

# THE OUTRAGEOUS HOSPITALITY OF GOD

A theology of our church buildings,  
and their use in mission.

Sabbatical musings by  
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## The Outrageous Hospitality of God.

### Setting the Scene

I remember very vividly visiting St Albans Abbey in the run up to Christmas in 2010. We were walking through the great nave of this imposing and very beautiful building- dedicated to the greater glory and steadfastness of God- majestic and awe inspiring. We took our children, who were then the ages of 6 and 3, as we felt that such a space could speak to them of the impact of God in the midst of a busy pre-Christmas shopping area. We spoke to them about the importance of remaining quiet in this space, and to respect the wider silence and atmosphere of prayer which seemed to exude all around- an attitude which they respected in the way in which only three and six years olds can. Then to our horror, as we walked slowly down the nave, some middle aged woman in pearls, who was sitting on some makeshift stage prior to beginning a choral rehearsal, turned and very loudly told our children to shush! This was not however the welcome which we expected, and it did make me feel somewhat irritated. It did not reflect something of God's call of everybody is welcome, and that these buildings might, just might, be about a desire for human flourishing, for He came that we might have life in all its fullness.

This little episode, no doubt, happens time and time again all over the country. People love their church buildings, and they are seen as one of the most important testimonies to the story of any local community, but, it highlights a particular issue that we currently face. What are our church buildings for? Who are they for? Should we behave any differently within them? Are they for the sole use of the people who pray in them? How will they be sustained into the future as they (and congregations) get ever older? All within a context of decreasing numbers of worshippers, except in a few cases.

As I write, I am aware that these issues are issues which I face daily. I am the Rector of Hackney- and our current church building poses a number of issues for us. Our building was consecrated in 1797, and it was initially commissioned to seat 4,000 people- replacing an earlier mediaeval church which was seen to have been too small for an every growing population. At the time, the Church was overseen by some hugely influential

characters, who made up the Hackney Phalanx- a collective of clergy people, academics and political activists who were High Church in tradition, and Tory in political persuasion. There was a genuine belief that State, Monarch and Parliament were to work in partnership with the Church of England as the State church for the wider support and health of England. This was largely demonstrated through the beginnings of the National Society for the education of the poor in the principles of the Established Church, the Incorporated Church Building Society, and International relief to the people of Leipzig following the Napoleonic Wars to name a few. They operated in a hugely changing environment, by holding onto their divine claims, and were very successful in changing and developing Government policy through these initiatives. Indeed, it could be argued that were it not for the activities of the Hackney Phalanx, the Church of England may well have been disestablished in the run up to the Great Reform Act of 1830, and that England may well have been radically changed as in America and France through Revolution.

Given this context, their “base” needed to reflect their theology, and St John at Hackney is the result. An imposing, large, cavernous and acoustically sensitive preaching house, designed eventually to seat 2,200 people. The building reflects a confident politic, a defined theology and a very particular understanding of mission which existed in the earlier part of the Nineteenth Century.

Of course, in the early part of the Twenty First Century, things are a little different. The interior of the building was altered in the 1950's following a major fire in 1955, and the current result reflects now something of the theology of church buildings posed in that time. By this point, a wing of the church had been separated from the main worship space. This was to create a church hall within the building- perhaps reflecting something of the separation of what is seen as sacred space with that of secular space? In addition, a circular sanctuary was added- reflecting a developing theology of the Eucharist, and the growing Parish Communion movement, and with the galleries, the seating capacity had diminished to 1,500, all seated within pews, making that large worshipping space obvious in a church building, yet inflexible and very difficult to manoeuvre. It was almost impossible to use the space for anything other than worship and occasional concerts.

Following a year of listening in various development groups, we tried to answer the question- What is St John at Hackney? in 2007-2008. One of these groups met to specifically follow the suggested Bible studies in Richard Giles's work, Re-pitching the Tent. We recognised that the building had been built to a theology and an understanding of mission which did not match that of the current age. We recognised too that the physical outside appearance of the building could not really be altered, so we thought about the interior, and came up with a few suggestions in gearing our building up for mission to the wider community.

The principal suggestions were that we would find a way to reorder, and make the space more flexible, and subsequently more usable to tackle some of the wider community issues that we felt what we were being called to do. Many felt too that we should be aiming to get the building open as much as possible, for the space was not the exclusive space for those who come to Church, but really did exist as a resource for the whole community- which spoke of God's activity within the heart of Hackney. Hackney is a community which needs gathering spaces to make community happen, and St John's was the logical place for this. We also felt that the building needed to become sustainable- that its running costs should be met by those who come and use the space, and not by those who attend only on a Sunday morning. In other words, the building should be come self-sustainable. Finally, we felt very strongly that we should aim to have the building decorated. We had benefitted greatly as a church from a £2.5 million restoration of the 2.4 ha reclaimed churchyard between 2004-2006, and by 2007, it was obvious that the regeneration stopped at the church doors.

The St John at Hackney project, as it became known, was a five year mission action plan, which ran between 2008 and 2013, and as I write, it draws to a close. In it, the building does now pay for itself, it is used for a variety of uses- Zumba, police cadets, HIV testing, Romp n Roll, a homeless shelter, Senior Saints etc. We also host a number of high profile events, including the Little Noise sessions concerts in aid of Mencap in 2011 and 2012- where Coldplay, Elbow, Emilie Sande, Sinead O'Connor and Gary Barlow have all performed. We have hosted plays, including the shocking Chickenshed production of Crime of the Century depicting gang violence, leading to the death of a 14 year old child-

depicting something not uncommon within the streets of this parish. We have installed Hackney's first knife bin in the churchyard, which in its first year alone took over 1,000 knives off the streets, and was by far the most used knife bin in London. We have also played host to Songs of Praise, numerous sound and visual recordings and remained open during the Olympics every day for anyone to pop in and visit.

In addition, following the granting of an Archdeacon's Temporary Reordering License in 2010 and a Faculty in 2012, all the pews have been removed, and they have been replaced by the stylish Canterbury Chairs, as seen in Ely, Canterbury and St Paul's Cathedrals.

### Developing a project

This is all very well and good, but what does it mean to now develop the use of a traditionally seen sacred space, and use it for wider community purposes, and is anything off limits? Making this alteration at St John's has meant that, although we have substantially gained new members of the congregation- being one of the most growing churches in the Diocese of London in the past 10 years, we have also "lost" a small number of some of those long standing established members of the congregation whose theology cannot accept these changes and alterations.

In 2012, following a suggestion from the Bishop of Stepney, I took a sabbatical to enable me to think through these issues of the wider use of our church buildings for things other than worship, to think through the theology of our buildings, and to challenge some of the deeply held views which ultimately lead to our church buildings being seen as exclusive space, and even more worrying- closed apart from a few hours each week which hardly reflects a theology of a God of welcome, hospitality and love.

I then wrote to, and am very grateful to, the Archbishop of York, and the Bishops of Bradford, Birmingham, Exeter, Worcester, Southwark, Coventry, Liverpool, Newcastle, Chelmsford, Chichester and Ely for their suggestions as to good people to chat to- both lay and ordained. These reflections are following my visits over the course of eight weeks- visits which were made to parishes and professionals who also live with these issues of the theology and mission of our buildings. I know that my musings do not do

their incredible ministries justice, and it is great to see the Church of England alive and well outside the Diocese of London.

What is clear however is that we are in a muddle over our buildings and their purpose. We struggle with the language about the theology of these buildings, and we struggle with the on-going battles of adapting our buildings with the heritage lobbies for our mission purposes. Reports such as the Mission Shaped Church are not good at informing the debates, for it says very little about the development of our buildings, and even Bp Laurie Green's work on urban mission and urban theology refers to buildings purely as millstones, as opposed to one of the best resources that the Church of England has at its fingertips- space! We are muddled too on seeing space as either sacred or secular, and the impact that this has upon our buildings.

These musings will take the form of a series of sections. Firstly, I shall be offering some reflections as to the definition of ecclesiology, especially relating to the Early Church. Building upon ecclesiology, I shall then reflect upon the development of the Parish Church has an ecclesial model, especially picking up on how our buildings were used in the late Mediaeval period. Thirdly, I will look at ecclesiology within the contemporary English context. Fourthly, I will speak of the importance and the impact of the Eucharist in our understanding of the role of the church in any context. Fifthly, I will describe the beginnings of a theology for church buildings, and that of reordering. Sixthly, I will describe the visits that I have made to a number of different parishes. Seventhly, I shall offer a Trinitarian model of how to develop and use our buildings well, and finally I shall offer some thoughts on further research which might be helpful in this debate. Finally, I am completely convinced that our buildings should reflect something of our theology of God. God offers an outrageous hospitality in Jesus, and I long to see our buildings do the same.

