



1. Leading Change in Church Buildings

Almost everybody sits in the same place when they come to church. There is something comfortable about the familiar. Yet, in the cinema or in a theatre seats are often allocated; the choice is limited and we are in unfamiliar territory. It is here that we are often confronted by radical ideas and emotional challenges that we absorb. We tend not to feel ownership of the cinema as we do of “our church”. However, many people have had significant spiritual experiences in their church space.

Vision for Mission

When a church leader has had a vision of a future church building that will improve their ministry, some of the members will be resistant to change because the stability and emotional comfort that they enjoy is being threatened. All are important members of the church family and the leader needs to bring as many people with him or her as possible.

Jesus did not say, “Go into all the world and establish yourselves in familiar buildings”. Instead he said, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the son and the holy spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”. Matt 28:19. He also said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:35.

Core Business

The core mission of the church today needs to be relevant to people in the 21st century. How do we balance being missional in a way that is relevant in the 21st-century, the core business of the church, with ensuring that we love one another with all of our hangups and preferences when it comes to managing change?

David MacInnes at St Aldates, Oxford introduced the idea of radical change to the heritage building through preaching about mission and issuing a discussion document entitled, “ Churches Have to Adapt”, which started with the history of change in St Aldates. Similarly, Peter MacPherson at St Alfred’s, Blackburn North explained to the members how the church had simply outgrown its 1962 building and, without change, the property was holding back the mission of the church.

Mission

The key to moving any church forward to change to its property is to focus on the specific mission of the individual church. The development of the brief and any design proposals for change must be clearly based upon how it will benefit the church community’s own mission calling before God. Every church should expect this to be described clearly by their architect as part of any proposals for change. Only by focusing on mission can a church expect to have a strong consensus to move forward.