification of family structures and the significance of virtual communities for younger generations have doubtlessly left their marks. The variety of religious and secular belief systems, including the emergence of popular charismatic and ethnic minority churches, encourage people to construct individual religious affiliations, independent from traditional institutional membership (described by Grace Davie as 'believing without belonging'). A growing lack in religious education, the controversial perception of churches in the public arena and the inability of many local churches to respond to changing needs contribute as well to the general reduction in church attendance, especially on Sundays.
11. The number of chapel and church buildings in England reflects the traditional form of worship which has typically taken place in a church building. As lives of individuals and families in the past were more predictable in terms of the location of work and home, it was easier to have an affiliation with one congregation throughout life. With the evolution of home and work life there is an increasing demand for flexibility in work and family life. Therefore more flexible forms of church, and sometimes church buildings, are needed. This report explores how the changing needs can be reflected and facilitated in the reduction in the number of church buildings in order to free resources for a more flexible mission approach.
12. One contributing factor to the number of church buildings retained by the denominations is the historic fragmentation of the churches into smaller groups. Over the years these groups have been re-united or united for the first time.⁶ The legacy of the Union is that there continues to be a multiplication of Methodist church buildings in certain areas.

Why do Church Buildings Close?

13. Relocation: A congregation might decide to relocate to new or different premises for a variety of reasons. These may include: Economic or structural considerations that make relocation a necessary or desirable outcome; A missional imperative to work in ecumenical partnership and to rationalise the use of buildings owned by the partner denomination and so release funds for mission purposes.

⁶ This was the case in 1932 for the Methodist Churches with the amalgamation of several Methodist branches.

14. A strategic decision to plant a congregation that meets in another public building (community hall, school, university, shop, etc.) or to establish new purpose-built flexible premises reflecting the mission, vision and purpose of the congregation.
15. Diminishing congregation: there are a number of factors that can contribute to falling rolls in our churches. The Methodist Church in Britain has a high age profile, which is not being renewed effectively by younger new members.⁷ In congregations with a high age profile and stagnating membership, it will be increasingly difficult for many to attend services regularly and deaths further diminish the congregation. Combined with other factors, this is sometimes sufficient to make a continued work of the chapel impractical, resulting in closure. Some congregations find it increasingly difficult to appoint members to key roles within the life of the Church.
16. Demographic changes and population shift means that it can be hard to sustain congregations. Some chapels are now 'in the wrong place' in relation to communities and centres of population. Conversely Britain's population is growing so the closure of one or more buildings whose communities have moved on offers the possibility of planting new churches within new housing developments.
17. Inflexible church architecture can sometimes hinder developing mission programmes and when combined with statutory limitations on reordering of buildings, closure becomes the preferred or inevitable option. This may frequently be combined with an escalation in maintenance costs that renders the future use of the property unsustainable.

Why do Church Buildings Fail to Close?

There are a number of factors that can discourage the closure and disposal of a church building that appears to have reached the end of its useful life:

18. The inheritance of church responsibilities passed on over generations within the same family or a few families can lead to an over-identification with the church building and reluctance to consider unsettling questions about the future.
19. The closure of a church building can be painful for members who are emotionally attached to 'their' building, especially perhaps amongst older members whose attachment to the building and to the memories it holds, can date back many decades.
20. The reluctance or inability to make an accurate assessment of the current situation or future prospects for a cause (eg condition of the building, decreasing membership, outdated facilities, etc) and a culture of non-communication concerning them.
21. Possible unwillingness of the Church leadership/minister to be part of the process of leading a congregation through painful change.
22. Members take their responsibilities seriously and many cannot face the sense of 'failure' from a church closing 'on their watch'.