## Section 1: What is the Church?

One definition of Church (Latin, ecclesia or Greek ek-ekalein, Ekklesia 'to call out') means convocation or a citizens' assembly. St Paul's use of the word in 1 Corinthians highlights the Church as the heir to that assembly before God in the New Testament.

This definition however is narrow, as Church is much more than a gathered community, but a wider, even political body. Ekklesia has connotations of the political status of the people of God. In the secular world, Ekklesia was at its heart the assembly of all those with citizen rights in a Greek city state, therefore by St Paul adopting the use of Ekklesia for the Church, he is making a radical claim that the Church is a new inclusive permanent assembly for the whole people of God as a new city state, as opposed to an inferior temporary polis that is secular. This is a very radical concept, because up until then, political power within the assembly rested within the ruling classes (The polis or the rich male citizens), whilst the oikos actually got their hands dirty with hard work. St Paul stresses that the new political assembly in the church is one of inclusion where all are one in Jesus Christ- slaves or free, men, women and children. By definition, the Church therefore is deeply political, radical by its inclusivity in its very nature. The people of God, the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, constitute a separate political and ethical polis for living out a God given life in his creation, where all things are held in common. Indeed, rather than being part of a "ruling" secular polis, life was lived en christo, and their central practice was worship (The breaking of bread), which then influenced all other aspects of their corporate and individual ethics, lived using personal and corporate charisms. In this, human relationships were conceived differently, where mutual service rather than mutual threat was encouraged as a way of demonstrating God's passion for loyalty in the light of Apostolic faithfulness. The Church is therefore inclusive, prophetic, radical, free and political in its nature.

McGrath offers five marks of the New Testament Church -

1. As the people of God- chosen, a Royal Priesthood
2. A Community of Salvation- called and sent
3. The Body of Christ- rooted in Baptism and the Eucharist
4. The Servant People- both doulos and diakonons
5. The Community of the Spirit- offering signs of the coming age, and acting as a seal of the Redemption of the Individual.

Of course, as McGrath continues, the Early Church had a very distinct ecclesiology, where the Church met in front rooms and other possible halls, as opposed to being in specific buildings. This gathering space was the *Domus Ecclesiae*- the house of the assembly. This changed with the conversion of Constantine, and the subsequent building of Basilicas, which has shaped our modern understanding of Church and Church buildings. This is a point developed further by Sheldrake in *the Spaces for the Sacred*.

In the Twentieth Century, themes concerning the church have developed. McGrath traces these as being the Second Vatican Council, stressing the place of Christ sacramentally in the heart of the church- where the Churches calling is to make Christ present in the world, bring together the fields of Christology, ecclesiology and sacramentology.

In addition to this theme comes the central Protestant theme of Christ being revealed in the Word- where the Church might be regarded as the herald- a kerygmatic theme, and the church comes into being through the proclamation of the Word.

Barth also adds the definition of *credo ecclesia*. Here in this place, the work of the Holy Spirit takes place. The Church is not an object of faith, but that the Church is an event, not an institution.

Cavanaugh adds that in the light of Modernity which is premised on a division between sacred and secular, the ensuing secularisation has led to an effacement of the church from history. This is certainly a helpful contribution when it comes to the understanding of church buildings- do they represent sacred space over secular space- and how might this inform the debate concerning reordering for community use. Nicholas Healy offers the term "Concrete Church". Its identity is "not simply given, it is constructed and ever reconstructed by the grace enabled activities of its members that embody the churches practices, beliefs and valuations." This definition allows movement and change within the Church, as responses are made to every changing culture and context. He develops this model further into practical – prophetic ecclesiology.

In addition, The Church of England has a developed definition of the church. In Article XIX of the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion we read that:

“The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.” Here we see Church being defined not just through theology, but also hermeneutics and liturgy, form and substance.

Furthermore, the definition of the Church has been developed with in the Mission Shaped Church report from 2004. In it the Missionary Church is deeply understood as God at work- the author of *Missio Dei*, where God is creative and redemptive, Kingdom focussed (The Kingdom being the Divine community, where the Church is the human community), rooted in the unique work of Christ (Incarnation, cross and resurrection- where the incarnation and the cross are seen as a missionary exchange), empowered by the Spirit of Christ, and subsequently rooted now in culture and context. The Church, according to the Mission Shaped Church report is designed to reproduce, and the true marks of the Church are that they are one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The report defines these terms very helpfully, and reminds us of our need to use our buildings and people to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ afresh to each and every generation. The report however is not specifically clear on the role for the buildings of the church, or the theology of the buildings themselves. Church planting is described in great detail- but the impact of our current buildings and their role in mission has been sadly overlooked.

In this section therefore I have looked at the political, inclusive nature of the church, and reflected upon some of the theological concepts which define the Church- in a fairly abstract way. We do note however that Post Constantine Christianity does have to also contend with a theology of the building in which one meets, for buildings and their stories of holy tombs and miracle associated with them can play a part of the development of the community, and vice versa.

This heralds the beginnings of an understanding of Church buildings reflecting the place where God dwells, and the divide between the *domus ecclesiae* and the place of pilgrimage.

In my next section, I shall look in detail in England and describe the development of the parish church ecclesial model.

## Section 2: The developing tradition of the Parish Church

The word parish is not found in the New Testament; however it comes from the Greek word, meaning "Outside the house." It referred to the areas where the non-citizens lived. Therefore our use of the term Parish is co-terminus with the ecclesiology of inclusivity as already stated, in particular for the strange and the stranger.

When Pope Gregory sent Augustine to England in 596, he gave instruction to establish Dioceses based around the Roman settlements in London and York, and develop twenty four Dioceses. This earliest ecclesiology is based upon politics and geography.

Furthermore, Theodore of Tarsus was sent by Pope Vitalian to develop the political authority of the See of Canterbury and through the first Synod of the English Church in 673 the relationship between Church and a geographical territory was established. Such ecclesiological vision led to a church which celebrated co-terminus civil and ecclesiastical provision, and eventually led to the obligation that worship would be provided by the landowners of The Manor. By the Tenth Century this had developed into a symbolic unity to the economic and spiritual relations of Britain.

Despite Martyn Percy describing the development of the parish church as an historical accident, by the Twelfth Century the parish model was well established. Where communities existed, which were economically viable, and where taxes and tithes were paid, (not just for local use- hence the Saladin Tithe of 1188), churchwardens and clergy would provide a sacramental and pastoral care for the poor. Likewise through elected officials, the maintenance of roads, bridges even the Constable became the servant of the parish.

Some parish churches became powerful Minster churches. Not only did they have the authority to perform liturgy on behalf of others, they also could levy and collect tithes and other pecuniary obligations. They also secured advantageous rights over birth and death, by the provision of a font and graveyard. In addition Chapels of Ease, Field Churches, Guilds, Hospitals, Schools and Chapels within people's homes were developed, often in partnership with the parish church.

In the Mediaeval period, the role of the parish church was powerful and political. The Dissolution of the Monasteries, putting lay people at the heart of decision making, and gave responsibilities for local provision of parochial services. Katherine has a hugely important contribution to make here through her work on the late medieval uses of parish churches in the Diocese of Bath and Wells. She concludes that the Parish Church, along with their Churchwardens were key components in the social fabric of the community. With little interference from the clergy and the Bishop, the laity administered local churches. Indeed, the laity oversaw all secular and sacred concerns- and subsequently the divide between them was never experienced. The Church building encompassed all different uses of community life from markets, dinners, entertainment and political discussion. The Church building became the subject of community pride, demonstrating something of the power of wealth and status of a community, and its individuals- where churches would be extended and rebuilt to make this clear.

In addition, when money for a repair was tight, the Churchwardens would specifically entertain ales, revels or theatre as a fundraiser. Indeed, people who worshipped together, drank and socialised together all within the church building.

