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Re-ordering of Churches

The Liturgical revival of the past fifty years has made us think seriously about worship; we no longer think about worship in terms of the incumbent "reading the service" - yet we still tend to treat the church building as if changes in liturgy hadn't taken place, or as a functional piece of 'plant' with no thought of what the building itself is 'saying'

So sometimes there is a conflict between what the building proclaims by its ordering and furnishings, and what the worshipping community wishes to express in the offering of worship.

In order to try to stop discussion becoming polarised between 'conservation' and 'worshipping needs', between individuals' likes and dislikes, the parish will need to undertake a careful programme of discussion of first principles before reaching decisions. This document suggests some of the issues which need to be addressed; there is a certain logic to the order suggested, but this will not be appropriate in every case.

What does your church say now?

- 1 About its history?
- 2 About the reasons for which it was built?
- 3 About the reasons for alterations down the years?
- 4 About its purpose today - how are you currently using it?

What are the significant features of the building?

- 1 **What are the general characteristics of the building?** large, small, cold, airy, dark, restful, homely, cluttered, spacious, empty, tidy...? what are the shapes of the rooms? Do they strongly impose certain patterns of usage? Can you see what is going on? How do you think it feels to be a stranger coming to worship here for the first time?

- 2 **Furniture and fittings.** Do they help your worship today? or hinder it? Which will need to be retained for historical or aesthetic reasons, and which might be used elsewhere or discarded?
- 3 **Lighting.** Are the lights in the right place? Can they be used to highlight a particular part of the building? Can the units be controlled flexibly? What atmosphere do they create?
- 4 **Acoustics.** Can you hear clearly? For the spoken word? For music?
- 5 **Notice boards.** How frequently are they brought up to date? What is their visual impact?

How does the worshipping community express its faith today?

- 1 Has the PCC discussed what the Church of God is for?
- 2 Has the PCC considered ways in which 'what the Church of God is' can be proclaimed in worship?
- 3 Has the PCC considered the variety of forms of worship now authorised in the Church of England? not only the Book of Common Prayer and the Alternative Service Book, but other authorised materials from 'Patterns of Worship', Lent, Holy Week and Easter', 'The Promise of his Glory'?
- 4 What needs to happen so that the worship may express more fully what the Church believes about God and his relationship to the Christian Community and the world?

For what purposes is the church to be used?

(Is it to be kept open?)

Liturgical - Sunday worship, weekday worship, the pastoral offices of marriages and funerals, special events, personal prayer

Educational - workshops, lectures, school visits, discussion groups, music, drama, art

Community - meeting room, day centre, library

Summing up

How may the Church building most effectively contribute towards -

- ☆ clarifying the relationship between God and his people?
- ☆ worship expressing that relationship?
- ☆ enabling proclamation and reflection on the Word of God?
- ☆ an understanding of initiation and commitment, especially as shown in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist?

So are there ways in which the Church building may better ordered to fulfil its role more effectively?

THE NEXT STEPS

- 1 If the above issues can be discussed and some consensus reached before any practical conclusions are drawn, it will be more likely that a consensus will emerge about any changes to the buildings, since these will then be the practical conclusion of what the church believes.
- 2 Once you have a reasonably clear idea of what in principle you would like to do, invite members of the Diocesan Liturgical Committee and/or the Diocesan Advisory

Committee for the Care of Churches to meet with you on side to hear your ideas and respond to them.

- 3 Take into account that the PCC is also in effect a trustee of the church building for future generations. Alterations should, in principle, be reversible and make allowances for the worshipping needs of future generations being different from those of today.
- 4 Consider the possibility of an experimental period of re-ordering. This may allow you to try a variety of ideas before plans get set in concrete.
- 5 Remember to keep everyone clearly informed. It is remarkable how quickly rumour gets out of control! the whole PCC will of course need to discuss the proposals; but remember that many others in the community may well regard the parish church as 'theirs', even though their attendance may not be very frequent. Great care is needed in clearly explaining the proposals to regular worshippers, occasional worshippers, and those who come but rarely.
- 6 Involve your architect at an early stage. Draw up a specification of what you want to achieve by the project, and invite preliminary drawings from the architect.
- 7 Submit the preliminary drawings to the DAC for comment.
- 8 Ask your architect for detailed drawings, obtain estimates and submit papers for a Faculty.
- 9 Many scheme take a long time to bring to fruition and almost all involved a degree of compromise.