

St Albans Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee

Church Buildings

Introduction

This document is designed to help deaneries think about the use of church buildings for mission and to give an idea of the flexibility there is to simplify administrative structures.

We have around 400 church buildings in the Diocese. These include

- Consecrated parish churches and Chapels of Ease, unconsecrated Parish Centres of Worship and Licensed Places of Worship and Shared Churches (see below for definitions):
- Mediaeval, Victorian and 20th century churches
- Churches in New Towns, in urban areas, in villages and in countryside

All our churches share a common purpose of being *local centres of worship and mission*.

As part of the deanery MAP process, please consider: 1) How each church building can be used more widely for mission and outreach; 2) Whether there are parish churches, especially those with low usage, for which future options could helpfully be considered.

1. Use of churches for worship, mission and outreach

Deaneries should encourage every parish to think about how their church buildings can be the centre of their community – both for worship and community life. The deanery may be able to offer support, identify common needs, host training and share good practice amongst parishes about the use of their church buildings. Please see 1.5 below for useful websites to look at and share.

1.1 Churches are primarily for worship, including regular services and pastoral offices such as weddings and funerals. The use of churches for worship and mission should mean the church building is at the centre of its community and this can include all sorts of activities, from Café Church and Messy Mass to concerts and art exhibitions. Parishes may be exploring the possibilities as part of their parish MAP planning, e.g.:

- Exploring ideas for liturgy
- Developing their Ministry of Welcome
- Reviewing the pattern of services in one parish or across a multi-parish benefice
- Enabling the church building to be open outside the times of services
- Improving accessibility and facilities
- Reordering

[Help and advice are available from diocesan organisations including the Equipping God's People programme, Liturgical Committee, DAC and Open Churches Group.]

1.2 If churches are working with their local communities, they may identify many needs which can be accommodated within the church building. Many additional uses can be accommodated in a church with authorisation (either a licence or a lease) by faculty, provided the main use of the church is still for worship. Examples include a local shop, post office or library; a WiFi broadband booster; charity office use; pre-school; etc. *[Contact the DAC team for advice in the first instance.]*

1.3 Regular use of a church for worship by another Christian denomination is normally recognised by a Sharing Agreement made under the Sharing of Church Buildings Act. Note that use by another faith group for worship is not permitted. *[The Diocesan Registrar can advise in individual cases.]*

1.4 A church site might include a hall and other land with potential for greater use, e.g. for community allotments; night shelter; social housing; pre-school; commercial offices; meeting space for community groups. Developing such ideas may need a multi-disciplinary approach and the deanery can help by providing a forum for initial exploration.

1.5 **Resources.** There are excellent case studies and other resources available on the following websites:

- The Church Buildings Council's *Open and Sustainable* initiative: <http://www.churchcare.co.uk/churches/open-sustainable>
- The *Churches Visitor and Tourism Association*: <http://cvta.org.uk/>
- The information website *Church Building Project – Making church buildings missional*: <http://www.churchbuildingprojects.co.uk/>

2. Options for parish churches

Deaneries should identify any parishes facing particular challenges e.g. small congregation; lack of volunteers; low use of the church building; lack of resources. There is a range of options for such parishes and the deanery provides a forum for initial discussion, in liaison with the Bishop and Archdeacon.

2.1 The basic model for parish churches, as set out in the Canons, is that there should be a service every Sunday. Until recently the requirement was for a Communion service at each parish church every Sunday, but this is being amended to require a Communion service in every *benefice* (which may include several parishes and churches) every Sunday.

- The diocesan aim is that each parish church should have a service every Sunday at a regular time.
- In the case of a church with a small worshipping community, the Bishop can dispense with the requirement for a service every Sunday. It might be appropriate for there to be a service once a fortnight or once a month; in the summer months only; or on a weekday. Lay Leaders of Worship may be worth considering for some parishes to enable greater provision of worship.

2.2 Each **parish church** is required to have two churchwardens and each parish is required to have a PCC. Where parishes struggle to find volunteers or feel overburdened by meetings, there are some options to explore, which are covered in the DMPC guidance on **Working in a Multi-Parish Benefice**. However, one of the options relevant to this paper on church buildings is that one or more of the parish churches in a united parish could be re-designated as a *Chapel of Ease*. It would not need to have separate churchwardens and would be cared for by the churchwardens and PCC of the whole parish. The church is not generally expected to have a service every week, but can still be used for weddings and funerals as well as regular or less-frequent services.