This picture of a well-developed mediaeval social and religious structure demonstrated the importance of the Parish Church. This may be a helpful inclusion into the current debate of the use of our buildings, at a time when regeneration schemes squeeze out community and public space in favour of economic gain. It would seem that the onus is on the church again to use our buildings for these purposes- as a way too of sustaining them and creating new centres for community life.

Furthermore, the parish system proved to be the great instrument of the English Reformation, for both good and for ill. However cracks began to appear in the Parish System at the outbreak of the Civil War, when Parliament embraced the Puritan cause, and by 1643 the Church of England became Presbyterian. The Episcopacy was abolished, and the Westminster Assembly was created, and the Church of England formally embraced Calvin's ecclesiology with the dissolution of the monarchy. The local congregation (As opposed to the parish church), along with the army, became the heart of the ecclesial polity. It was not until the restoration of the Monarchy in 1661, which brought the restoration of the Episcopacy, the Act of Uniformity, the Corporation Act of

1664, the Prayer book of 1662 and the Test Act of 1673 which all determined the superiority of the Church of England, and cemented the relationship between Monarch, Church and Parliament. Although the parish system was retained throughout, many of the rituals and activities of the parish church were stopped, and administratively, the parish was no longer integral to community life as before.

The Act of Toleration of 1689 makes it clear that the supremacy of the newly established Church of England, with its system of parishes, needed to be protected in Law, but it was not until the Riot Act of 1715 that a significant number of Chapels were allowed to be built as an expressions of the ever growing Christian diversity.

Significant sociological and economic turbulence of the Industrial Revolution brought much contextual change to the parish church. In the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, the church was forced to reinvent their connectedness to the parish. The Church Tax was abolished in 1864, and the parish church had no longer any economic relationship to the parish, despite there still being a legal obligation to carry out the Occasional Offices. This will have had a huge effect upon the sustainability of the parish church, no longer paid for by the parish, and effectively leads us to the current financial arrangements for the keeping and oversight of much of our nation's heritage. In addition, the bifurcation of the administration of urbanisation and industrialisation into secular oversight caused the parish church to become an intensive and exclusive "Spiritual space," sidelined from its former privilege. Furthermore, immigration, technological developments, migration and industrialisation caused the parish system to flounder and it forced a rapid response from church authorities. Many large rural parishes were carved up to make room for new industrialised parishes. Between 1840 and 1876 over 9,000 churches were built or substantially restored, thanks to the initial pioneering work of the Hackney Phalanx and Joshua Watson some years before. (In addition to non-conformist and Roman Catholic churches too), leaving certain communities with too many religious buildings. However the parish church survived, because of its tradition, heritage, renewed zeal for caring for those with in the parish and partnership with national Government.

In conclusion, the traditional notion of a parish church is associated with territory, the Occasional Offices, the provision of worship (Preaching and the sacraments), the

provision of a building for the community use, and a partnership with Government, as well as a duty of developing spaces for human flourishing within any context. In this developing tradition, it responded to its political, economic and sociological context described as Pre-Modernity and Modernity.

Having looked at our past, I want to look at the current practice of the Church of England ecclesiology, and see how this might inform our developing use of our buildings.

### Section Three: The Parish Church Theology and Building in the Modern Urban Context

#### Mission Shaped Church

In 2004, the Church of England offered a report on church planting and the supporting of Emerging Church (Fresh Expressions) through the Mission Shaped Church report.

The Mission Shaped Church report did not state that Traditional Parish Church was outdated, but it described it as a piece of Gruyere cheese- a large slab with massive holes. Indeed, some sixty percent of the population have either no experience of the parish church, or were closed to it. Because of this, Bishop Graham Cray argues, we need to put the missionary model first, to enrich the more traditional models of church. This will obviously have great implications in the use of our buildings.

Mission Shaped Church argues that planting and new expressions of church are required to fill these geographical gaps. Networks and cultural patterns had to be proactively engaged with.

For the Mission Shaped Church, there are a number of examples cited, to be developed by a series of pioneer ministers and missionaries who would be trained in such network based ministry. These are:

- Alternative worship communities
- Base Ecclesial communities
- Café church
- Cell Church
- Churches arising out of community initiatives
- Multiple / Midweek congregations

- Network focussed churches
- School based churches
- Seeker churches
- Traditional church plants
- New monastic communities
- Youth congregations

The Mission Shaped Church in its ecclesiology stresses that, God is missionary, as the Trinity is outward, giving and altruistic. The incarnation reminds us that it is Christ who works in culture, and the church needs to engage seriously with post-modern culture.

This mission focus celebrates:

- The Trinity with an emphasis on worship, and its Apostolic and intercessory nature.
- The Incarnation to be culturally and locally relevant to the communities that it serves.
- The Transformation of individuals, neighbourhoods and wider societies.
- Making Disciples, where everyone is treated sensitively and with dignity. People are enabled to live in a consumer society, but are not necessarily shaped by their values.
- Relational, this is characterised by welcome and hospitality, where all are made in God's image.

The Mission Shaped Church emphasises a new missionary model, largely in the light of declining numbers. The theology is comprehensive, but dangers exist. This may lead to a homogenising and fragmentation of the church, and may reflect the wider wake of globalisation between the "vagabond" and "tourist," as depicted by Anthony Giddens, or other category of divide as recognised through the processes of globalism. However, it is an important contribution for our buildings to reflect this missionary theology of the church. It may just be that reordering may be required to make this vision of church a reality.

## Traditional Parish Church in the post-modern context.

In 2010, as part of the current ecclesiological debate, Milbank and Davison describe the Mission Shaped Church report as “flawed”. They argue that the report endorses the time and space compression of globalisation, yet, the church needs to be counter cultural.

Should culture govern ecclesiology, or something else?

The church is not just a network or a gathering of likeminded people, but it is a goal of salvation, and subsequently not a human made creation, but a Divine institution. The Biblical images painted are those of the body or the bride of Christ, the Temple, and people of God, the New Israel and the New Jerusalem, bound by eschatology, and bound in soteriology. As such, the church is far more than an instrument for mission, but contains God’s activity in the world. When people receive new life in Jesus they are ultimately incorporated into the Church, and not just a new personal relationship with Jesus. Furthermore, there is scant regard for the centrality of the Cure of Souls for a geographical area. The Mission Shaped Church mentions this concept only in relation to Incumbents with freehold standing the way of church plants, and the importance of Bishop’s exorcising their authority over them.

Given these concerns of the emerging model, I will now outline the parish churches encounter in the modern urban environment. I will be outlining the following: It’s Inclusivity, relationship with time and place and its vicarious presence in an urban context.

### i. Inclusivity

As stated in the first section, the parish church does not constitute a homogenised interest group, but an inclusive and diverse body which reflects God’s activity amongst his people. No one is turned away. It exists for everyone- especially its non members, reflecting God’s availability for everyone. It is the Parish Church model which has the capacity to demonstrate this, as rooted in the Biblical concept of Ekklesia.

### ii. Relationship with Time and Place.

The Parish Church model’s greatest strength is its relationship with its locality- past present and future. For Davidson and Milbank, this demonstrates the incarnation at work. In many ways for any given community, it is the Parish Church which is a guardian

of place and history, of celebration and resistance. The parish church celebrates place and history as it sees beyond them to the one who transcends both place and time, and yet came to dwell within them. It is this incarnation which anchors human expression of the sacred firmly in the world of particularity, highlighting again the place of the Parish in holding that collective narrative.

John Inge develops this concept, evaluating biblically, sacramentally and theologically God's relationship with people and place, and its crucial importance to our understanding of culture and context.

Indeed, in the modern urban environment, location is everything. The places where we work, live and worship and encounter others are essential in the formation of spirituality and theology, and people learn what it is to be mindful of God in the everyday, as people are shaped by place. In addition it is in the city where the strange and the stranger are common place, as everyone operates within the same space. It is the local parish church, in its diversity which can make sense of this diversity.

Finally it is the parish model, with its weird boundaries which speak clearly to a congregation of their missionary and pastoral care responsibilities. The clear boundary gives both focus, and limitation, which actually makes the task bearable.

### iii. Vicarious Presence

Both Martyn Percy and Grace Davie speak of a need for vicarious religion in the urban context. Each local community has stories, celebrations and tragedies, and it is usually to the parish church that people turn to provide meaning in these events. Parish churches immerse themselves in local story, cultures and customs and provide such meaning.

