



**Mothers' Union Diocese of Peterborough
Registered Charity No. 1065047**

Abeyance or Closure – What's the Difference?

Branches can close for many and varied reasons.

It can be that all the members are getting a little bit older and no one quite wants to take responsibility any more for running a Branch. It may be your church has gone into interregnum, and you feel you can't operate effectively without your Vicar's support. It may be your bank account has been closed by the bank, and it all seems to be too much hassle to work out an alternative. Or it can be the Branch Leader moves away, or sadly, dies.

There are options available:

Run by Committee - This can be a few of your members, making up a committee. Share out running a meeting between you, assign one person to read a Bible passage, assign one person to read the prayers. Someone can be responsible to booking a speaker and ensuring the speaker knows all the details of; where the meeting is, at what time and what day, and also what is expected of them. Another can be responsible for the refreshments, and you can all take it in turns and put your own spin on proceedings. Sometimes a change is all it needs to reinvigorate a Branch.

Amalgamate with another local Branch – obviously both Branches have to be willing to make this work. You can rebrand your name, you can meet in alternate venues if that works best for you. Have a discussion first within your Branch and then approach your Incumbent and gauge their view. If the next local Branch is in the same Benefice, then it should not present much of a problem but if it's in another Incumbent's patch, make you sure consult with them as well as the proposed Branch you are merging with. All decisions need to be friendly and workable.

Become an Internet Branch – If all your members have access to the internet and perhaps are not so mobile, consider moving your Branch online. You can meet up on Zoom or Teams, and see each other and hold your meeting that way. The only drawback is you have to provide your own tea and cake!

If these solutions really seem to be a step too far though, you can either decide as a Branch and with your Incumbent's consent to go either into abeyance or close the Branch.

Abeyance is the preferred option, as this gives the opportunity to re-open the Branch at a later date, for example a previous MU member arrives in the Parish and wants to reopen your Branch, or a new Vicar arrives who is really keen to work with a Mothers' Union branch, because he / she knows what a support they can be to their ministry.

Following discussions with your Incumbent, your Mothers' Union area Vice President and Mothers' Union Deanery Leader, if you still choose to go into abeyance, this is the procedure:

Close your bank account and send a cheque to the Diocesan Treasurer (currently Mrs Sylvia Rowley), the Treasurer will then put the funds aside should your branch ever re-open, You could of course just decide to donate the funds you have to the Diocesan Fund, or AFIA or for Prison Work, where it will be put to good use supporting projects within our diocese. If you go into abeyance, your Mothers' Union banner may stay in your church.

However, if you choose closure, then that is a final decision, and then it is a lengthy process to re-make a Branch in that Parish in the future. Going into abeyance is always the preferable option.

So if your Branch ceases to meet and you wonder if that is the end of your time as a Mothers' Union member – then the good news is – IT ISN'T.

You can become a Diocesan Member.

Diocesan Members are members of the Mothers' Union who don't have a local Branch meeting of their own, but once their annual subscription is paid, they can access all areas! Diocesan Members are invited to other local Branch meetings, to Deanery meetings as well as all the Diocesan meetings. They will receive all the information that Branch members receive, all the Bulletins, the magazines (Communicate and Connected), and the Prayer Diary.

Diocesan Members are looked after by two Diocesan Member Coordinators.

We have one for each Archdeaconry, so Oakham is covered by Mrs Kay Short and Northampton is covered by Mrs. Barbara Haynes. Both are passionate about keeping you in touch with what is going on. They are regularly in touch with their members by sending cards, invitations and news.

All for the same fee you pay as a Branch Member – what a bargain!

So if this situation arises in your Branch do pray about it first, do talk to your Vicar, do discuss it thoroughly in your Branch, it's a big decision to make - many of our Branches are over 100 years old. A century of faith in action backed up by prayer and people willing to step out and be God's hands and feet in their communities. It's a wonderful tradition and sad when it goes.

But going into abeyance will always offer the hope that one day in the future, a new Branch will spring up, and start again seeing needs and solving them.

In God's timing all things come to pass, even a resurgence of Mothers' Union Branches in Peterborough Diocese.

If you have any questions or queries, please do not hesitate to contact me. If I don't know the answer, I will find out for you.

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