



# The Methodist Church

## Guidance on Church closures

*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.*

*This note was produced by the Property Support and Legal and Constitutional Practice Teams, with David Stabler, District Property Secretary for the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Methodist District. We wish to thank all those who contributed.*

*NB This note is not exhaustive and has not been approved by the Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice or the Law and Polity Committee.*

*Queries about or comments on this note can be sent to [lcp@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:lcp@methodistchurch.org.uk)*

No.	Action required/ recommended	Date completed	Notes
1a	<p><b>Ceasing to meet</b> - The Church Council must come to a decision to seek approval for the cessation of public worship often referred to as a request to ‘cease to meet.’ * Standing Order (‘SO’) 943(1) (see <b>Appendix A</b>) provides that the request must be referred to the Circuit Meeting, who shall make a recommendation about the Local Church’s future, to the District Policy Committee.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid green; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>. * There are three distinct and separate steps, which should not be combined:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Discontinuance of Public Worship. SO 943 (1).</li> <li>B. The appointment of successor Managing Trustees. Model Trusts Part II 2 (1).</li> <li>C. The sale or disposal of the Property. SO 918, which will require a Property Consent request (see <b>Appendix B</b>).</li> </ul> </div>		

	NB Procedure with Local Ecumenical Partnerships will differ. Please consult your LEP's Constitution and the Connexional Ecumenical Officer.		
<b>1b</b>	<b>Final meetings</b> - You may wish to consider whether it is appropriate for the Superintendent to Chair the final Church Council meeting(s) (see SO 502(1)).		
<b>1c</b>	<p><b>Seeking final approval to cease to meet</b> - The Church Council, Circuit Meeting, with the managing trustees (if different) must then make a <i>further</i> recommendation to the Synod for approval to cease to meet. Only once the closure is approved can public services be discontinued, and the Local Church removed from the Circuit plan.</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 &amp; Synod (see <b>Appendix C</b>).</p> <p>It is expected that at this point, discussions will have been had with the Circuit about whether closure is the best course of action for the Church. Please refer to the Connexional Property Support Team's Strategic <a href="#">Guidance</a> for the Use of Property in Mission, the 9 points noted in <b>Appendix B</b> and the Church's <a href="#">Mission Planning workbook</a>).</p>		
<b>1d</b>	<b>Appointment of a managing group</b> - Closing a Church is a huge undertaking which should not be left to one person. It is therefore highly recommended that the Circuit Leadership Team or Circuit Meeting appoint a managing group to deal with the closure.		
<b>2</b>	<b>Pastoral visits</b> - Visits should be undertaken to 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 <b>Appendix D</b> on pastoral considerations.]		
<b>3</b>	<p><b>The chapel</b> – Prior to closure the Church Council may wish to vote to make a <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) has been approved. As to the sale, see <b>Appendices A and B</b>.</p> <p>As noted, the legal aspects of selling a chapel are beyond the scope of this guidance. Please refer to TMCP's <a href="#">sale guidance</a>, or consult the Church's <a href="#">panel firms</a> as required.</p>		
<b>4</b>	<b>Insurance matters</b> – Inform Methodist Insurance (unless insured by an alternative company). If the closure will significantly increase the cost of the policy, you may wish to seek a number of quotes and switch insurers, before transferring responsibility for the policy to the Circuit (or, where appropriate, to another Local		

	Church). [See <b>Appendix E</b> for information on Methodist Insurance's requirements].		
<b>5a</b>	<p><b>Listed Buildings &amp; Buildings in Conservation Areas</b> - The Ecclesiastical Exemption for Listed Buildings ceases once the building is no longer used for ecclesiastical purposes. The managing group should be aware of this, as the Local Authority becomes the statutory authority for the building 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 or Heritage Officer if they have queries or concerns.</p> <p>If works are proposed to the exterior of the building as part of the sale, then include these 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 building for secular use, (and in the case of item (i) before worship ceases) the Trustees must:</p> <p>(i) If the building 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 building 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 building;</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 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.</p> <p>(iv) 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, 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>		
<b>5b</b>	<p><b>War Memorials and Burial grounds</b> - 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 or public space where it can be appreciated. Any war memorials affected by closure should be</p>		