Cultural events and narrative need structure, and there is still the demand for religion which is public, performative and pastoral on behalf of a local community.

Davie takes this one stage further. Parish churches have to be attentive to episodes, whether individual or collective, in through which the implicit becomes explicit, or the abnormal normal, and parish churches should expect that they are performing rituals on behalf of others, for example the Occasional Offices, house blessings, thanksgivings the public saying of the Daily Office and the celebration of festivals and Saints' days in the Christian calendar. Parish clergy should also expect that others will be looking to them for moral guidance, to embody different moral codes. Of course, usually parish clergy live

in their localities, and they invest in their localities, and this exacerbates this point. Clergy are affected by the local services, schools, health facilities, crime and transport issues, and this informs the life of the parish church, and should inform the "apt liturgy" offered which enables a solidarity between people, especially in the struggles that they as individuals and as a community face. It is this presence and liturgy which enables hope to be found, where memories of the heart can be changed and mended over time.

Parish churches also offer a space for debate concerning the unresolved issues of a modern society. This vicarious nature of the parish church is especially relevant with a consumerist society which plays down obligation, only the parish church "needs to be there" when I need it. As Percy concludes, "We do not live in a secular age; our era continues to be a time of questions, explorations, wonder and awe. An offering of an open (parish church) building and an outward looking parish community are dominant signs in our cultural landscape, pointing to the generosity of God."

This factor is interwoven into the very fabric of the community. Historically, the Church building speaks of God's steadfastness in a time of uncertainty and change in a vicarious manner. The townscape is affected by the presence of the Church building. As such, the Church needs to inform the debates concerning planning and regeneration- which seems to pay little regard for a communities need to gather, pray and reflect, and where S106 seems to support just the activities of any local authority.

I am however impressed by the vision of Richard Rogers, the Architect. He has developed seven principles of a sustainable city of the future, and these points seem to be remarkably theological in their approach. These are:

1. Just- fundamentally accessible to all and participative
2. Beautiful- with an aesthetic which uplifts the spirit.
3. Creative- Able to grasp the full potential of its citizens + responds easily to change
4. Ecological- landscape and human interaction and integrated.
5. Of easy contact- communication is facilitated and public space is communitarian
6. Polycentric- Integrating neighbourhoods and maximising proximity
7. Divers- reflecting the diversity of humanity.

With these principles in place- it would seem that there is the potential to develop (and continue to develop where this is being done) some key partnerships. There is some singing from the same hymn sheet!

In this section, I have highlighted the position of the parish church as a faithful and relevant witness to God's activity in that presence in some capacity for centuries, but also the need for emerging church. Our attention will now turn towards liturgy and specifically the sacrament of the Eucharist to highlight God's relationship with place and time, to demonstrate the faithfulness of the church in its urban context.

#### Section Four: God's relationship with space and time: The Eucharist in the Parish

The models of Mission Shaped Church, and the Traditional Parish church have a sense of koinonia at their heart. These models are relational models, and all are affected by the places where they are based, and expressed through worship and the sacraments of the church. Indeed, a counter cultural activity, liturgy becomes the means through which Christians stake their interest in a place by creating events and new histories which proclaim God's new order. The building must be in a position to carry out this function in an "apt" way.

In this section, I want to explore how the Eucharist is an ultimate factor in the use of our buildings in transforming the local community, largely in an urban setting. I will do this by looking at how the Eucharist relates to space and time and by discussing the practice of the Eucharist. This obviously has implications on the use of the church buildings in any given context.

##### i. The Importance of Redeeming Space and Time through the Eucharist

The Eucharist is not just a ritual activity competing for time and space with other religious acts that human beings perform. The church is a distinctive body doing distinctive things. The Eucharist acquires those marks that set it apart from being just a repetition of ordinary social practices which reproduce social injustices and inequalities, a community and subsequently a parish is made equal by being recipients of the same food and drink. Such food, when it is taken in perichorectical Trinitarian worship, locates the parish into

the heart of heavenly worship. This is animated by Jesus, and roots and forms the basis of a common life, vicariously in the parish. The parish church through its incarnational life is empowered by liturgical praxis, and by synergy between Christ's body, the wider parish and the Holy Spirit. The parish church and parish are subsequently caught up into Divine life, when all work and play is brought into the offering of the church, to be made visible and reconnected to the creator, then given back to the parish renewed in vision. As such, the Eucharist is a practice of resistance to any attempt to homogenise human experience or place. Indeed, this is one of the prime theologies of the purposes of the church building.

Only in the sacraments, Cavanaugh adds, can the church fully understand its purpose, story and vision. In an environment of excessive individualism, at the Eucharist the consumer does not stand detached from the consumed, for it is the body of Christ who consumes, with Jesus as the storyteller and provider. Cavanaugh stresses that only the narrative of the Eucharist can unite the whole church on earth with the church of all times and places in eternity. At the same time it is the Eucharist alone that is genuinely catholic, universal and local, where the middle is everywhere (a world in a wafer). Ward also adds that it is in the fraction and participation of the Eucharist where the church finds its place of embodiment in a locality, to be sent to minister into a broken and fragile environment. Quite literally, the Eucharist makes any church building, the heart of that community.

These assertions are not static. At the Eucharist, through anamnesis, Jesus makes himself present and in the course of the liturgy, time itself is held together in the "proleptic anticipation of the eschaton," in conjunction with the angels and the archangels.

## ii. The Practice of the Eucharist

Parish Churches tend to offer the Eucharist as a main act of worship. When the Eucharist is celebrated in a parish church, with a focus on a liturgy being offered for the whole parish, that geographical area is transformed. As Sam Wells reminds us, The Eucharistic acts of gathering, confessing, listening, interceding, sharing the peace, sharing communion and being sent out all inform the church and its relationship to the parishes it serves. These rituals, when embodied, enable specific virtues to be celebrated (patience, constancy, humility, prudence, persistence, justice, equality, temperance and love) in the

local context, where local traditions are embraced, they bring an immediacy and relevance to the parish church. Through the liturgical language of worship, virtues and gifts are expressed and shared which have formed a mirror to society, and society is now learning from this rich heritage. The Eucharist is a narrative which enfolds the participants within a Biblical narrative, which makes people and the parish characters within the story, embody the story, but then live out the story in their locality- both parish and their networks. Such stories make people who they are, and give an opportunity for religious awakening as people are subject to the Biblical narrative. The shape of the Eucharist also is shaped by the inclusion of the Ekklesia. It begins with naming fractures and failures, but ends with the climax of Jesus' hospitality, especially in relation to the marginal or disrespected. All are welcome to receive at the table. Liturgy is a social and political action, where people and the parish participate actively in redemption and the Holy Spirit is invoked.

It is in the Eucharist therefore where the parish church lives out its calling to be a vicarious community to transform the whole community. It is the Eucharist which roots the parish into heaven and with the activity of God, past, present and future and it is the parish Eucharist which shapes humanities' ethics into a wider altruistic narrative, enhancing identity, rootedness and a sense of belonging.

Given this understanding of the Eucharist, I shall now look at developing a sense of the theology of the building, and the possible theological justification for reordering.

## Section five: Theology of the church building, and the need for Reordering- the Current Context.

So far I have described the theology of the church, the role of the parish church, the current need for a missionary focus, whilst being rooted to the parish church concept, and the theological principles surrounding the Eucharist.

In most cases, all these concepts and actions require a home from which to operate- and this is where our buildings become so important. The buildings, the very bricks and mortar have to embody these concepts, and speak of these concepts, especially to populations for whom the Bible and an understanding of the concept of God is waning.

Richard Giles and Jeanne Kilde have both looked at a chronology of the development of the use of buildings. For Kilde, it is clear that religious space is both dynamic space and contested space. There are three key factors at work- and a combination of these factors might develop either a shrine theology of buildings- completely sacred, as a space where God dwells (Temple), or a theology of the tent of meeting, where God dwells only were two or three are gathered in my name Acts 2, and Hebrews 9.

For Kilde, the powers at work are

1. Divine power- which is attributed to God
2. Social Power, pertaining to a variety of social and clerical hierarchies
3. Personal Power, which the laity derives from their experience of the divine

These expressions of power then have an impact upon the ordering of buildings, and their function. They also relate to both time and space as already described. Indeed, as the definition of the church and the study of ecclesiology develops, so must the use and layout of the buildings that we have, where the community gathers. Change must be the norm as opposed to the exception.

