***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 Leadership Team. The Circuit Meeting shall submit any such recommendation to the district committee before any steps are taken to carry the intention into effect.*

**Church:** Bolton Methodist Church

**Circuit:** Pocklington and Market Weighton (29/14)

**1. What is the present membership?** 7

**2. What is the number on the community roll?**  7 i.e. only members

**3.  What is the average adult attendance at worship?**  5 (often including visitors)

**4. What other activities take place on the premises?**

 There is currently a fortnightly coffee morning and a monthly arts and craft group meeting on the premises.

**5. Provide a financial overview – e.g. income vs expenditure.**

Income for the year 20/21 £9,142

Expenses for the year 20/21 £12,057

Total Funds as at 31/8/21 £23,688.

The church is financially viable thanks to a lot of hard work, fundraising and generous giving however the challenges facing the church relate to other areas of its life including fulfilling roles and the numbers attending worship.

**6. If a new building is not to be provided, what provision will be made for the present congregation and other activities?**

The Methodist Church in Bolton has been struggling for many years. Bolton is a very small village and much of its community life is in neighbouring Fangfoss approximately one mile away. Ecumenical working has been explored previously but not pursued. There is a Church of England presence (St. Martin’s) in Fangfoss but no Methodist church. There is no other community building in Bolton but opportunities for wider use by the community have previously been offered but not pursued.

Of the present membership of seven one member is moving away due to work commitments, two other members can only worship with us occasionally and one member has not worshipped with us for approximately one year. As this decision to seek permission to cease worship was only made on 13th April 2022 no pastoral conversations have taken place although the nearest Methodist Church is in Pocklington and two of the members live there. We have in the last year or so explored becoming a class of another church and clustering with other small congregations both options were not seen to be viable and the congregation expressed the view they wished to cease worship after many years of mission and presence in the village. The concerns leading to this decision relate to the small and reducing number attending worship and a desire by the church not to make a call on the preaching resources of the circuit, which are stretched when there may be very few people able to attend worship. This says much for the members of the church and their thoughtfulness and stewardship. There is also an increased burden on a few to fulfil the roles required within a church which have increased over the years.

**7.   What impact will the closure have on the local community?**

There will be little impact on the local community within the village but others who support the coffee morning and the arts and craft group from outside the village will miss the fellowship. We will try to link people to opportunities elsewhere in the circuit.

**8.    What other Methodist Churches and Sunday Schools are there in the neighbourhood and what are their distance from the property to be sold?**

Pocklington Methodist Church is under three miles away and five members who are active have transport. There is one elderly frail member who would require assistance to worship elsewhere and one who is leaving the area.

**9.    What initiatives have the membership tried, if any, to encourage the residents of the community to become part of the worshipping family?**

This is a very small village with a busy road through it, which means that the number of people living in the village who could come to worship is limited. The church has put on numerous events over the last years including one year with an event each month all well publicised. Attendance has been mixed and often more support from elsewhere in the circuit than the village community. We have also put on special services of different styles and festival services to encourage attendance but sadly no success.

 We have looked at the possibility of Circuit involvement as part of the circuit strategy but this village is not one of our priority areas for mission and would direct in the future direct new Christians in the village looking for a Methodist Church have tended to come to Pocklington Methodist Church.

**10.   Does the membership consider that their mission is complete from this building and why?**

The membership does consider its mission complete and took the difficult decision at its Church Council on 13th April 2022 to seek permission to cease worship. This is a decision supported by the Circuit Leadership Team given the situation the church finds itself in. This will go to Circuit Meeting on 23rd April 2022 for agreement, which is expected.

**11. Who will offer Christian worship, mission and on-going pastoral care of the community?**

There is an active Anglican Church (St. Martin’s) in the neighbouring village of Fangfoss which has links with the C of E school. Whilst, this may mean that the only community building in the village closes the use by the community has been very limited, as has involvement with church life. The minister based in Pocklington will still be available as before for specific pastoral care as needed.

**12.  What arrangements have been made for on-going pastoral care in the community?**

Transfer of membership and pastoral care for the church community is just commencing as they discern where they wish to worship but it is likely transfer will be to Pocklington Methodist Church for some of the members. One member has already indicated their preference to worship in the Anglican Church prior to this decision and another is leaving the area because of work commitments. Wider pastoral care within the village will be available as at present from the minister based at Pocklington.

**13.Have discussions taken place with other denominations in order to maintain a Christian presence in the locality and what was the outcome?**

No these will need to take place as the decision was only made to request cessation of worship on 13th April 2022. The Vicar who was on long-term sickness absence retired on 31st March 2022 and the closest church St. Martin’s is in interregnum.

**14.   What is to happen to the building? If it is to be sold, how will the proceeds of the sale be used to promote an effective presence in the community the Church once served?**

It is expected that the Circuit will sell the building and that proceeds will help to sustain its presence and put into place its circuit strategy for mission. We are currently exploring and reviewing our strategy and way forward following the impact of the pandemic on our local churches. Including addressing governance challenges to free people for mission. We would encourage people from the community to attend Pocklington Methodist Church, which is one of our mission centres and engages with community of all ages.

**15.    Has the District Archivist been consulted regarding records and artefacts and records that might need to be conserved?**

Not yet but we will do so and relevant documents will be archived at the Treasure House Beverley. Transfer to archives would therefore be straightforward.

**Additional Information**

This decision to request cessation of worship has not been taken lightly by the church who have thoughtfully addressed the challenges they face. They are seeking to be good and responsible stewards and recognising the challenges facing not only themselves but the circuit. The Circuit Leadership Team met prior to the Church Council when informed that this was to be discussed and does not see financially supporting the ongoing work as either good stewardship or fitting with the circuit strategy priorities. It is therefore supporting the decision of the local church to cease worship.

This decision has not been taken lightly by any of the parties. Whilst Circuit Leadership Team support this course of action Circuit Meeting has not yet met and our meeting has been deferred until 23rd April for other reasons.

**District Leadership Team are therefore asked to give permission for the cessation of worship subject to such agreement by the Pocklington and Market Weighton Methodist Circuit Meeting on 23rd April 2022 so that this request can be approved by Representative Synod in May 2022.**