

CLOSING ACTIVITY

Even if congregational members are ready to close the church and give the resources toward a new, missional vision, there's still concern about what will happen to the people of the congregation. Where will these congregational members worship now? What happens to their membership? The goal of this activity is to help them explore options for where they could find a new church home.

Time needed for activity

Depending on the way you do this activity, it could take two hours (minimum) or several days

Group size

Every active member of the congregation should be invited to participate

Steps for Activity

There's no one "right" way to do this, but here are some options you may want to consider:

1. Host a lunch or a dinner at the church. Invite the pastors of local churches to come and hold a forum for the congregation. A facilitator should prepare a set of questions ahead of time to ask each visiting pastor about their church, and should ask the same questions of each pastor.
2. Schedule a bus trip to visit local congregations on a weekday or Saturday. Arrange a short tour of each building and speak with each pastor about their church.
3. Take a couple of Sundays (maybe one a month) to worship as a group at another church together. Do this before your final worship date. Meet for coffee after these services to share your experience.

Frequently Asked Questions When a Church Is Closing

Question: What is the role of the classis?

Answer: As noted in Church Order Supplement, Article 38-d (pp. 70-72), "When a council and congregation decide to disband (or revert to unorganized status), the approval of classis is required. If any distribution of assets is required, the congregation and council shall consult with classis."

It's consistent with this official role of classis that the leaders of the disbanding congregation also would request the counsel and assistance of classis regarding the transfer of memberships and the pastoral care of the members during this period of transition.

If a congregation reverts to unorganized status, it would come under the care of a neighboring council designated by classis (see Article 38-d).

Question: What will happen to my membership? Where will my "papers" be held?

Answer: When a church disbands, care needs to be given to transferring memberships to a neighboring church or churches. The general pattern is for the disbanding congregation to obtain agreement from a neighboring CRC council to receive their memberships, with the understanding that individuals may choose to have their membership transferred to another local CRC congregation of their choice.

Question: Who will provide pastoral care for me—a member of the church that's closing?

Answer: The disbanding congregation may be able to provide pastoral care and/or request the assistance of classis for a transitional period with the understanding that as soon as membership transfers are effected, pastoral care will be provided by the receiving church(es).

Facilitator's Questions

(to be asked throughout this activity)

1. What are you most afraid of as you enter this process of closing your church?
2. What feels familiar to you as you learn about other churches?
3. What's most important to you as you search for a new community of faith to be a part of?
4. Is there a date by which you'd like to have made your decision about where you'll settle?
5. How will you know, after moving your membership to your new church, that you've made the right decision?
6. Do you have a sense for what God's calling you to do and to be in your next congregation?
7. What other options can you consider?