Giles offers a very helpful insight to the development of buildings. As well as asking whether Christians need buildings in the first place, he reminds us that Jesus, in the New Testament, did use buildings- and indeed the Temple and the Synagogues were all used by Jesus in the context of his ministry. But, he had an open mind concerning their significance. Such buildings had a function, and the focus of the function was a relational one, and not a heritage or wider shrine understanding of the building itself.

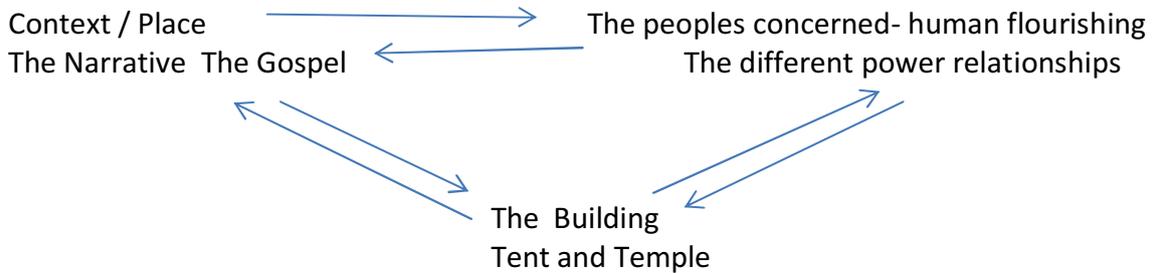
The early Church did see the assembly as key, where the church building was seen as the *domus ecclesiae*. This designated the place where the activities of the assembly might take place in their prophetic, liturgical and political ministries of transformation for human flourishing.

Then, Giles argues, as the use of buildings became more widespread, so did the redevelopment of an earlier priestly caste- who will carry out the business of God for us. This would represent a change in the mix of power as recognised by Kilde and a developing attachment to place, as the stories of God's activity through specific people built up an attraction to a specific place.

Sheldrake states the significant role of Constantine, and the growing association of the church being the place where God dwells- the Basilica. This concept draws from the

Biblical understanding of the Temple of Solomon, where God chooses a specific place for worship to be centralised- in contrast to that of the tent of the Israelites in exile.

Therefore, the relationships concerned might be configured as follows:



So, given that the buildings are a key influence and component of the Church in any given locality, what do such buildings say to us, and what do these buildings say about us?

Giles answers these questions by stating that the environment gives a sense of place- and this can shape the attitudes to our lives. Church buildings can develop a sense of place and belonging, and influence how we relate to God and each other.

The buildings can also say much about the community which uses it. Poor notice boards, locked doors, poor gutters and damp walls speak much of a community, as indeed does row upon rows of empty pews or choir stalls. These may be defended by a handful of well-meaning powerful individuals but they may be preventing the use of the buildings except for Sunday worship or a handful of concerts, which runs contrary to an open hospitable image of God.

If this is the case, Giles offers two clear thoughts- one, our primary concern is to recall the church to the Gospel and its outrageous hospitality in love, and secondly the task is to tell the Christian story to the world- both of which are essentially about human flourishing and can be undertaken in a variety of different ways. These must inform and dictate our understanding of our buildings

Giles adds, the church which panders to human kind cravings for temporal certainties betrays the sickness of the soul, and for this reason the reordering of the church buildings can be a catalyst by which a parish community is recalled to the pilgrim path, to the adventures of going with Jesus into the unknown. He adds that the knife goes deepest

when it concerns our possessions- either our savings or our sanctuaries. Such reordering of being recalled to the Gospel is a costly act of letting go- a costly act of surrender, but then discipleship is costly in itself.

The church must be ready to tell the Gospel in each part of Britain, through its network of churches- each has the potential for storytelling. Indeed, the storytelling might be archaeology, history, architecture or hagiography relating to a famous person- or we retell the Christian story- creation, slavery, exile, waiting and longing, Jesus and human flourishing. Both are important, and can be a way of building upon relationships with the strange and stranger.

The layout of the church reveals something too of human flourishing, and what it means to be human. We are beings in relationship, rather than individual creatures- and buildings should demonstrate such a corporate nature. I am not here to make *my* communion! We are each called to participate, where congregations are not audiences, but together share a priesthood of participation. The community is Eucharistic, creative and celebratory- lived in grace. Anything other than this rootedness in God betrays our identity.

In addition, it is important for us to understand the image of God portrayed by our buildings when first erected. Beverley Minster and St George's Newtown are both parish churches, but their initial theological image presents two very different pictures of the God. The architecture is important, and will influence all the activities that take place, and this must be recognised. This is highlighted succinctly by Mike Highton states the following:

“Some idea of the variety of Christian visions of the saved life can be gleaned from the different ways in which Christians have designed and built churches. To enter many Byzantine churches is to be drawn into a golden cave, filled with the light of candles illuminating icons of the saints and apostles; to be saved here is to enter the communion of the saints and apostles as a novice initiated into mysteries. To enter a gothic cathedral is to find oneself in a garden of pillars, a stone Eden where every line draws one's eyes upwards to the canopy of heaven; to be saved here is to participate with proper humility in a creaturely life in harmony with these heavenly heights. To enter a baroque church is to be confronted with a glorious vision, an explosion of light and ornament in which everything is caught and set in motion by the light streaming from God's throne and from God's Eucharistic presence on earth; to be saved here is to share this rapturous vision

and to reflect its light. To enter a neo-classical chapel is to find oneself in a space for preaching and sober reflection, a place of calm order and decorum; to be saved here is to become a pure hearer of the Word, and to live in untainted orderly obedience to it. To enter many modern churches is to come into a space designed for fellowship and families – chairs in the round and a coffee bar, perhaps; to be saved here is to be drawn into friendly fellowship with God and neighbour, away from pretension and obscurity.”  
 Mike Higton, *Christian Doctrine* (SCM Press, 2008) p260-1

In this section, I have shown how our buildings need to demonstrate God’s love. They have a distinct theology which needs to reflect our understanding of ecclesiology, rooted in an understanding of the Eucharist. Parish churches and Church of England churches continue to engage with place, and therefore there is a constant need to change and respond to context. The church building needs to be flexible enough for this to take place. The Church by definition demonstrates that Church is inclusive, political, liturgical, associated with place and it responds to the wider culture, for which it exists to serve. With this definition, I now want to demonstrate how this has taken place across a series of churches that I visited during the sabbatical. This will outline the developing model of parish church, in which a group of worshippers within every natural community in England are trying to let that community know what kind of God it worships.

### Section Six: How this looks on the ground

In this section I shall demonstrate which churches have been visited, and disclose some of the key comments from those visited. The comments all relate to how the buildings are currently used, and how these reflect the God that we seek to portray.

#### A Table of churches visited, and some of their key characteristics

Church	Open	Partnerships	Building For non worship	Separate Hall	Cafe	Projects	Rents income
St Nicholas Cathedral Newcastle	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
All Saints Leamington Spa Coventry	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y

The Outrageous Hospitality of God Sabbatical Thoughts 2012-13 The Rev'd Rob Wickham

Church	Open	Partnerships	Building For non worship	Separate Hall	Cafe	Projects	Rents income
Beverly Minster York	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
St Georges Everton Liverpool	N by arrangement	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y
St Matthew's Brixton Southwark	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
St John's Stratford Chelmsford	Y	Y	Y	Y- crypt	N	Y	Y
S Bride's Liverpool	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
Michaelhouse Cambridge Ely	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
St Philips Mills Road Ely	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
S Martins Upton Park Chelmsford	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
S Barnabas Erdington Birmingham	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
St George's Newtown Birmingham	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
S Oswalds + All Saints Bradford	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
S Margaret's Thornbury Bradford	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

## St Nicholas Cathedral Newcastle



Benedictine hospitality

Reorder the nave as peoples' space and plans to remove the pews

Flexibility- markets, exhibition, liturgical

Life in all its fullness

Story of the North East- heart of Newcastle. Relate to Local Authority

Permeability and liminality- as close as you want

Accessible and open- thirst for encounter.

Relational and Incarnational

Discover selves in context.

The church is both hose of people and house of God.

## All Saints Leamington Spa Coventry



Inclusive to all- homeless etc. Ecumenical projects.

