

## **Something to bear in mind as we consider the arrangement of the parish church - and possible changes...**

Unsurprisingly the Church has views over the design and re-design and arranging and re-arranging of churches.

The Bishops of England and Wales have provided general guidance on the design of churches in *Consecrated for Worship*, its' Directory on Church Building<sup>1</sup>. It is especially attentive to how church building 'house' the liturgical rites in their post-conciliar form.

As our present church was designed prior to the Council and has been only superficially 'adjusted' since then, we need to take this matter into account. The following extract from *Consecrated for Worship*, may be helpful for us all to read:

*The renewal of the Liturgy mandated by the Second Vatican Council was inspired by one visionary theme: that under divine grace the Church is created and sustained by its liturgical life.*

- *The Church assembles at the font to enact its birth in the person of new members.*
- *It is gathered and schooled by the Word proclaimed at the ambo in its midst.*
- *It centres its life on the altar where the Eucharist, the source and summit of all its activity, is offered.*

*The sacred space of a church building is given shape by the rites of the Church.*

*Each parish has a responsibility for the proper and dignified celebration of all these rites, therefore parishes will reflect from time to time on how best to employ the ritual space they have.*

*Communities worshipping in older churches, particularly those which are listed, need to weigh carefully the requirements of a renewed Liturgy and the need to respect the historic and artistic values of the existing building. Those presented with the opportunity to build a new church should in turn accept the responsibility of creating an inheritance of value.*

*The Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, published in 1963, called for the 'full, conscious and active participation' of the people to be the aim considered 'before all else' in the restoration of the Liturgy (SC 14).*

*To this end the Church has authorised revision of the rites themselves so that they may convey more clearly what they signify, the translation of the texts into vernacular languages so the faithful may understand better the prayer of the Church.*

*In addition, with respect to church buildings, many changes to fabric and layout have been made, to give the assembly a better view of the liturgical action, and particularly to more easily associate themselves with the action that is performed not by the presiding priest alone, but by the whole Christ, Body and Head (Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 1136). ...*

*In the forty or so years since the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council the introduction of the revised rites has had a profound effect on how the Liturgy is celebrated and understood. The principal focus, the heart of a church, remains the altar on which the Eucharist is celebrated, and the ambo from which the word is proclaimed.*

*But around these, and ordered to them, there are other ritual spaces: for the rites of initiation, penance and reconciliation, marriage and holy orders. Within the church building space needs to be provided for the whole Liturgy to be celebrated with dignity by the gathered people of God.*

*Often the changes made immediately after the Council were intended especially to give the congregation a better view of the sanctuary and the actions that take place there. Subsequent experience has taught that this is not enough. Participation in the Liturgy calls for action and movement, not just by those on the sanctuary but by the whole assembly.*

*The Liturgy happens not just within the sanctuary but throughout the whole sacred space. In order to do the actions that are proper to it, the assembly needs to face in different directions, to process, to kneel and stand in comfort, the better to express its active role as the worshipping Body of Christ.*

*Church buildings have to facilitate many liturgical and devotional activities in addition to the celebration of Mass: celebration of the Sacrament of Penance, walking the Way of the Cross, meditation before the Blessed Sacrament and so on. They have to accommodate many different people as well. In the quest to provide an inclusive and hospitable place, access to all parts of the building should be equally available to all. As an instance of this, particular focus in recent years has been on legal changes favouring access for those with disabilities.*

*The vocation of the community is to announce the Gospel to everyone and this has to be expressed not only in what the Church does but also in the buildings it uses.*

*Cf Consecrated for Worship 7-12*

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<sup>1</sup> The Directory can be accessed at <https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/CFW/index.shtml>.