	<p>recorded on the following database for National War Memorials Record – <a href="http://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk">www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk</a>, even if kept in situ. 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.</p> <p>Managing trusteeship of any burial grounds on the Local Church’s site must be formally transferred to the Circuit, or whichever trustee body is best equipped to maintain it. For guidance on the property and legal aspects of burial grounds, including closure of burial grounds, please consult TMCP’s <a href="#">guidance</a> or contact <a href="mailto:legal@tmcp.org.uk">legal@tmcp.org.uk</a>.</p>		
<p><b>6</b></p>	<p><b>Moveable Items</b> - 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 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 Church.</p> <p>NB: If the building 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>Guidance on retention or relocation of pipe organs can be found on the property pages of the Church’s website which includes links to the Methodist Church’s Organ Advisory Service (MCOAS) who can provide advice on re-homing.</p> <p>Guidance on disposal of historic artefacts written by the Methodist Heritage Officer can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</p>		
<p><b>7</b></p>	<p><b>Records</b> – Under Standing Order 015(1A), when determining whether archives are worthy of permanent preservation, the advice of the Liaison Officer for Methodist Archives must be taken into account. Under Standing Order 015A(2), the Local Church/ Circuit Archivist (or if none, the Superintendent) is responsible for depositing archives with Local Authorities where necessary. For further information, see the Church’s <a href="#">guidance</a> on best practice in relation to retaining records.</p> <p>It is highly recommended that managing trustees retain historic insurance policies, gas safety certificates and quinquennial reports.</p> <p>As for retention of particular types of records which relate to safeguarding, please see paragraph 5.1.7 on pages 81-82 of the <a href="#">Safeguarding Policies, Procedures and Guidance for the Methodist Church</a>.</p>		

8a	<p><b>Utilities</b> - 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 <b>Appendix E</b>), it may require draining down. Heating should be switched off and the draining system disconnected, again, depending on your insurer's instructions. Some water companies will not charge water rates for closed places of worship: advise the company and ask if this is possible.</p>		
8b	<p><b>Ongoing maintenance</b> - The Property Steward or Managing Group (if appointed) will need to be mindful of on-going maintenance issues and repairs, as part of a weekly building check it will be important to be pre-emptive and look for problems. It should be noted that fire and security alarms need to continue to be 'on contract' and be inspected and maintained by the contractor. It is important to note that the Circuit must adhere to Standing Orders, in particular in relation to quinquennials (SO 952).</p>		
9	<p><b>Contracts (for photocopying, cleaning, initial services, etc.)</b> - Managing group should review and consider cancellation of all contracts.</p>		
10	<p><b>Police and Fire services</b> - Both should be advised of the situation and provided with key holder information for emergencies.</p>		
11a	<p><b>Finances</b> – The TMCP Finance Team must be contacted if any questions arise.</p> <p>At least one further meeting 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.</p> <p>Managing trusteeship of the building and the Church's Model Trust Funds must be formally delegated to the Circuit (or, less frequently, to another Local Church) under Model Trust 16(k) 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 Local Church's bank account should remain open, with responsibility transferred to the Circuit (if this is how the Circuit wishes to manage the finances) and new signatories assigned as per Standing Order 012(1). Responsibility for its CFB account should also be transferred to the Circuit).</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) and 917(2)(viii)).</p> <p>Bear in mind when completing final accounts (or upon sale of the Church building) that there may be returnable grants.</p>		
<b>11b</b>	<p><b>Bequests</b> – 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. You will be aware that the first £20,000 of bequest is considered income for the purposes of the Model Trusts (see SO 915(3)(viii)).</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>		
<b>12</b>	<p><b>Groups which hire church property (if any)</b> - They must be informed of the closure, and the dates from which alternative arrangements will need to be made, unless pro tem, the Circuit has made a decision for the premises still to be available for user groups and licensees.</p> <p>If not, 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 building once the request to cease to meet has been approved. If the building 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 will be wish to empty the premises.</p> <p>If a building is listed or in a conservation area a photographic record of the interior and exterior of all the buildings is undertaken. This should then be forwarded to the Connexional Conservation Officer for the church’s archives.</p>		
<b>13</b>	<p><b>Certificate for Public Worship/ deregistration of the Church for marriages (England and Wales only)</b> – If a Local Church stops using its building, 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 <a href="#">here</a>. It can be completed by any person who represents the Local Church.</p> <p>The form must be submitted to your local Superintendent Registrar along with any marriage registration stock that may be</p>		