Vision of seeking to serve the Kingdom and not the Church- common good.

Open and not privatised property

Jazz and film clubs- come up against cultural difficulties- our beautiful church!

Flexible space

Holiness- link with the dead and churchyard.

Relate to Council- key for human flourishing

Building first and foremost place of worship.

Unsupportive hierarchy, not clear why community ministry important

## Beverly Minster York

Christmas trees, café and lunches, dominated the skyline.

Food fayres, wedding fayres

Uses volunteers and relationships- warm welcome.

Concept of Moral Ratio to get the balance right- fundraising vs discipleship.

No distinction between sacred and secular. Church- meeting place- relational.

Theological issues discussed

Not quote for the hire of the building- come with suggestions

Shop, youth café, bouncy castles and gladiators!

Freeing up space for other uses- flexible inside

## St Georges Everton Liverpool



First iron church structure- loads of visitors

Organise space- noticeboards

School, memorial services, youth café toddler groups, long term associations with people but slum clearance around- few houses to relate to.

Beautiful, incarnational and redemptive.

No sacred / secular divisions. Building says yes as God says yes. Seating flexible

Vision of Neville Black

## St Matthew's Brixton Southwark



Reordered in the 1970's, taking three quarters of the space to be used as a commercial enterprise. Church has no say in running or leases- left only with worship space. Little income for PCC. Used for community use- political gatherings- Community Organising. Other spaces even used as a Torture Garden- difficulty in relationship. Vicar described reordering as Violent. People not now read buildings- have to develop community- building secondary. Could originally seat 2,000 people.

## St John's Stratford Chelmsford



Central to the Olympics

One site, focussing the local story and engagement.

Church is centre of community- welcome and narrative.

Policies etc all important.

Employment, health, music healing café, Market Research. Open church in community – church without walls. Paving stones inside. Person at the door, welcome, Volunteers. Worship comes first. Recognise God's spirit at work. Building an agent in mission- have space for community groups- income and outreach. Happy to promote a political agenda. Big crypt so church space not used regularly for non worship

Chapels for prayer, no probs with other faiths using the building- only Anglican worship offered.

Is a Town church, not a neighbourhood church.

## S Bride's Liverpool



Vision of Neville Black. Lots of fixed community rooms in Nave on sides under balconies. Used as creative space, overseen by Trading Company. Was no focus on congregation, but now balance being made right.

Listen to community- now an Inclusive Church- reaching out to those with questions. Reflected in worship. LGBT support. Growing church. Now catalyst youth, soup kitchen and recording studio, Muslim prayer room, Godly play room and artist in residence.. AA, dancing, asylum seekers, foodbank. Develop relationships key now. Vicar described Anglicanism as autistic worship- a pantomime. Now they are authentic and listening. No division in space with sacred and secular. Kingdom building not Church building.

Church meet in the gathering space in the West End of the building whilst they await permissions to reorder and remove the pews.

## Michaelhouse Cambridge Ely



Been on a journey. Michaelhouse (+Gt St Mary's) reach to non students and University staff. Focus is beyond congregation- church belongs to everyone. Engages at different levels- Chaplaincy, Café and church. people relate to the building, exhibition space. Feed off each other. Needs to be professional- something good. Overseen by the PCC, the Trust and the Café provider. Key- hospitality. Has prayer space, concerts, projects and rooms to rent.

## St Philips Mills Road Ely



Reordering driven by theology and need. Christian architect. Church connects the practical and theological, rooted in business sustainability. Easy access, undoing Victorian reordering, a journey into the sanctuary from the café. Flexible space. Sees church as the Public square with a roof. Based on God's hospitality. Hosting the community narrative. Monastic spaces (George Lings)

## S Martins Upton Park Chelmsford



Church hall offers breakfast clubs, and supports Rough sleepers. Works with TELCO. Franciscan support- Rule of life- balance of work, study and prayer.. "Jesus expects us to do stuff" Rooted in context. Difficult if we are precious with our buildings. Former Archdeacon a huge support. Esol classes.

Daily Office undergirds the whole ministry. Sacred space is key. Holy ground. Hall used for community use. Expression of God's love, not judgement. St Bonaventure influence. Reach to poor and marginalised. Lots of programmes and resources. Other churches use sacred space- sometimes friction. Incarnation and hospitality. Gutsy and organic incarnation

## S Barnabas Erdington Birmingham



Church about to be reopened after fire 6 yrs ago. Theology- through the window. Building belongs to parish so being set up as flexible, open and accessible spaces. Good flexible facilities (Projectors PA systems etc) new café in entrance. Incarnational approach. Foodbank, good artwork. Glass doors- architecture on a harbour. Good standards, film nights, counselling, crèche facility. Key is hospitality, and develop a sense of place.

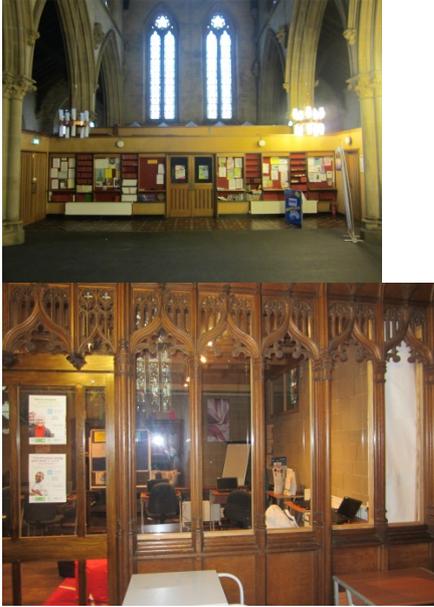
## St George's Newtown Birmingham



New church 40 years ago. Hall and church with hall downstairs- mediaeval concept of the crypt. Theology of church and hall all open plan. Used for white working class population be the centre for parties, beer, dances. Incarnation where divine and human were integrated.

Was surrounded by 16 tower blocks. Many knocked down. Waves of immigration- now African, Eastern European. More fragmented. Poorer. Now hosts independent school as a PRU, used by Pentecostal churches- raising issues of landlord and tenant relationship. As host church- gracious and welcoming to different groups

## S Oswalds + All Saints Bradford



2 churches, both with reordered spaces in West end, or reordered chapels. Building left open. "Arms of Blessing to the Community" Lunch groups, IT groups, getting people into jobs. Toddler and parents groups- so different in the inner city. Some churches see community work as a distraction from mission, but here it is key. Esp to Asian members of the population. Healing miracles inspiration. People are proud of what is going on. Sundays, pray for the work of the centres. No home groups. Church buildings need a splendour. Church for the parish inspired by the context.

## S Margaret's Thornbury Bradford



Street in the middle- church on one side and community centre + Library + Café on the other. Try to integrate the two. Centre based in Muslim area. Professional centre- paid employees. Trust oversees the centre. It is a disinterested service- not expect anything back. Makes Bradford a better place. Interfaith prayer and work developing. Faith is acknowledged and welcomed. Long term sustainability is key- making the right appointments. Church space open for conference and community uses. Side prayer chapel available. Good for other service providers to have a relationship under the churches banner. Halls available for hire too.

Other Meetings:

### The Ven Geoff Miller. Newcastle Diocese.

I visited a series of churches across Byker and Scotswood.

Each church had either been rebuilt or reordered, or was about to be. Each showed an immense optimism in the work of the Gospel through community endeavour.

One had become a Children's Centre

One a Conference Centre

One reordered to create a separate hall inside through glass panels.

One was becoming a circus skills workshop

One was trying to become a wider arts centre for the local community.

One had been reordered, but the wider housing was being developed, and subsequently was struggling to find its new use.

The key concepts were hospitality, flexibility, and a deep commitment to the place and the context. They also required deep sense of vision, supported by the hierarchy in a strategic, comprehensive and resourced fashion.

The ministry required was incarnational, and focussed upon the kingdom, and not putting bums on seats! They were aiming to reverse a sense of preparation for decline. Mission and partnership were key, with all the possible losses which this might bring to the parish church over access.

The relationships which were being developed were a credit, and deeply rooted in the Trinity- seeing the church as the giving gift, and a hospitable gift- perhaps with a Benedictine feel to the work.

There was too a concept of liminality- thin places, where a prayed in space will have an impact upon those who come and use the space. Holy spaces are seen as places where something of God has taken place. Indeed, as the key concept is of hospitality- here we see the crossing point between the tent and shrine mentality.