Procedures for the Disposal of a Church Building

23. The Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP) is the Custodian Trustee for Methodist property. The members of the Church Council are usually the Managing Trustees for local

⁷ The majority of Methodist church members are between 66 and 80. There are no statistics whether the age profile is actually rising. The numbers of deaths reported has decreased since 2005, from 8500 to 6500 reported deaths (whereas there is no information about the age and reason for the deaths): <http://www.methodist.org.uk/statisticsformission>

Church property. In cases of the disposal of local Church property, the net proceeds of sale are held by TMCP and can be applied as capital money for the relevant Circuit's purposes. Standing Orders 916 and 917 set out how the capital money can be expended by the circuit and have been significantly broadened in recent years. The ceasing of public services in a local church requires the permission of the District Synod but upon the recommendation of the Managing Trustees, the Circuit Meeting and District Policy Committee. There is no power provided to the Circuit Meeting for it to determine that a local church should cease worship nor that the building should be sold, unless the Church Council has delegated Managing Trusteeship to the Circuit Meeting under Model Trust 16(k).

24. In the event of a local church being unable to make up the church council to seven members (excluding Ministers and others noted in S.O. 610(i)), the Superintendent shall nominate to the Circuit Meeting those who will be invited to join the Church Council for the year. On appointment, they, together with local Church Council members, will be the Managing Trustees.
25. When the number of members in a local church falls below 6 (see SO 605 for clarification of this figure), and so continues for four successive quarters that Church will cease to be recognised as a local church. It shall become a Class of another church and the Circuit meeting is responsible for keeping under review the provision of public worship (SO 605).

Listed Building Status and Charity Law: The Impact on the Sale of Churches

The Model Trust and the Sale of Property

26. Model Trust 16b requires Methodist property to be sold for 'the best price that can be reasonably obtained.'

Model Trust 20

27. Model Trust 20 is a provision in exceptional circumstances to sell a church property at an under value. This legislation sets out the criteria for when a sale under Model Trust 20 can be considered by the Methodist Council. The Methodist Council, in January 2013, considered extending this facility to leases, but it restated the policy underpinning Model Trust as set out in the paper MC/13/05 which states: "An increasing number of requests from Circuits and Local Churches are being received for the leasing of Model Trust property to an undervalue to incorporated Methodist bodies [...] These requests are normally received where Local Church membership is low in number, but neither the local Church or Circuit want to cease worship." The Council determined that the Model Trust 20 policy as already in place did not need further review at this stage. The key concerns were that a lease of the premises would decrease the capital available for the work of the Methodist Church and that a lease would just be a way of delaying the inevitable need to sell the property.
28. In October 2013 the Council approved the sale at an undervalue of surplus land at Keswick Methodist Church under paragraph 20(1) of the Model Trusts to Keswick Community Housing Trust.
29. In the news section of the November 2013 Cumbria Methodist District website, it was reported: "This sale would allow four affordable homes for rent to be developed from the existing schoolroom at Southey Street, Keswick, and pave the way for a larger redevelopment of the church itself. The vision is to redevelop the church building to provide a worship area and conference centre for the town, all made possible by fundraising and an investment from a local trust." This is an excellent example of how existing provision in Methodist law can be used by

churches to facilitate the innovative missional use of buildings that are no longer suitable for their original purpose.

Listed Buildings

30. The widespread listing of church buildings, particularly in some parts of the country, is a challenge when it comes to their development, renewal and disposal. Alterations to buildings that make them more flexible for mission projects are often prevented and on other occasions are only permitted after long and protracted negotiations. Once a decision has been taken to seek permission to sell, a listing is often a disincentive to the purchaser because permissions to change the use of buildings are difficult to secure. Problems particularly arise because of the requirement of the Charities Act 2011 which require a charitable asset to be sold for the best terms achievable and paragraph 16(b) of the Model Trust which requires properties to be sold at the best price obtainable.⁸ Conversely, the costs of maintaining a listed chapel may be higher, providing a greater impetus to close and dispose of them. Other options might be considered, especially the disposing of the buildings to a charity which cares for redundant church buildings.

