**CUMBRIA METHODIST DISTRICT**

**Discontinuance of Public Worship – Standing Order 943(1)**

**Introduction** – there are three strands to consider:

1. An application (under SO 943(1)) to cease public worship in a chapel (‘chapel’ is the Methodist name for the building, ‘church’ the name for the people) requires Church Council, Circuit Meeting, DPG and Synod approval. This form is primarily concerned with this strand and needs to be completed as part of that process.
2. The future use of the chapel: the Circuit may determine other uses, but if the Circuit decides (under Model Trust 16(1)(b) or (e)) to sell or otherwise dispose of the chapel, a Property Consents process will also be required. Other than initially registering the project on the system, this cannot proceed until permission to cease worship has been given by the Synod. (The agreement of the District to any disposal comes not through the cease to worship process, but through the consents system, and is given by the District Consents Panel.)
3. The members of the Church Council are the Managing Trustees who need to make the initial decision cease worship (where numbers are insufficient, the provisions of SOs 612 and 605A can, where relevant, be applied). Frequently, it will be sensible for the managing trustees also to agree to delegate responsibility (under Model Trust 16(1)(k)) for deciding what to do with the chapel and the undertaking of any disposal to another body, such as the Circuit Meeting, Circuit Leadership Team, or another Local Church. If the chapel is retained but used by another Local Church or by the Circuit going forwards (e.g. for a mission project purpose) the managing trusteeship will follow the new use, and thus the successor Managing Trustees will be as set in Model Trust 2(1).
4. **General**
   1. Circuit (name and number):
   2. Name of Church and Chapel:
   3. How close is the nearest: a) Methodist Church, b) church of another denomination?
   4. Reasoned statement: Please explain why the Church Council and members believe that public worship should cease.
   5. Date of the Church Council decision and details of the voting:
   6. Date of the Circuit Meeting decision and details of the voting:
5. **Conversations** 
   1. Have members been properly consulted and have the managing trustees fully discussed the issues involved and considered the various alternatives?
   2. What conversations have been had ecumenically and within the relevant Mission Community (including about possible shared or future use of the building)?
   3. What consultations have there been with the wider community? (It is wise to keep people who may have a long association with the building properly informed and involve them in the discussions.)
   4. What conversations have there been within the Circuit (and in section 6 explain more fully how the proposed closure fits within the Circuit strategic policy plan)?
   5. What conversations have there been with the District (and its relevant officers)?
6. **Membership and Pastoral Care**
   1. What is the present membership and how has this changed over the past five years?
   2. How many additional persons are there on the community role (and are there any particular groups that should be identified for future care or ministry)?
   3. The cessation of worship and/or closure of a building can be a painful and emotional experience, sometimes accompanied by a sense of failure, guilt, or loss. Every effort should be made to reassure, give thanks, and celebrate “a cause whose purpose has been fulfilled”. Are there plans for a final service (which strictly should only be after Synod has agreed to worship ceasing)?
   4. Will existing members move to a new location (e.g., a community space, a home, another Methodist or ecumenical church)?
   5. If existing members do not move to a new location as a group, where will their memberships be transferred to?
   6. What might happen to the connections with and care for those on the community role?
7. **Finances**
   1. Please summarise the church’s financial position, including the general fund and any reserves (sometimes copies of the most recent standard accounts might be supplied, or might be requested).
   2. Please state if any funds are restricted or held on particular trusts or endowments.
   3. In consultation with the Circuit, please state what provisionally is proposed to happen to any remaining funds (and seek advice to consider passing appropriate resolutions regarding the future of any trust funds).
8. **Chapel/Building** 
   1. In addition to worship, please briefly indicate what other activities take place on the premises? (It is wise to keep people who may have a long association with the building properly informed and involve them in the discussions.)
   2. Please provide a brief summary of the current state of the premises.
   3. Are the congregation likely to join with another local Methodist Church, and, if so, are any sale proceeds intended for a development project (such as in another Methodist Church)? (This may affect a decision for Replacement Project Status, but also sometimes there can be other issues to consider.)
   4. Could the chapel be adapted for shared community use – such as a post office, clinic, shop, one stop centre etc – thus making it more viable? (A neighbourhood audit might reveal community services that the building could accommodate.)
   5. What impact will the local authority development plan have on the community? (If a housing development or building a road by-pass is planned, it may be appropriate to retain the building, to use or sell at a later date, or even demolish it, and retain ownership of the site for future development.)
   6. 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, and local ecumenical Mission Community buildings strategy?  Please give reasons for that view.
9. **Mission Strategy**

In this section please address what ongoing mission opportunities there may be, consider the questions raised in the Strategic Guidance for the use of (Methodist) property in mission on the Connexional web site (link: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/22046/strategic-guidance-for-the-use-of-property-in-mission.pdf>), and considered any relevant Mission Community Mission Plan and Buildings Strategy.

* 1. Heritage: is the site itself of strategic importance for Methodists and within the locality, and could it be used for a missional opportunity (e.g., a fresh expression of church)? [[1]](#footnote-1)
  2. How might an effective Methodist or Christian presence be maintained in the community if worship ceases in the Methodist Chapel and following its possible sale? (Consider ecumenical links and joint ventures, including possible ‘fresh expressions’ of church, in a village hall, school, home, etc., and making use of the sale proceeds if appropriate.)
  3. How does the proposed ceasing of worship (and possible new use, or disposal of, the building) fit within the Circuit mission and any strategic development plan, and within any local Ecumenical Mission Community Buildings Strategy?

***Signatures:***

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Church Council Secretary   
Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Minister in pastoral charge   
Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Circuit Superintendent   
Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_\_

1. NB There is funding available to explore the feasibility of developing a building for a new mission opportunity: see <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/starting-a-property-project/feasibility-funding/> . [↑](#footnote-ref-1)