

## **A brief note on the disposition of religious objects**

David Bracken, July 2024

On the closure of a religious house, serious consideration should be given to the future of religious objects or liturgical items in the care of the community to avoid potential losses to the patrimony of the congregation and the wider church; and to avoid items being used for profane purposes, among other concerns.

1. As a first step an inventory of such items should be created, including a photograph and brief description of the item, its provenance and ownership. The inventory itself is an important record of the religious material culture of that community.
2. The inventory should be assessed to determine the artistic, historic/cultural, and monetary value of each of the objects and a decision made as to their future.
3. On occasion there can be difficulty in distinguishing what is 'movable property' and what is part of the building. The Local Authority conservation officer should be consulted before any fixed items e.g. altarpieces etc. are removed.
4. It may be determined that some significant items should be retained by the community and deposited in the congregational archive or museum.
5. For religious items that are not of significant historic, cultural, or artistic value, it is desirable, that they be re-used in an ecclesial context:
  - (i) Re-use in another house of the congregation or a parish church for example.
  - (ii) Re-use in the developing churches of the Global South. Other AMRI members may be able to assist in identifying local churches in search of religious/liturgical furnishings.
6. Where it is not practicable to re-use the items, they may have to be sold or in limited cases destroyed e.g. where an item is damaged beyond repair.
7. However, particular attention should be given to the future of sacred vessels and relics, and care taken to ensure that these are not sold.
8. A record of the destination of all the objects should be retained and deposited in the archives of the community.

For a detailed discussion of the issues involved see, Guidelines on Ways of Dealing with Religious Objects (c.2011), available at:

[https://www.catharijneconvent.nl/documents/56/Guidelines\\_dealing\\_with\\_religious\\_objects\\_\\_oyww2E0.pdf](https://www.catharijneconvent.nl/documents/56/Guidelines_dealing_with_religious_objects__oyww2E0.pdf)

