

Crossing the Threshold: Inspiration and Information.

When: 10th June 2010.

Location: St Paul's Marylebone.

Organised in partnership between Church Urban Fund and the Cathedral and Church Building Division.

Event Sponsored by: EIG.

Defined purpose of the Day:

'The day will help Diocese better understand and support churches who want to increase the community use of their building.'

Content of the Day:

'The day covers the whole process of increasing community usage, split into four steps – Envisioning, Planning, Building and Sustaining. There will be an overview on each section given by a practitioner experienced in their field, as well as useful case studies. ...'

Quotes from the flyer.

Conference Notes.

Paul Franklin of EIG welcomed the 60+ attendees and explained that EIG's involvement was linked to the fact that church buildings used more than just on Sunday got vandalised less often and so were less of a risk to insurers.

Stephen Bowler of the Cathedral & Church Building Division introduced the day, linking it to the 'Building Faith in the Future' Report and the emphasis that the buildings are not the 'House of God' but the 'House of the people of God'. He noted the 'sea change' towards compromise between those who wish to preserve heritage and those who live within it. This day was to be one of a series that would look at the elements of church life.

A leap of Faith? Culture Change for Beginners.

Helen McGowan is the Church Building Support Officer in Coventry Diocese and heads the 'Divine Inspiration' organisation. In her address, Helen noted and challenged some of common issues of perception regarding opening church buildings, highlighting that 'opening up' does not realistically mean just for tourists but for all. Raising the profile of the foundation thinking about 'what the building is there for' is important, well before an architect is appointed. She spoke of the 'Golf Club Syndrome' where a welcome is there for those who fit the rules and know the 'language', "*there for the delectation of the select few*", well illustrated with examples from Coventry Diocese: Eg. On seeing a sign saying 'Come in and find the Peace of the Lord.' she was told that she would have to come back on Sunday when it was open. There are now 6 or 7 churches open 24/7 in that diocese.

Helen encouraged all churches to be objective: Do a 'Welcome Audit' using a complete stranger; Identify your audience (why would people want to come in?); Being open every day is basic hospitality (free sweets); Give permission to enjoy being there; Remember that the average reading age in the UK is that of a 10 year old; Tell your story; Dare to be different (but realistic). First impressions count so tidy up, show connectedness to the whole church by signposting partnerships and other churches, let the spirituality be seen in action.

Key Questions: What is the building currently used for? What is the real need? How might it serve the Community? What do we need to make it happen? Who could we ask?

First Steps.

(eg. community audits, feasibility studies, working with PCC and congregation)

Rev Jack Maple is the Community Adviser in the Diocese of London and was the incumbent in Marylebone when the host building was re-opened and re-ordered in the 1980's. Jack outlined the history of the building and the surrounding community – which has the highest deprivation index in the Diocese – and noted how such buildings can help break down barriers within and between communities by opening up the building for use by community groups. This does mean the “need to capacity build congregations so they have the skills and confidence to change”, encouraging individuals to see their contribution as being valued in the community [not just the church] and so developing a greater sense of self worth.

Jack noted that, in reality, it's not what a building looks like that is important, it's about how it's used. He adapted a quote from ++Rowan: “The church is most affective and most attractive when the story that it tells is also the action that it takes”. It means a wider understanding of sacred space: The Eucharistic feast *and* the washing of people's feet.

Cluster based community workers to support church development was suggested as a way forward, along with a community audit looking at what the congregation is positive about, what the profile of the church is within the local community and local agencies (counsellors, charities, etc.) and so find who the church could work with in the future.

Example of Good Practice – Rapid Parish Development Programme. [RPDP]

Nick Ralph is the Social Responsibility Adviser in the Diocese of Portsmouth. He started his session by asking if anyone knew what single word was most commonly used by teenagers to describe the church. ‘Boring’ was suggested. According to a study [Buried Treasure: Phil Rankin] the word is ‘Shit’. Nick noted that the C of E is unique, wants to be successful, needs to change/invest or die, and needs to take opportunities wherever they arise – examples including using a redundant but town-centred car showroom for church events.

The Diocese of Portsmouth's RPDP is a workshop based programme for three parishes at a time (for mutual support during the programme). The programme helps them to understand real local dynamics, the key elements of their development, and to present clear opportunities to ‘stakeholders’. They work with parishes willing to undergo change so as to encourage envy amongst those parishes that resist change. It was reported that two of the eight parishes that have completed the programme have walked away from their original building and put their assets to better use in the community. Spending money on activities (rather than buildings) has more chance to show that the church is alive.

The impact on the Diocese: There is more work done by diocesan officers at parish level; there is an investment in change; they are working with the willing (rather than the resistant); and they are creating envy through success.

