

Proposal for a building project @ St Denys Church in the Parish of Lisvane

The church of St Denys in the Parish of Lisvane is a small medieval church with an extension built on the North side in the 1970's. This extension comprises of an extra nave and a small church hall. At the time it more than doubled the seating capacity of the church. The resulting building is 'L' shaped with the Altar at the corner of the 'L'. The choir and organ occupies the old Chancel at the east of the building and is completely invisible from the 70's extension. There are pews with a central aisle in the east/west part of the nave and pews with a side aisle in the north/south part of the nave; neither part of the nave is visible from the other. This means that the overall effect is of two congregations meeting at the same time, in the same building, taking part in the same service, but invisible to each other. Because the easiest entrance to the north/south part of the nave is through the Church hall, which is at the north end of that nave, many people enter the building that way. This means that with two entrance/exit points, together with two parts of the nave that are invisible to each other, there are members of the same congregation who simply never meet. Thus the shape of our building is clearly a hindrance to good fellowship.

By 2001 the congregation had grown to such an extent that it was decided to split it in half and run two principal Sunday morning services instead of one. This decision was also heavily influenced at that time by a clear dissatisfaction with the worship style offered at the single Sunday morning service. It became clear that we had a section of the congregation whose preferred worship style was fairly formal and would include the strong Choral tradition of the parish. It was also clear that another section of the congregation found this worship style very difficult and preferred a much less formal style that would include the growing interest in modern worship songs. The existing single church service was attempting to bridge this gap but was itself a source of discontent. The decision to split the congregation therefore was made on the two grounds of overwhelming numbers for the size of the building and a desire to offer worship that appealed to as large a cross section of the community as possible. The result is that we now have two completely different styles of worship in two principal Sunday morning services. At present this has also solved the seating problem, however the informal service is continuing to grow and is already getting towards the limit of the available space. The room required by the worship group also means that there is absolutely no extra space at the front of the church and so innovative ideas in worship are restricted by the available space. Thus the size of the building is clearly a hindrance to church growth.

For some time it has been difficult to accommodate the numbers of people who might want to attend weddings and funerals at St Denys. There are a growing number of weddings in Lisvane and this coupled with a relatively wealthy community means that the weddings sometimes require in excess of 200 seats. This is more than we can comfortably accommodate. Some weddings from Lisvane have even gone to neighbouring parishes simply because the accommodation is larger. Thus the size of the building is clearly a hindrance to good pastoral care.

In recent years the Junior Church, which now meets at the same time as the informal service, has grown rapidly. Originally the Junior Church was accommodated in the existing church hall

but in recent years this has become impossible. By the grace of God the parish were left a house across the road from the church by a faithful parishioner and this house has had to be altered to accommodate living quarters upstairs for a parish youth worker and her husband and space downstairs for junior church. This space is shared with the Parish office and other mid-week youth activities. Despite the alterations we have made to this building we are clear that it is inadequate to the task. The space is cramped and the children must cross a fairly busy road to reach it. The original church hall accommodates one of the Junior Church groups and Church house accommodates the other three groups. Each group is now at the limit of its accommodation.

Our proposal is to take down the North wall of the medieval church and to demolish the 70's extension completely so as to make space to build an open chancel and nave seating about 250 people with room around the altar, and to build a 'church hall' comprising of a number of multi-purpose rooms, all of which will have a common single entrance/exit. The architect Mr Peter Bird of Caroe, has come up with an innovative design which allows plenty of natural light and enables us to 'show off' the medieval nature of the original building. The original brief given to the architect included the following

- Worship space should be an uncluttered (i.e. minimise columns) open space and seat c250-300
- Moveable seats rather pews
- Single entrance to both church and hall
- Five rooms in hall to be multi-purpose for possible use as coffee shop, bookshop, Choir vestry, crèche, junior church rooms, counselling, kitchen, toilets etc.

He was also charged to preserve as much as possible of the existing view of the church from the south. This is by far the best view of the existing building and the architect has managed to preserve it in his plan.

It has been suggested that we might alternatively look for another site on which to build. There are a number of objections to this suggestion. Firstly land in the parish is very expensive and not easily made available. It is our view that the purchase of sufficient land alone would make this project impossible to finance. Secondly the original medieval church has already been radically altered by the Victorians who stripped away the wall plaster and imposed a barrel ceiling, and by the addition of the extension in the 70's. Our proposals, whilst preserving much of the medieval structure are simply continuing the tradition of altering this building so as to make it more useful for the existing community. Thirdly there is no desire in the congregation or the PCC for us to be responsible for two churches rather than one. Indeed the view has been expressed that a new building might attract people away from the existing medieval building and result in that building over time becoming redundant.

As a congregation we are committed to numerical and spiritual church growth. Our present accommodation does not aid us in that task. We are looking for the opportunity of creating a confident, safe and comfortable building which will be for the glory of God and for the extension of his kingdom in this parish.