Again, key was the fact that the Church has such access to property, and as such the church buildings must be used for celebrating human flourishing, and not be the precious domains of a handful of people.



## Andrew Mottram Diocese of Worcester.

Andrew's main experience- All Saints Hereford. A church opened up and reordered for wider community used- taken back to mediaeval walls with the concept of pods inside- vestry, toilets etc.

A café was a key factor to the building too, which enabled the building to be open during the day. The church was the church with candles, services etc. But also new fringe groups were listened to. AIDS services etc.

Rooted in the daily office and the Eucharist. The outrageous hospitality of the Eucharist. Coming to terms that it was fine to bring mess into the building- people's lives and people's stuff. Here in the mix is where the Kingdom of God can be found, therefore not necessarily rooted in the building of the church.

Useful imagery concerning the leavening of the bread- the church being there for all, but also the throwing of the money changes out of the temple- these people preventing the Gentiles from worshipping.

Argues that the church needs to look at the context- esp of retail. What are people's experiences of public and private space?

Supports the Saxon minster model- driving the churches local economy and teamwork support.

Theologically now, seeking for churches to undo the sacred and secular split- this was not seen in the Early Church, neither in the Gospel. No sense of clean and unclean, only the religious authorities being condemned as hypocrites when standing in the way of genuine relational ministry of Jesus Christ.

Does recognise that an open church does come with costs to the congregation, along with the minsters and associated support, but it is worth it. The Church of England is open for all peoples, and this needs to be related in the mission and the ministry. Such mission comes through relationships.

Richard Giles  
Retired, Living in Newcastle.

Starting points:

The Church building is the narthex of the world- the place where paths cross- bread and butter weekly worship- where befriending and reconciliation happens.

The place where heaven and earth meet- where you go to seek that which is beyond.

The place of healing where Jesus is found- encountering need. God's health spa!

There are many buildings of relevance- the Great Mosque or Cordoba, St Peter's Kiln and all sorts of places like airports and stations- the impact of the journey. Greeting and reunion. Hospitality and outreach takes place beneath the indicator boards opening avenues into fuller life.

Current situation

Need to give fresh expression to the regular gathering of God's people- not just specials.

Need to build community- facing the cost, the upheaval, required of forming holy assembly.

Participating fully in liturgy- taking active role, equips us for a fuller participation in society.

It builds confidence as we recall and grow into our holy calling and commission.

We live in the middle ground between temple (shrine) and tent. Not turning our backs on the world nor losing our identity in it.

Amidst the instant and the virtual and the empty cult of celebrity, we hold onto a sense of the presence of a reality beyond our imaging. The wholly other.

Creating beautiful things and places for God is a means of giving primacy to the holy. The 1960's experience of dual purpose buildings made us think that social action = scruffy places, but this need not be so.

Creating places of still ness and lives of consecration will be radical in a frenzied society. The nun looking at the punk in the street:

I knew it was myself who was the ultimate drop out, the delinquent, the recidivist, the vagabond, the wild woman, the subversive, the original punk" Paul Durcan in a snail in my prime.

In our meeting he added, it was good not to permanently screen off areas in church- but keeping the whole. Mission takes place through mingling- a relational build up is kingdom building, and not necessarily associated with the building of the church

## Comments from these visits.

The key words / theological concepts from the visits of these churches are clear:

Relational

Incarnational,

Partnership with a variety of different organisations

Church open to all, both ecclesiological and practically.

Sustainable

Flexible

Hospitality and welcome

Trinity- in worship and theology

Worship and importance of the liturgy- a praying presence.

Contextual being a driving force. The flourishing of the local community. Belonging to everyone

Ownership through the local church- cannot wash our hands of the building

Listening

Volunteers

Professional

Serving

No sacred or secular divide.

Political and Prophetic

Benedictine spirituality or Franciscan Rule of Life.

Incarnational

Ecumenical

Permeability + Liminality

Moral Ratio- uses of the building- fundraising vs discipleship.

Beauty being a symbol of transcendence and redemption

Policies

Heritage and narrative

Good Christian architects as a vocation.

Good local strategy for the buildings- or not.

Good hierarchical support for community use- or not.

God's interaction with place

What is clear is that in each of these different examples, the building is proving to be a key in mission. Furthermore, in each case, a thorough listening to the local community, as the Parish Church / Minster Church or Cathedral Church, reaching out in their very different ways, has taken place. This long term rootedness in context has led to a vision of human flourishing in that context, where the church plant is a main instrument for that work. This has, in many ways, required reordering and the making flexible of spaces to realise that vision, no doubt with a cost to both church and clergy alike, reflecting the different varieties of power involved in sacred space which Kilde speaks of.

In addition, it is clear that to fulfil the mission, proclamation and prophetic role of the Church, the building has to be used for a wider community ministry with a great host of life enhancing projects and the arms of blessing which this provides. Such reordering becomes all the more important when the church has no other space in which to work. Only by such reordering, a 24-7 vision, and an outreach to the entire community and its complex needs can the church really say that it is being the church in any given context. For this to take place, the church also has to be sustainable- bringing in different sources of income, and spreading the risk. Each of these examples shows a good use of the space, and need for partnerships from community, Private and Public sectors. The State and Local Government requires the Church again to be the church to carry out the basic care for any community to flourish. At one level, it is a shame that there is no automatic funding for such maintenance of church buildings- but we are grateful to the Church Buildings Council and the Church Commissioners to get the Government to extend the VAT reclaiming opportunities.

These issues concerning community ministry, and the use of the building has been realised further in the report- Faithful Cities, and the insistence of the volunteering of the Church to be recognised as Faithful Capital. This report shows the impact of faith communities and their ability to transform local communities- especially reaching out to the poor and marginalised. For example, the C of E contributed 23.2 million hours of volunteer work a year- quite apart from the work of paid staff (clergy) throughout the country- much of which takes place within the church building. Unlike the Mission Shaped Church report, it does also take the role of church buildings seriously, for our role within the city is very different from that in the suburbs.

Church buildings are more than bricks and mortar- they can be transformed into significant and convivial spaces in urban areas- and the church building can be a powerful and symbolic presence, and possibly the last remaining public and community space within any neighbourhood. As Malcolm McLaren pointed out- the Church is the most fantastic place. It is sanctuary- they should be open 24 hours a day. They are the only places left in London where you don't have to buy anything!

The opening of churches is key- albeit for private prayer and the lighting of candles, or through parts of the building being used for community groups. We need to rediscover our passion for open churches, as opposed to being paralysed by the fear of what might take place. Are we keeping God in for ourselves, or indeed keeping God's work within the community out!

The impact upon a wider community when a building is left open can have huge repercussions- when tragic or celebratory events take place. I was amazed to find Muslims praying in my open church building when ministering in Kings Cross just after the 7-7 bombings. Likewise, I was impressed to find the Church in Hackney being the centre of the community response following the riots in August 2011. Both of these national events required the church to be the church- open and accessible.

Indeed, the Church of England provides 16,000 buildings for public use, and the Faithful Cities report concludes: We would strongly advocate an opportunistic approach to church buildings, especially in poor urban areas, which must not be portrayed as millstones that compete with or undermine purposeful mission. They can represent a Kingdom of different and equal values, rooted in Pentecost, and transformed through the political, pastoral and prophetic act of the Eucharist.

But, the Church needs to be strategic on how they are developed- a role for Bishops, Archdeacons and other staff. That way, individual churches may not all apply to the same sources of funding, but a joined up approach across clusters, deaneries and even through the appointment of Minsters and Minster teams will lead to a greater clarity in our mission, with greater sustainability in the process.

It is also interesting to witness trends in reordering schemes. It seems we have moved away from the model of permanent walls cutting a nave in half, to create separate secular and sacred space for separate community and liturgical purposes. The most recent reordering does seem to be more flexible in approach. This is demonstrated

through the progression of reordering schemes provided in Byker, Newcastle. There is a renewed awareness of linking the liturgy and the community activity, as both are needed for the flourishing of wider community. They exist together, and so the spaces may reflect this. The downside of this work will come about when there are clashes and competition for space, reflecting again on Kilde's work.