The impact on the parishes is very positive. There was a plea to be positive in whatever is done. “Have some fun – smile!”

The cost of the RPDP per parish is £700.

Planning – When not to employ an architect.

Alex Coppock is an architect and a director of Communion Ltd. whose company motto is: Where space, design and people meet. Alex started his address by outlining what architects actually do and what they do not do. He stated clearly that parishes need to present a 'Brief' not just a set of ideas to the architect to work with. This Brief should be developed after consultations and a community audit to look at the issues of 'who are we?', 'what do we want?', and 'who will work with us?' It should also include:

Project Requirements – overall vision

Statement of Needs – and how this feeds into the design.

Statement of Significance – and how this feeds into the design.

The design should sit between the need and enhancement of the building

A Draft Funding Document is also best produced at this stage.

[see: www.churchcare.org.uk]

When the Brief is complete, *then* find an architect whose previous work has caught the attention of those responsible for the project. Be clear about what they are required to do. Architects do not do; archaeology, fundraising, structural mechanical and electrical engineering, quantity surveying, the long term running of the project.

Planning – Dealing with the changed fundraising landscape.

Maggie Durran has written the book 'The Church Fundraisers Handbook' and directed people to the updated re-print for details on this subject. In general, she noted that trusts have less money available than in previous years but that the Heritage Activities Lottery Fund will be releasing more money.

Maggie advises that modest schemes have the best chance under this climate of 'Basics only'. Trust grants have become very competitive whereas Heritage grants are based on priority: A project that fails one year may get funding if it re-applies the following year. There is an over supply of grants for children's work and an under-supply for grants for the elderly. Items/issues that should be included in any grant application include: Significance, need, feasibility study, options report, benefits of project, architectural details, revenue budget, letters of support (often forgotten), and recent church accounts.

NB: It was at this point in the proceedings that my notes show that I was getting concerned about the lack of reference to God, Christ and faith. It was all very functional. Even the 'Community Audits' failed to give space to seek God's Calling for a parish.

Building – How do you help PCCs/vicars run a church AND a building site?

Revd Cannon John Kiddle sub-titled his illustrated address 'Leadership in a building project' said that such leadership can sometimes feel like a ship far out to sea or a rally car stuck in the mud. He went on to outline a number of themes for leadership of a building project:

Vision – Keeping the What, Why and How in perspective – ensuring that ownership of the project remains clear.

Communication – Multi-media

Leadership – Holding the Vision, setting the pace, training for support.

Teamwork – clarity of roles, knowing skills, giving thanks and emotional support – 'We're in this together'.

Finance – Thanksgiving and generosity, clarity of purpose – advice, resources, partnerships.

Prayer – [Hurray! something of our faith!] Rooted in God, listen, being changed by God, spiritual life of the parish, mission of the parish, different perspectives.

Journey – encouragement, seeking next step, companionship, accompanying, reflecting, celebrating.

Sustaining: An overview

Revd Graham Buckle is the present incumbent of St Paul's Marylebone. He started his presentation by asking us to be silent for a few minutes and let God seep back into the proceedings.

He described sustaining a project as being partly about “thinking on your feet” and keeping a sense of humour. It is easy to have the vision, but a different thing to keep it going. It needs enthusiastic leadership that uses the resources available to match needs with those resources as well as sustaining the original vision and allowing movement to a new vision. He called for training that would enable incumbents to manage the dynamics of people, and spoke of the example of Islam in nurturing people to become active (in a positive way) in their faith.

Examples of Good Practice

1 – Underlying Principles.

Rev Simon Taylor, incumbent at Christ the Lord, Crawley, departed from the original title for his address (about partnerships with local government) and discussed the underlying principles required for sustaining the project he works within. These principles are; support, guidance, intervention, and mentoring. These are what he needs to help him in his job and he looks to the diocese for this help. He said that there was a need for a ‘diocesan person’ to visit (not phone) him in his office. He also noted that sometimes we forget that what we have we can share with others (including joy) and said that there were key words to sustaining a project: Values, Volunteer base, Visibility, Vision. All these Vs go towards liberating energy, not just money. [see <http://www.crawleychurches.org/ctl>]

2 – What are the key things that churches need to effectively market/promote their centre?

Charlotte Benstead has had many years experience in the media and works with *InSpire St Peters* [www.in-spire.org.uk]. She advised that all forms of media should be used to highlight events and activities, sometimes using a ‘news’ format to highlight a forthcoming event. Various examples were given from full magazine articles to small ‘nibs’ that are used to fill gaps on a page. There was a warning given not to sign documents that could lead to the syndication of items out of the control of the originators.

The day gave a good, basic overview of the issue of increased community use of church buildings and how changes could be achieved.

Revd Robert Hill.
Social Responsibility Adviser.
16th June 2010.