

Congregation told church is to close

The message to the congregation at St Michael's Parish Church is that their church is to "be disposed of".

The Kirk on Slateford Road serves the Gorgie and Slateford community and [celebrated its 140 years](#) in December, but the Session Clerk, Douglas Bannatyne, advised that it is to be put up for sale by the end of 2026.

The announcement was made by Mr Bannatyne during Sunday's service followed by words and a blessing by Reverend Andrea Price, who was visibly moved while sharing the news to her congregation.

In his announcement, seeking to balance the news of the closure with hopes for the future, the session clerk said: "Following the visit to all kirk sessions from the deployment team, they prepared a report and presented it to the full deployment committee of the Presbytery who then considered and then decided to uphold the recommendation of the general trustees which proposed the disposal of St Michael's.

"The theme of last week's general assembly was 'Buiding Together' and we must remember, as individuals, we are and we make St Michael's Parish Church, and together we must hold each other in prayer and journey together, moving forward together in faith."

“Protest or accept” the decision

The Presbytery planning committee ruled that the merged congregation would bring together those from St Michael's, Barclay Viewforth, Craiglockhart and Polwarth churches in three buildings with the latter three being retained, and St Michael's the only one in the amalgamated congregation set to close.

Reverend Price told the congregation that St Michael's will now decide internally in their next session meeting whether to “protest or accept” the decision “or both”.

She said: “I am sorry that we have not managed over my time here to raise more people, and more younger people, to be part of St Michael's but this is the case in most churches these days.

“Looking at the future realistically, there are just not enough young people committing to church life to keep all congregations and all buildings going. We've run out of sufficient ministers, and now we are running out of people, younger people.”

Speaking to The Edinburgh Reporter in December, St Michael's musical director, Stuart Montgomery, who has been in post for just under 32 years, commented on declining congregation numbers, and said: “It wouldn't be happening if more people came – it's as simple as that. It's the end of something. There are people in this church who've been here for 60 to 70 years.”

“Painful for us”

Helen O'Brien, 86, took her vows in the church in 1960 and has been a member of the community ever since. She also told The Edinburgh Reporter last year how much she appreciated her church life. She said: “It's such a community. It's great

because I like talking to folk – I just love coming.

“I can’t bear the thought of not coming here.”

The Church of Scotland is undergoing a four-year review of its assets. Owning the most listed buildings in Scotland, the Church of Scotland currently has 1,250 congregations in 43 Presbyteries in Scotland and 1 in England, and owns around 3,000 churches and halls, 800 manses, and 500 Glebes amounting to 12,458 acres.

St Michael’s is to be put up for sale by the end of 2026, but it is still too early to speculate on the future of the building on Slateford Road.



St Michael’s – the future of the building unclear but closure as church set for end 2026. Credit: Jamie Smith-Maillet

In 2021, [Bruntsfield St Oswald’s](#) was bought in 2021 in a community asset transfer to create a community space with wraparound childcare facilities, and the purchase was funded by numerous grants.

But for the parish's congregation, looking to the options for the future, Reverend Price said: "The question for us is what to do next. Fight or flight? Given that people do not need or want as many active churches in their neighbourhood that they did in the past, it is time for us to look forward in faith. Maybe pack up our faith things, pull up our faith tent, so to speak, and move into the union although that will be very painful for us".

The road ahead

During the coming months up to 2026 when the building is set to close, Reverend Price called for the congregation to remain committed to the church, saying: "We must continue to worship here. [...] We have to go forward in faith. Please support us, your elders, your session, as best you can.

"Stay us and help us on the road ahead."

A spokesman for the Church of Scotland said: "The Presbytery of Edinburgh and West Lothian mission plan proposes that Barclay Viewforth, Craiglockhart, Polwarth and St Michaels' congregations merge as a single parish and will be served by a team ministry of two full-time Ministers of Word and Sacrament and one Ordained Local Minister.

"These four congregations already work well together to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and will move towards a union as soon as practical, journeying forward together in faith and fulfilling God's commandment to love your neighbour as yourself.

"The Polwarth and St Michael's buildings are very close to each other geographically with the former being a flexible space on the canalside, with a part-owned boat which is well used for mission outreach activities.

"After much prayerful consideration and extensive

consultation, the Presbytery's deployment committee supported a recommendation from the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland to release the St Michael's building by December 2026.

"The deployment committee will present this proposal to a full meeting of Presbytery on 18 June for its consideration.

"Discussions will continue in the years ahead about the future long-term status of the other three buildings as we discern God's will for His Church."

Cllr Christopher Cowdy said: "I was saddened to hear the news that St Michael's is to close. Although I have not attended the church, I was in touch with Reverend Price during the council elections campaign, and she was very welcoming. I have only heard good things about the church from residents and I am sure the congregation will be welcomed in neighbouring Polwarth, Barclay, and Craiglockhart churches."

