

St Anne's Community Centre: Conversion to a "multi-functional community space/place of worship" - B Thomson (15/02/2022)

At the January Synod Meeting, I spoke of " 'my dream' for the Parish being to have an **outward-looking** financially sustainable church (ANNEX). I was considering the years to the Church building being 200 years old and more. With a congregation that's steadily reducing in numbers, rising Church & Presbytery maintenance and running costs are unfortunately likely to make Church & Presbytery upkeep eventually unsustainable. The only way I could see sustainability in the long-term, was by offering the option of selling the Church & Presbytery ground down to Terrace Road to finance what High Peak Borough Council would call a "multi-functional community space/place of worship". I called it the 'Hub' for short.

Practically, it would mean changing our current St Anne's Community Centre for this new expanded use as a new site and building for the 'Hub' is unlikely. Here I paint a picture of what it could be like under a proactive management team. You'll need to use your imagination.

The team have made changes. Energy needs are substantially met through solar panels and heat sink technologies provided by COP26 funding. It's a dementia- and disability-friendly place, with a platform lift providing access to the upper rooms. It's managed under a 'Live Simply' credo and the team's positive marketing and partnerships have created more amenity and bring in many more community activities than our existing Centre had pre-Pandemic. For example:

- Many enjoy the Hub's Community Cafe with independent external access and toilet created by part of building out over the space occupied by the Parish's garage and rear court
- Its popular Playschool is highly subscribed
- Its Youth Club members, besides their own activities, socially interact with the Sunday Club (now open to all isolated) via weekly indoor sports (kurling, bowls, bocha) and help with Internet use.
- With help from the University of Derby and Thomas More Chaplaincies, young Christians within the Youth Club use the Centre's live-streaming technology to broadcast to their peers in Buxton via their own YouTube TV channel, some broadcasts being about Christian values e.g. helping others through volunteering, which they do. Their volunteering draws in our Confirmation Candidates
- Zink employability are partnering as Hub and Cafe activities and tasks offer ways to bring people back into work practice
- It's Cinema Facility (part of its Community Arts focus that also attracts grants) has people and families mingling in the Community Cafe before and after screenings.
- There's also a specific room for commercial hire as an office, for example, by business 'start-ups'.

That's some of ways it could bring us in contact with many more people and increase income. I can think of others and I'm sure you can. It's financial sustainability is assured by Community use, which, besides providing income, enables community grants for maintenance and development,

Regarding our worship, we have a private area for individual prayer, confessions and week-day use, possibly through the rear extension of the building, with Sunday Mass being said in a community-use space. Many of us stay on afterwards for a coffee and chat. Parish social events have increased and help engage parents of 1st Communicants, Confirmation Candidates and other parishioners.

Finally, should this proposal fail, much of what I've mentioned could still occur in our current St Anne's Community Centre to increase our interaction with the wider Buxton community and assure its financial sustainability. All it takes is commitment and a proactive approach.

ANNEX

"My dream for my parish so that it can become more outward-looking and more missionary" Bruce Thomson

We have to practice our faith in an ever-increasing secular and multi-cultural society where the numbers of Catholic Church parishioners and priests is declining. Even Catholic Ireland recognises the need for change "What is now emerging is a different sense of "ownership" of the Church and its mission - from a "clergy-owned" to a Church truly "owned" by the People of God." (Archbishop Dermot Farrell, Dublin Mass, 3rd June 2021).

Looking forward, **'my dream'** for the Parish is to have an **outward-looking financially sustainable** church. We do this by creating a "multi-functional community-based place of worship". Call it the 'Hub' for short. It would have a private worship room for our individual prayer/confessions and week-day use, as Sunday Mass would be said in one of its community activity spaces. Community use, besides providing income, would keep the 'Hub' open to community grants for maintenance and development. The 'Hub' would have many more community activities than our existing St Anne's Community Centre had pre-Covid. These would connect us with many more people than the proposed 'community space' in Church that is required by High Peak Borough Council's Local Plan because of Buxton's loss of the Community Centre as a community amenity.

To achieve this dream, what do we need to stop doing? What do we need to leave behind?

With a dwindling and ageing congregation providing less and less income over the years, economics says it should be the Church/Presbytery and ground to Terrace Rd we **leave behind** to finance 'Hub' construction. We sell that for property development with off-road car-parking entered from Terrace Rd. The housing mix would include a small flat to accommodate a Parish Priest for as long as we're supplied with one. If a site was not found nearby for 'Hub' construction, the Community Centre could be extended and adapted for this dual-use or be new-build if allowed. If a new site was found, the Community Centre could be repurposed for social need e.g. housing and/or refugees.

What do we need to stop doing?

1. Diocese practice leaves parishioners with the consequences of decisions made by Parish Priests and Diocese Administrators long after they've gone from the scene. When we're down to a visiting itinerant priest, the Pastoral Parish Council will have to **stop** being advisory and become executive along Methodist Church Governance lines where *'Local churches manage their own affairs (including church property) through lay volunteers called church stewards.'* To prepare for that we all need a better understanding of our Parish finances. If the 2018-2021 annual financial statements were reformulated into an itemised income/expenditure 'balance sheet' for each of the Church, Presbytery and Community Centre, we'd be better able to evaluate building proposals based on sound knowledge from their individual accounts.

2. Also, to compensate for the reduction in priests, we will have to step up to the mark in spiritual and pastoral care as well. Who knows if we'll have a Parish Priest after Fr Gerry retires? The Church has to **stop** holding lay women back from being able to contribute sacramentally.

Being 'more missionary'

Our Parish Mission Statement *"To learn about God's love and to share it"* was agreed in 2004 as was our being able to achieve it by:-

** Providing meaningful and uplifting prayers and celebration*

** Increasing our understanding of the Word of God and having the courage to face the new challenges of putting our faith into practice*

** Welcoming all and creating opportunities for everyone to be involved in parish life*

** Offering love, care and support to the wider community.*

We become **"missionary"** by following the pathways above and "walking the talk". Actions, particularly selfless, speak louder than words. James (2:17) says *"So it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead"*. Can we remind ourselves weekly of our Mission Statement by putting it back at the foot of our Newsletter? By now, parishioner taxpayers have either made out standing orders/gift aid declarations or decided not to. New parishioners can be approached individually. Also, our Mission Statement says a lot more about us to visitors than "BANK DETAILS FOR STANDING ORDERS".