

### 3. Property Barriers to the Church's Mission

There are many ways in which the church's property can act against its mission. As members familiar with our own church buildings, we may not see them as others do, but their impact can be significant. By understanding them we can fix them next time we change our buildings. Here are a few:



#### **Solid Walls and Small Windows**

Banks, town halls and churches all used to have monumental architecture. It somehow fitted the impression that they wished to convey; one of dependability and reliability. This gave the institutions credibility in a world long before digital technology. But banks and town halls have changed. We are used to seeing inside before we enter. Like it or not we have become the shopping centre society. Heritage churches do not offer a visual invitation to enter but have defaulted to the fortress genre by comparison with the rest of society's public buildings. The transparent contemporary entry building to church has become the means of overcoming this barrier; particularly by the outside public being able to see people just like themselves socialising and enjoying life within.

#### **Unfamiliarity**

Church used to be the place that was the default location for key events in everybody's life. Baptisms, weddings, funerals, Christmas and Easter were events in the calendar for most people. This has changed and many people have no idea what their local church looks like inside. It has not become the default place to go when someone is in distress or needs support.

By having community groups renting the church facilities for their own activities or by hosting community social events, the church community is getting its local people over the threshold and creating a familiarity with the churches property.

#### **No Opportunity to Sample**

How can people decide if church is for them? Are they allowed to hover in the doorway for 10 minutes to see if this is going to suit them? We expect people to come in and participate, joining in songs of praise to God and declaring a creed of belief which may be completely new to them. Do we expect them to be hypocritical if they have no faith yet?

Mariners Church in LA has a cafe which runs while church is on with screens and audio from the adjoining church service. A pastor has been allocated to the cafe people who can listen to see if church and faith is for

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them. To make this ministry available, the church has to be willing to run a commercial cafe at the same time as its worship service and it needs to be an attractive place to be.

### **Discomfort**

Sandy Miller, past rector of Holy Trinity Brompton said that, 150 years ago church was more comfortable than the average house in London. Things have changed and even the seating at sporting arenas is more comfortable than the church bench where people are stacked like books on a bookshelf.

Pews are one of the greatest barriers to flexibility as well as comfort. People will sit longer in a lecture theatre than in church listening to a talk. We need to have an appreciation ergonomics in the church.

### **Lack of Hospitality Equipment**

We live in a society that expects refreshment and considers the basics of tea, coffee, juices and snack food to be available as a mark of hospitality. If we are expected to stay on site anywhere for longer than two hours we would expect to receive some refreshment. If this cannot be seen as we enter the building people will expect to have to move on to find it elsewhere before long.

Signs of hospitality need to be visible as people enter your church building and you can then engage them in conversation later.

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