Mapping Exercise

31. Work continues on a comprehensive mapping exercise of main denomination buildings in the United Kingdom. The Methodist Church has invested in the development of a church web-mapping programme, containing a range of useful information about its local churches, including their location⁹. This has been combined with the data of the Church of England. The webmap currently shows Local Churches as defined in the Deed of Union and SO 003 (vii) therefore does not necessarily include all church properties.
32. Discussions to add data of the United Reformed Church properties to the webmap are already underway and other denominations could be encouraged to provide information too. When complete, the tool will offer an overview on the concentration of church buildings across the country and may prove a useful tool in the development of an ecumenical approach to the strategic use, retention or disposal of church buildings.¹⁰

Releasing the Mission Potential of Historic Sites and Listed Buildings

33. Much work has been done in recent years to develop heritage sites and buildings of special historic interest as vehicles for mission and ministry¹¹ recognising that, in some situations, rather than seek to re-develop a building, it is appropriate to celebrate the heritage and significance of the building:
34. Further conversations with the Historic Chapel Trust, English Heritage, TMCP and other interested parties (including other denominations) would encourage the creation of educational and tourist resources in appropriate places. The Church of England with its two thirds listed buildings is a good source of expertise in this field. These conversations should not neglect the opportunities offered by the requirements of school curricula and the potential provided by imaginative use of ICT.

⁸ However, there are examples where people have purchased a Listed chapel, have sought a change of use under planning law e.g from a chapel to a residential unit, and the Local Planning Authority has approved alterations to the building which would not have been permitted had it remained a church under the Ecclesiastical Exemption.

⁹ <http://www.methodist.org.uk/links/church-webmap-advanced-version>

¹⁰ This project has been started in 2012, in cooperation with the Methodist Research Department and the United Reformed Communication Department

¹¹ One example being the Old Chapel in Upminster: <http://www.theoldchapelupminster.co.uk/>

Focussed Resourcing of Mission

35. Concerned that limited resources are used most effectively the 2011 General Secretary's report raised the possibility that: "...the 'dependency model' of poorer chapels being helped by wealthier ones to the extent they have been in times past cannot be sustained. Through a proper expression of our Connexionalism, in cases when long-term dependent chapels are unresponsive to the discipleship/mission priority of the Connexion and yet require continuous resources to enable their simple survival, we may have to decide that they should not be sustained."
36. This is about far more than closing church buildings. It is also about the ability of the Church to focus resources in places and in ways that will enable significant fruit for its mission. This is essential to the strategic development, but strikes at the heart of the ways in which Methodist Circuits, Districts and the Connexion have operated over the years.
37. It is vital that those mission and ministry programmes proving effective in our work are resourced appropriately, whether or not those programmes are based in traditional church buildings. To this end, the Church will want to maximise resources to such work and to minimise the tendency for resources to be removed from places of perceived strength and into places of inevitable decline. This is a difficult judgement to make from a distance, but is probably easier to determine at a local level.
38. Consideration should be given:
 - a) to the creation of a 'tool set' to assist Managing Trustees to make an informed (pastorally sensitive) judgement in such matters. Ecumenical partners have undertaken useful work on this. For example the library of rural good practice on the Arthur Rank Centre's website is a helpful resource. A District Group (as proposed below in paragraph 39) could offer important input and Church and Community Development practitioners within the Discipleship & Ministries Learning Network will increasingly become a resource to assist in local mission and resource planning.
 - b) to ways in which funding, ministry and resources can be focussed and retained in places and projects that reflect the Church's missional priorities and to further consider how changes in governance might encourage this. This should be seen as a healthy model of pruning 'old branches' in order to provide space and succour for new growth.
 - c) Circuits and local churches should be encouraged to consider the principles of mission in relation to their properties, considering the issues raised in this report when undertaking circuit review processes.
 - d) Programmes of ministerial formation should include the exploration of good practice in relation to the closing and disposal of buildings and the appropriate pastoral care of individuals and congregations in these communities.

District Support

39. It has been suggested that it may be beneficial for districts to create a specific group to assist/facilitate churches in the above work, being a 'step removed' from existing church/circuit relationships. For such a group to be effective, specific authority would be needed within Standing Orders.