## Section Seven: Rooted in the Trinity / Rooted in Christ

Through these visits, from studying the Mission Shaped Church and Faithful Cities, and from trying to ascertain what the church building is for in a Church of England context, it seems clear to me that the Trinity and our understanding of Jesus holds the key. In the same way that the Church itself is Trinitarian in theology and the Trinity inspires our worship and ministry, so too our buildings must be rooted and understood as God- the Holy Trinity, with the focus on the ensuing desire for relationships.

I am also struck by the need for a Trinitarian understanding of a theology for our buildings to find the right balance of how our buildings are used. If we use our building purely as a café, a concert hall or community centre- we are not, as far as is possible, reflecting God. Likewise, if our building is closed all the week apart from worship on Sundays, we are not reflecting God fully. Furthermore, as we celebrate certain persons within the Trinity at different points in our mission- reflecting our diversity, I wonder how this might be a tool for making sure that we are getting the balance right in our buildings. Clearly in their histories, each of these examples has got the balance wrong, and for some (Brixton) it is now impossible again to get this balance right as permanent changes have left the church at a serious disadvantage within their own building.

What is clear is that the doctrine of the relationships within Trinity is not governed by the constraints of space and time; so neither should the development of the theology of the building. In other words, the greater community use should not lead to less time for prayer in a building, but it should put greater emphasis on the provision of prayer within a building. They feed off each other, not act as competing activities

I have suggested the following table as a draft. Those with a better understanding of the Trinity would be able to do a much better job I'm sure! These terms are not exhaustive, and I'm sure that far more reflection will create a much more helpful tool in the development of our buildings.

### A Trinitarian Model for the Use of Church Buildings

Father	Son	Holy Spirit
King	Priest	Prophet
Creator	Redeemer	Sustainer
Proclamation	Incarnation	Revelation
Truth of the Gospel	Kenosis	Kingdom building
Apophatic prayer	Creation through Him	Kataphatic prayer
Shrine	Tent	Community Centre
Majesty and Awe	Eucharist	Human flourishing
Set place	Gathering	Community ministry
Long term basis	Responding to context	Prophecy
Givenness of the building	God's yes to the community	Reordered space for purpose
Narrative The Church	Narrative- the Word	Narrative- the Place
Conservation	Reordering	Mission
Tradition	Kenosis	Listening
Heritage	Healthy Ambivalence	Accessible + Contemporary
Open church- confident	Open Church- Unthreatened	Open church- Sustainable
PCC oversight	Good partnerships	Policies in place
Bishops' support	Peer support	Community support
Overall strategy- Bishops	Local church participation	Local community participation
Rooted in God	Praying through Christ	Partners with the Holy Spirit.
Historical	Flexible	Usable
Where God dwells	Domus Ecclesiae	Community Hub
Vision	Befriending	Life Transformation
Life in all its fullness	Discipleship Projects	Community projects
Silence	Hushed activity	Noisy activity
Work with the elderly	Work with children	Work with community
Significant events in the Church	Significant events in the Churches year	Significant events in the community- death, riots etc
A place for Confession and Anointing	A Place to light candles	A Place to silently meditate
Paid staff	Official volunteers	Casual helpers

Each of these points is vital in developing our understanding of the need for our buildings to be open and usable for the local community- but a balance is required. But this does not mean restricting our mission. On the contrary, the Trinity is life giving, perichorectical, altruistic and unbound by space and time, and this is reflected in the moral ratio. The architecture of the building too will be implicated in this relational model. Buildings which speak of the majesty and awe of God may take Father for granted, and may have to really develop how it speaks of the Son and the Spirit through the churches activity. Likewise, a church built to be a dual purpose hall may require all sorts of additions and alterations to portray the Father aspects of the building.

However, I am also aware that this relational model can also restrict our understanding of the Trinity. It may be better to possibly see the ratio as ascertaining aspects of Christ through an understanding of priest, prophet and king. This requires further thought and digestion, which my sabbatical, sadly, does not leave time for!

This relational model provides a tool for thinking about how the Trinity or our understanding of Christ might influence and inform the uses of our building. In addition, here we see a theological framework where both tent and temple theologies held in tension- for both are required to reflect God in the world.

## Section Eight: Further Questions and Points

There are various areas which ought to be explored, to get a clearer picture of the theology of the buildings, and how this can affect our ministry to the people of England.

These are:

- What can the impact be of developing a Benedictine theology within the context of Parish Churches?
- How might this Trinitarian Moral Ratio be developed and extended?
- How might we assess the impact of the conversion of Constantine on the theology of Church buildings? Reminding ourselves of Helena's founding of monastery churches on Mt Sinai and Mt Tabor.

- How might we develop the better writing, and increased importance of Statements of Significance and Need for Faculty applications- stressing both the vision and theology of any proposed alteration- making these a higher priority?
- How might we continue to work with Heritage Groups / DAC's / Amenity groups to create clearer guidelines for the reordering of the buildings to develop their long term sustainability?
- As in Newcastle, how might Dioceses develop a clearer strategy for the use of their buildings in relation to where regeneration might be taking place- offering concrete resources? (eg M Girt's work in London)
- How might we encourage all churches to become open each day for prayer and for wider community use? What might the role of Ecclesiastical Insurance be? Archdeacon's visitations?
- The Buildings that we have are not a millstone, but a great mission resource. How might we change the agenda in colleges, POT and Deanery support to recognise this fact?
- How might we resource the training of Architects with a theological mind, rather than purely a conservation or contemporary drive. (An MA possibly?)
- How might we support churches in creating trading companies, or link churches together for a trading company to oversee the renting out and income generating activities of different churches? Likewise, where are the model renting forms? How might we get away from the need for individual Licenses under Faculty for any group which takes time away from more profitable exercises? How might the role of temporary Licenses for Archdeacon's be extended?
- What is the impact of our buildings within the rural communities, and how might these be made sustainable when used for community use.

## Section Nine: Conclusions

This journey of discovery of the role of the Church Building has taken all sorts of twists and turns.

I began by suggesting that the Church Building needed to reflect the theology of the Church, and that this changes over time. I also suggested that the role of the Church is wider than liturgy, but is also prophetic and political in its nature.

I then discussed how this informed the development of the parish church model in England, and again how wider political influences have caused the churches presence in England to change over time. It was noted however that a key role for the Church of England was that of serving the whole neighbourhood, and not a select gathering. The Church of England exists to serve its non-members, and over time the church buildings have been changed, adapted and renewed to make this happen.

I then looked at the impact upon the contemporary ecclesiological debate, and how recent reports in the Church of England help or hinder the debate and confidence in the use of our buildings, and then I described how the Eucharist plays a key role in what the role of the church might be. This is a key influence on how our buildings reflect God to the people that we serve.

I then had the great privilege of visiting some excellent projects, and met some wonderful people. Each, in their own way, disclosed to me how they were using their buildings for the delights of human flourishing in their contexts. Their stories were inspirational and exciting. Some had little knowledge, it seemed, of any specific theology of the buildings themselves, only that here was a place where church could happen. Some stated a deeply held view that there was no sacred and secular divide only that their work and their buildings needed to reflect something of God to their communities.

Following on from these visits, I have then suggested that our theology of our buildings ought to reflect something of the Trinity. If our buildings are rooted in God, portraying something of God, and housing the ministry of God, it is our understanding of God that informs our theology. With this in mind, I have suggested a relational model, rooted in the Trinity as a tool to help us get our balances right of using our buildings for either community or liturgical use. In addition, It is clear to me that as God's arms are always open to the communities that we serve, so should our church buildings. This does put greater emphasis upon getting our buildings open for prayer and for wider human flourishing purposes. Likewise, this enables us too to form further opportunities for

income generating, whereby making our buildings more financially secure and sustainable. We must be open to wider partnerships. As the buildings are for the wider community, aspects of the wider community must financially support the mission of our buildings, and use them- at a cost of course!

As for Hackney, as I return from my sabbatical, I am convinced that we don't have this balance right. I am now convinced that the "father and son" nature of the work needs to be beefed up! I can see the need for the reintroduction of Evening Prayer, and a focus upon the teachings of the desert. I can see how the people of Hackney will need teaching apophatic prayer techniques, and be immersed in what it means to love God, and our neighbours as ourselves, without letting our personal baggage get in the way.

This has been an incredible journey, and I am grateful for this opportunity. I hope that these few words might help in the debate of these issues.

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