

Enabling Development - How Can We Be Responsible?

Some years ago in London, a legal determination was made to decide who owned a heritage church building in the City. After some consideration it was ruled that ownership was jointly held by the current congregation and God.

Firstly, to whom are we responsible when we think about the church's buildings and the possibility of Enabling Development? Is It:

- Our predecessors – they created the property to be effective for the work of the church.
- The current membership – as the current custodians it is our role to use it for effective mission today.
- Our successors – it is also our role to prepare it for the future church as an asset, not a liability.
- God - we should prayerfully ask how we can make the buildings and land more effective for the work that he has given us.

Of course we must be responsible stewards in terms of maintaining the buildings that have been handed down to us. Many churches do not have a maintenance contract to regularly clean the gutters and downpipes. Although out of sight, this is basic common sense. Very costly repairs result from ignoring this.

But if we have an opportunity for Enabling Development that can help to fund changes that improve mission potential, we should seriously consider them. Do our current buildings present an invitation to hospitality and welcome or are they a barrier to the average person in the street? Could we be creating some new caring ministry if we had different facilities? Some other opportunities are listed in my last blog.

Acting responsibly will include getting independent advice. You will certainly need legal advice on any proposed joint development agreement to see that you are getting good value, but you should also have independent design advice to see that the outcome for the purposes of the church will be maximised. Presenting independent professional advice to both leadership committees and to the whole church membership is the best way of bringing everyone on the journey of change. You should expect it to focus upon the benefits that it will bring to the core business of the church. Church leaders can set this into the context of the spiritual work of the church.

So in addition to the basic responsibility of looking after property, I believe that we have a responsibility to consider whether some of it could be redeployed to make the work of the church more effective. Particularly in cases where the church is property-rich and cash-poor.

Next time: Enabling Development – do we still need fundraising?

More comments about the book: [Making Property Serve Mission - Rethinking the Church's Buildings for the 21st Century](#) from reviewers:

This book...challenges us to think creatively, think big and think mission. This book will help you think through all the key issues and thus give church leaders some confidence as they take steps to consider concept drawings, designs and plans.

Bishop Paul White ;The Melbourne Anglican



This church asked Studio B to investigate the potential to develop their unused land to meet the needs of aged and disabled, incorporating development value.