Statutory Compliance and Management of Property: An Alternative Approach

40. As the managing trustees, the Church Council is responsible for all aspects of maintaining and running property within a framework of Statutory & Charity Commission compliance and adherence to the Constitutional Practice & Discipline of the Methodist Church. Volunteer office holders within the local churches often take on the roles without the necessary expertise and training to do so. Each role brings with it the need for considerable administrative processes and it is not uncommon for churches with few volunteers for the local minister taking on additional burden of the work.
41. One of the ways in which church Councils should monitor sustainability of the church community is to annually monitor their reserves policy. The 2013 Conference directed that a working party be set up to consider the issues that were raised in memorials M15/16/17, 'Releasing Money for God's Mission'. The working party will report to the 2015 Conference on ways churches and districts can maximise their resources.
42. The existing directory of the key property related statutory requirements and schedules should be reviewed, thus enabling local congregations and circuits/synods to have a clear picture of the legal and statutory framework within which they are required to operate. The information currently collected and entered onto the annual schedules should be seen as a resource for planning and taking decisions regarding future mission. This needs to be kept up to date in accordance with changing legislation and procedures. Additional resources which focus on resourcing the church and community in rural areas can be found at:
www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk

The role, responsibilities and influence of the Managing Trustees

43. The interest of the local church as exhibited by the actions of the managing trustees may sometimes stand in tension with the strategic approach of the District and the Circuit. It is important to be able to take such steps to diminish the likelihood of local churches 'blocking' missional development by retaining possession of church buildings when there is no reasonable prospect of growth or of establishing a new congregation.

One suggestion is that the facility for the removal of the Managing Trusteeship from the local church to the Circuit should be explored and that criteria should be developed by which this can be achieved and that the governing statutes are amended to allow this to happen.

44. The following framework may be one way to achieve the facility for the removal of the Managing Trusteeship from the local church and its passing to the Circuit/District.
Rationale: The Methodist members of the JSPG accept the suggestion from The General Secretary that the view that "decision-making about the life, ministry and future of local chapels could and should not remain primarily in the hands of those chapels." should be revisited. (Report to the 2011 Conference, paragraph 55). They believe that the Circuit remains best placed to determine and shape the mission needs in its communities, but that the expertise, advice and over-view of the District is helpful in achieving these goals.
45. SO 962 refers to the role of the District Policy Committee in keeping under review a development master-plan for the Methodist church buildings and circuit staffing of the District taking into account Planning Authority Proposals. This is a key strategic role for the District Policy Committee who, by carrying out this work, can ensure that they have strategic oversight of their resources in order to utilise their resources efficiently. Considerations concerning the strategic selling and closure of church buildings in order to release resources for mission should be encouraged as to be part of each development master-plan. Districts should use their

Development Plan when deciding whether or not to give consent to property projects under SO 930.

46. Early assistance to explore strategic opportunities for local mission that might (or might not) include the closure of a church building is essential to the development of Christian communities and that we must create the means by which such mission audits can be facilitated with the minimum of resistance.
47. The formation of a District Group (detailed in paragraph 39) to assist local churches and Circuits in their assessment of the challenges and opportunities for mission and that some amendment to SO 962 be considered as outlined below.