2.3 If a church has a very small worshipping community and low usage and the parish struggles to maintain the building, some of the following options may be explored:

- A basic level of insurance and maintenance paid by the PCC, with occasional services in the church [*This model is sometimes known as a **Festival Church** used mainly for festivals.*]The church remains open and “in use”, so is eligible for grants for places of worship.
- Wider use of the church building by licence or lease, whilst retaining part of the church for worship. [*e.g. Hexton church has been adapted so that the nave is available for a pre-school and community use, whilst the chancel remains available for worship. The whole building is used for occasional larger services.*]
- Designating the church a Chapel of Ease within a larger parish with a parish church or churches (see 2.2 above). The Chapel of Ease would not need to have separate churchwardens and would be cared for by the churchwardens and PCC of the whole parish. It might have only a basic level of insurance and maintenance, as above.
- Closure of the church building for public worship. This is done only on grounds of the lack of pastoral need and requires a *Pastoral (Church Building) Scheme* and a second Scheme to transfer the building to an agreed new use, which may be:
 - Vesting in the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) or another preservation body (normally only for very highly listed buildings with particular architectural or other importance).
 - *The CCT maintains a number of closed church buildings for visitors and occasional services.*
 - Use by another Christian denomination for worship.

- A new use, which may be commercial, community or residential.
- In the last resort, demolition.

Some definitions

Parish Churches are the most common category of church building. Each ecclesiastical parish should normally have a Parish Church.

- A parish church is normally required by Canon to have a service every Sunday.
- In cases where the main church in a parish is a modern, dual-purpose building or a shared building with other denominations, it may be an unconsecrated *Parish Centre of Worship* instead.
- A parish may have more than one Parish Church and each will have churchwardens, although they are all wardens of the whole parish.
- A parish may have a Parish Church and a consecrated Chapel of Ease or a licensed place of worship.
- The site of the church and churchyard is normally vested in the incumbent of the benefice.
- Any change to the status of a parish church must be authorised by a Pastoral Scheme.
- Very large parish churches with a civic or other extended role may be designated as a *Major Church*, in order to recognise and support its complex needs and opportunities. There is a Greater Churches Network and there are resources for Major Churches on the Churchcare website.

Chapels of Ease are also consecrated churches, often originally serving a part of a parish a long way from the parish church.

- A chapel of ease does not have separate churchwardens and is not required to have a service every week.
- It is a church in use and is maintained by the PCC.
- It can be used for weddings.
- The site of the church and churchyard is normally vested in the incumbent of the benefice.
- Any change to the status of the chapel of ease must be authorised by a Pastoral Scheme.

Licensed Places of Worship are unconsecrated buildings licensed by the Bishop for public worship.

- A Licensed Place of Worship is a church in use and is maintained by the PCC.
- The site is normally vested in the Diocesan Board of Finance in trust for the PCC as a charitable trust property.
- The church is not required to have a service every week or separate churchwardens.
- It may or may not be licensed for marriages or be brought within faculty jurisdiction.

Closed Churches are consecrated churches which have been formally closed for public worship following wide consultation leading to the making of a Pastoral Scheme. They are then the subject of a further Scheme providing for them to be transferred for a new use or into the permanent care of a body such as the Churches Conservation Trust.

An example

A group of villages under the care of one incumbent has 5 consecrated places of worship. Options include:

- One benefice with 5 separate parishes, each with a PCC, and 5 Parish Churches.
- One benefice with one or more parish(es).
 - Within the parish (or each parish), there is 1 PCC but each village has a sub-committee dealing with local matters, including opening the church for services and ensuring regular maintenance is carried out.
 - Each church is a Parish Church with its own churchwardens; OR
 - Some churches are Parish Churches. Churches in very small communities are Chapels of Ease with an appropriate pattern of services (e.g. more in the summer months; regular service on a weekday rather than Sunday; regular use for school services...)
 - One church is developed for community use by providing disabled access, toilet, kitchenette and separately-heated meeting space.