Archival Guidelines for the Closure of a Church Building

From time to time a church building comes to the end of its life as a place of worship. Because it has been a place of significance for a Christian community over the years, it is important that the history and stories of that place be preserved. It is also important to farewell the building with celebration for its life and ministry, and to do this with sensitivity and respect. There will be pastoral and practical issues related to the furnishings, memorials and historical items contained in a building that is to be closed. The following guidelines are offered to Presbyteries and congregations as they work through these issues.

1. Create a photographic record of the church, associated buildings, and significant memorabilia. For example:-
   a) Exterior photographs of the church on the site from representative perspectives.
   b) Exterior photographs of all associated buildings (if significant in the life of the congregation).
   c) Interior photographs of church and associated buildings.
   d) Individual photographs of stained glass windows, pulpit, communion table, font, pipe organs, harmoniums, and other significant furniture.
   e) Individual photographs of small items (e.g. trowels, plaques, small trophies, communion trays and chalices, lectern/pulpit Bible (in situ), hymnbooks used, and similar items - only if inscribed/engraved as memorial gifts).
   f) All memorial plaques and tablets.

   NB: Transcribe the text of all memorials unless these are clearly legible on the relevant photograph.

2. Gather all relevant archival material
   a) Refer to the attached guide for details of appropriate material to be sent to the Synod Archives.
   b) Collect all news items about the planned closure, including those in local papers.
   c) Encourage members to contribute their own photographs (only if identified for time, place and people).
   d) Encourage church members to write down their memories and/or significant associations with the church.

Where possible, it is suggested that a Service of Closure be held. (Useful liturgical resources for this could be obtained from various Presbytery offices or alternatively a version of this document from the United Church of Canada http://www.united-church.ca/files/planning/theme/worship_closure.pdf or this from the Evangelical Lutheran Church http://www.liturgybytlw.com/OccChs/ChClosing.html could be used). Include a copy of the Order of Service for the final service in the building among the documents sent to the Synod Archives.

3. Send the gathered archival material to the Synod Archives. Information regarding how to appropriately prepare this material for archiving is included in the attached guide.

4. Appropriately arrange for the disposition of physical items. (Please note that in some states the Archives do not have the facilities to store memorabilia due to restrictions in available space. Check with the relevant Archives and if they are unable to accept any of the following items please follow the procedure below).
   a) War memorials, Honour Rolls, etc, after being photographed and transcribed as in (1) above should be offered to an appropriate ex-service organisation or local government council. If such organisations are unable to accept these materials they should be disposed of having regard for that organisation's views.
   b) Other memorials, furniture, and inscribed gifts require special consideration as such items and their disposition may be sensitive matters for the families concerned. Wherever practicable enquire within the congregation as to any knowledge of the family or their descendants' whereabouts and consult with relatives prior to disposing of any item.
   c) Inscribed pulpit and memorial Bibles should be returned to family members wherever practicable as set out in (4.b) above. The inscriptions on these items should be photographed and transcribed or photocopied as set out in (1) above and the images and transcriptions sent to the Archives.
   d) Hymn books and choir music should be offered to other local congregations. If not required by any other congregation these can be disposed of.

   NB: In all cases please make a list of all items and clearly identify the action taken for each item detailing how, when and where such an item was disposed of. Send this list to the Archives with other material as to assist in providing a pastorally sensitive response to any future enquiries about these items.

5. Finally, if you have any queries or concerns, consult the Synod Archives, who will gladly assist in any way possible.