	<p>held and both current marriage registers. You will only need to fill in the form if the Circuit does not wish to use the building for worship, or allow other denominations to do so.</p> <p>The Superintendent Registrar will then arrange the return of these documents to the General Register Office. The appointments of any Authorised Persons at the building will be cancelled and they will no longer be authorised to register marriages.</p>		
<p><b>14</b></p>	<p><b>The chapel and site</b> – It is very important that all the property associated with the church building and if required the site itself (e.g. 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>*Please Note: A Circuit Steward or any other member of the Circuit can act as the Property Steward, taking responsibility for the premises (alternatively the Circuit may appoint a management group). As previously noted, the trusteeship of any burial grounds on the site must be formally transferred, not just that of the chapel itself.</p>		
<p><b>15</b></p>	<p><b>Statistics for Mission</b> – The change of status <a href="#">needs to be reported</a> via the ‘REPORT CHANGED STATUS’ button within the church’s profile on the website.</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 toll must be kept up to date then</p>		

	transferred to another Church or marked on the system as having 'ceased to meet.'		
<b>16</b>	<b>Final services</b> - Liaise with Superintendent and District Chair, as appropriate. Offer a service of celebration. You may wish to use the Church's <a href="#">suggested liturgy</a> for closing a place of worship.		
<b>17</b>	<p><b>Signage/ miscellaneous</b> - 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"> <li>• Remove all remaining signage and notice boards not removed previously;</li> <li>• Remove temporary signage referenced previously;</li> <li>• Take final meter reading for all utility connections;</li> <li>• Ensure all relevant keys are handed over the relevant person dealing with the sale.</li> </ul>		

## **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.

(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.

### **Appendix B - Suggested template for permission to advertise Church Premises for sale**

Before seeking consent to sell church premises the Circuit Meeting and District Policy Committee should consider the following questions from the Connexional Property Strategy document.

Please refer to Standing Order 918.

Please add notes and answers to questions raised.

		Notes and answers
A	Is there potential for an expression of Methodist mission to continue from these premises?	
B	How does the property fit within or give expression to the circuit/district mission plan(s)?	
C	What alternative uses might be made of the property as an expression of Methodist mission and ministry and have these been explored?	
D	What other Christian presence remains locally, particularly in rural areas?	
E	Is this the only community space in the locality or are there other community buildings?	
F	What are the alternative uses for the property when vacated, taking into account, amongst other things, the local authority strategic plan? Could it be redeveloped to generate income for mission elsewhere?	
G	Are alternative sites available which would better enable mission?	

Having considered the above questions we wish to apply to sell the above premises

Date of Circuit Meeting at which decision to sell was agreed: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Superintendent Minister

Date \_\_\_\_\_

FOR DISTRICT COMPLETION

Are there any special recommendations made by the District Policy Committee?

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Date of District Policy Committee consent to advertise for sale

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Signed \_\_\_\_\_ District Property Secretary

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Standing Order 943: See Appendix A above**

**Sale of Methodist Church premises – from Connexional Property Strategy 2018-2020**

Before consent to sell a property is sought Managing Trustees should have considered the above questions as posed by the Connexional Property Strategy 2018-2020, the purpose of which is to enable the establishment of new Methodist communities, before making a final decision to dispose of Methodist property.

The Property Strategy 2018-2020 can be found

at: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/10865/3219-connexional-property-strategy-2018-20-vs3.pdf>

***Steps to sell a property must not be taken until consent is granted. A project must be entered on the on-line consents system.***

**Appendix C - 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 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 on the 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 Local Church and Circuit's preferred option for the future of the building, 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 D – 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 E – Insurance considerations



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

Rebecca Oliver, underwriter, Methodist Insurance:

When we are notified of a closed church, we do try to encourage the Church or Circuit to find an alternative use of the premises so that the building is considered 'in use' rather than closed (quite often this would be along the lines of the building being used by a third party for community use).

The reason why 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 there isn't the interest from a third party, and at this point we would have to consider the premises unoccupied.

At the point of becoming unoccupied it is important that the Church or Circuit notify us and subsequently abide by our general condition 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 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 Churches 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 Church or Circuit 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.