

Quick Guide...

Removing or Altering Pews

Prepared by the Committee on Church Art and Architecture

There are many reasons for the requests for the removal of pews, ranging from: Lack of space due to the current layout of the Church, a need for better access or perhaps the need for a more flexible space. CARTA are well versed in dealing with the removal of pews and will consider cases made for removal in whole or in part.

Some sanctuaries lend themselves to change being made easily by taking away pews whereas others may not. It is important to consider the following as examples of what has to be planned into the proposal:

- Will the removal of pews affect the floor surface? Unsightly holes may be left, or at worst, the floor may need replacement. Will the floor covering need replacement?
- Does the building structure or other fittings rely for support on the pews?
- Are heating systems affected by pews? Pews may have heating pipes fixed to their underside.
- Are the pews built into wainscoting at the walls? (Wall panelling that was traditionally wood to decorate and insulate walls.)
- Are the pews linked historically to the building? This can be when the pews have commemorative links or have been gifted under conditions.
- If the floor is sloped, will the slope adversely affect any new use of the freed space?
- Will there be a clash between any pews left in place and new chairs?
- If removing part of pews, how will the ends be finished?

- Is the removal of pews going to have a huge impact on the aesthetics and value of the interior?
- Sometimes pews form part of the historic decorative scheme of a listed church, in which case there needs to be a compelling case for removing them, particularly pews that predate 1840, pews that are curved, or have carved ends or other details that reflect the internal architecture of the church.

Replacement Chairs

The selection of replacement chairs should be given some careful thought. When choosing the chairs that will suit your needs best, the following should be considered:

- Are they moveable and, if to be stored, stackable? Do you have adequate space to store them?
- Do they link physically in order to stay in place, but have flexibility in this to allow choice of placement?
- Are they comfortable for all?
- Do they need to have storage for books and other items (below the seat, between the seats or on the back of the seats)?
- Have arms for around 50% of the seats.
- Are they acceptable for dementia users? Colour and texture is important. For more info see the Quick guide on Dementia Friendly Church (www.resourcingmission.org.uk/dementia-friendly-church-buildings).
- Are they affordable and durable?

CARTA can advise on this and will expect to be given details of seating as part of its process.

Reusing or offloading your pews

The pews material may be used as part of other alterations or modifications in your building. This can be a good way of expressing attachment to the heritage of the original pews. Even though they may be redundant to you, pews could still be desirable or valuable to someone else. It is worth contacting the CARTA to see if they can be re-used and if not advice given on where to advertise them for sale.

Whom to Contact

Anyone wishing to contact the Committee should complete an enquiry form which can be found on the Resourcing Mission website (www.resourcingmission.org.uk/resources/carta) and email it to: gentrustees@churchofscotland.org.uk. Alternatively, you can telephone 0131 225 5722 and ask to speak to someone in the CARTA office.

CARTA Quick Guides

Other Quick Guides include advice on audio visual schemes, dementia friendly church buildings, access for all, stained glass and lighting. These can be accessed on the Resourcing Mission website (www.resourcingmission.org.uk/resources/quick-guides).

About the Authors

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