**A GUIDE OR AIDE MEMOIRE FOR ACTION FOR LOCAL CHURCHES WHO ARE CEASING TO WORSHIP (CLOSE) AND HOW TO DEAL WITH CHURCH PROPERTY**

There are times when, for one reason or another, a congregation will consider it time to cease to meet. At such a time it will normally be of great help for the local church to share their concerns with the Synod Pastoral Support Committee and undertake the Being Church review with the congregation.

Once a congregation sets its mind on closure, there are a number of things to be borne in mind, to tie up all the loose ends. These are listed in the Action Points for Churches (see separate document), regarding legal requirements and procedural advice, in the case of outright closure of a church.

[*Please note that separate guidance notes and action point documents are available in the case of union of two or more congregations.]*

### Legal Requirements in the case of Local Church Closure

* Church Meeting should resolve formally to close. (Synod will also make formal resolutions, acknowledging this.)
* The funds and other property of a local church are held in trust for the purposes of the United Reformed Church and should not be dispersed indiscriminately. Disposal of church buildings and manses are subject to a special procedure under the United Reformed Church Acts, whereby the decision-making involves the trustee and Synod, as well as the local church.
* The Registrar of Births Marriages and Deaths needs to be informed. The church building may no longer be a place of public worship and the church will no longer conduct marriages. The Registrar will give instructions~~.~~

### Procedural Advice in the case of Local Church Closure

* Church should consult with the Synod Pastoral Committee about its future. (It can be helpful for someone from outside to explore options with the congregation. Synod has as one of its functions, the power to amalgamate or group churches. Where possible, Synod will seek to make provision for worship and pastoral care for members.)
* A closing service can provide an opportunity to celebrate the life and witness of the congregation and come to terms with its closure.
* Authority should be given to the officers of the Church and/or Synod to continue to act on its behalf after dissolution of the congregation: to look after and insure the buildings until they are sold or taken over by the wider Church; to settle all outstanding debts and gather in all the assets of the Church, to be disposed of as agreed; and to prepare final accounts.
* Church Meeting may, if it wishes, resolve that any gifts or bequests to the closing church not yet received should be paid to a named local church, provided that the terms of the gift allow that. Otherwise, the gift or bequest will be received by Synod.
* Normally, Synod would be expected to oversee and approve disposal of funds and premises. Small donations of money and goods may be made from general funds to other organisations which the church has supported as part of its witness, mission and outreach, such as religious or charitable organisations. Churches should seek advice from the relevant committee of Synod regarding larger donations/disposals, and may make known their wishes, understanding that the Synod may in some cases finds that it cannot agree.
* Normally, arrangements should be made to have gas, water and electrical supplies turned off (and telephones disconnected, where applicable), and final bills requested.
* Valuable items should be stored securely, preferably off site, until they are disposed of.
* Consideration should be given to deposit of registers and historical records with the County Record Office.
* Consideration may also be given to creating a brief photographic record of the church (both the buildings and the people), and possibly a brief historical account, if there are none in existence.
* If the church had a graveyard, up-to-date burial records should be sent to the Synod Office, together with details of anyone with rights to be buried there, if known.

Church Secretaries should note that there are other matters to attend to apart from financial and property issues, such as arranging for certificates of transfer for those members who wish to join other churches. For further information and assistance, please contact your Area Pastoral Officer, Convenor of Pastoral Support Committee or Trust Officer at the Synod Office. The issues identified above are also listed in the Action Points document detailed below.

### Resolution on Closure of a Local Congregation of the United Reformed Church

The suitable wording of a church meeting resolution to close is set out in the document:

**ACTION POINTS FOR CHURCHES WHO ARE CLOSING (i.e. ceasing to meet for public worship) – DEALING WITH CHURCH PREMISES AND FINANCES**

Further actions also mentioned in the above Action Points document include the following:

* *arranging for disconnection of gas, water, electrical and telephonic services as appropriate,*
* *gathering in all assets and sums owing to the church, settling all outstanding debts, disposing of those assets as instructed by this minute, and preparing final accounts,*
* *liaising with the Superintendent Registrar regarding removal of registration as a place of public worship and marriages, and depositing registers*
* *depositing items of historical interest with the County Record Office,*
* *doing all other things as may prove necessary.*

*Church Meeting can resolve to:*

* *dispose of moveable property in the following way: [donations, rubbish].*
* *make small donations from its unrestricted funds as follows: [donations].*

Please do make reference to the accompanying document – Action Points for Churches who are Closing, which includes template resolutions and a vacating property check list.