Creating Good Endings

48. The General Secretary, in his report to the 2011 Conference, asks “are we able to put a ‘mission accomplished’ sign on our closing premises and allow ourselves to hear the whisper of the Spirit, ‘well done, thou good and faithful servants’.” (51) What does it mean to ‘finish well’ in respect of a Church Building? Can local congregations be helped to grow through the experience of building closure and consider the possibilities for a different shaped church moving forward? How can we help the mission achievement of a local congregation to be celebrated at the same time as acknowledging a possible sense of bereavement at their loss? Support must be provided for all concerned- congregations, ministers and also those outside the church that feel some ‘community ownership or pride’ in Methodist buildings.
49. Such times require pastoral sensitivity which helps people celebrate and grieve its ending. The analogy with the process of bereavement in case of human loss according to the work of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (denial, isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance) is described in David P Easton’s Master thesis.¹²
50. It is important for a local church to feel that they have ‘permission’ to let go of their building. This is a pastoral and liturgical process as much as it is a legal process, and it is very demanding for the staff involved. In the process, it is important for the minister and the church workers to have support from outside the Circuit in order to cope with the various reactions of the church members that might be projected onto the ministerial team who would take the leadership for the implementation of the decision of the Managing Trustees.
51. A closing act of worship lies with the local congregation. Closing services of worship should include thanksgiving and the celebration of life, but also providing space for bereavement, aiming to ensure a beautiful ending for the life of the congregation in the closing church building. In recognition of this, work is being undertaken by the Faith and Order Committee’s Liturgical Sub Committee (which will be available on the Methodist Church website) to produce an accessible and practical guide to creating good endings for church buildings and the on-going encouragement and resourcing of Christian congregations in local communities.

Recommendations for the Council to discuss:

The Council is asked to consider the following suggestions which may lead to recommendations being brought to the 2014 Conference.

- 1) That work is undertaken to amend SO 605(2).

¹² David P Easton, ‘Ceased to meet’, 2002, p. 42ff.

605 Formation and Cessation. (1) No new Local Church shall be formed, nor former church reconstituted, having less than twelve persons who are locally resident and are either members of that church or actively committed to its life as ministers not in the active work.

(2) When the number of persons within clause (1) above falls below six, and so continues for four successive quarters, that church shall cease to be recognised as a Local Church.

(3) For the purpose of clause (1) a person is locally resident if resident in such a place that the Local Church in question is a natural centre for worship or fellowship.

(4) Where by reason of the operation of clause (2) above a Local Church ceases to be recognised as such, the members shall be constituted as a Class and placed under the care of a leader, who may be chosen from their number or from the wider membership of the Local Church to which the Class is attached. A number of such Classes in a neighbourhood may constitute a Local Church or such a Class may be attached to a larger church, either neighbouring or central, but so that in either case there shall be a Church Council and Pastoral Committee sufficient to undertake the oversight of the members and the training of new members envisaged in this Part and Section 05.

(5) The provision of opportunity for public worship for such Classes shall be kept under review by the Circuit Meeting which, in deciding whether or how often to sustain services in chapels where there is a Class but no Local Church, shall take into consideration the possibilities of growth in the area, the ecumenical situation, the sufficiency of numbers to form a worshipping congregation, facilities for travel and the stewardship of the resources of the Circuit and of the services of preachers.

Should the number of persons stated be increased and possibly the number of successive quarters reduced?

One suggestion is that when a local church is unable to appoint officers to fill the roles of Church Council Secretary, Treasurer or is unable to pay circuit assessment reasonably asked of it, and so continue for two quarters, that church shall cease to be recognised as a local church.

2) That work is undertaken to amend SO 612.

612 Minimum Size. (1) When it is impossible to make up the number of members of the Church Council to include seven persons other than those qualified under head (i) of Standing Order 610(1) who are able and willing to act the Superintendent shall be informed. He or she shall nominate to the Circuit Meeting sufficient members of other churches in the Circuit, able and willing to act, to make up the number to seven. The Circuit Meeting shall then appoint that number of members to the Church Council for the ensuing year.

(2) When the procedure in clause (1) above has been followed for two successive years the Circuit Meeting may apply to that church the procedure set out in Standing Order 605(4), so that the church will become a Class within another church. The Church Council of the church thus united will take on all the responsibilities of both Church Councils.

It is possible for the process of designation as a class and the subsequent transferring of trusteeship outlined here to take up to nearly three years. Should there be a reduction in the number of years set out in SO 612(2)

3) That work is undertaken to develop an effective mechanism for removing managing trusteeship from church councils without also allowing them to abdicate their trustee responsibilities. *(The formulation of any such mechanism would require a change to the Model Trust)*

4) That when a church building ceases to be recognised as a local church, the church building should be retained only if the current and future development of mission in the locality would be severely hindered if it were not retained.