

## Stacy's Reflections on the Church Project, 18/10/2023

### A little about me:

I am very aware that I am a temporary person in Hartshill. That curates come and go, and the church belongs to the local community not the person who comes and goes.

I am also someone who loves ideas... not so much the idea itself but the process of teams, groups, communities building together an idea or vision. I love the layering of an idea from a person and then another person bringing a different perspective and another person bringing a different concern and another person an unexpected hope and the idea being refined and formed and those aha moments of even the idea changing. That collaboration, interaction, mutual learning just excites me. So you may find that I sound excited and on board with each idea that comes up.

### Perspectives on Buildings and Worship

I find a space has a big impact on me and how I feel. So, for example, I visited Ely Cathedral on a very rainy day, and it was so dark inside that it actually made me feel a bit low. I visited a church in Wiltshire and it was full of plaques on walls and lots of flyers and things around and it made me a bit stressed because it was too busy and cluttered. Alternatively, I went to a Lutheran church in Germany (which was meeting in their hall because winter) and it was set up for the service such that there was a table/altar in front of a wall of near floor to ceiling windows overlooking a wooden glen. It had warm light and a sort of cozy warmth and I felt both comfortable and reverent as I saw the glory of God's creation behind the table. And the burst glory baptistry window at Coventry Cathedral, if I'm in front of that, I feel overwhelmed and amazed and who God is.

I have also worshiped in a variety of different contexts and buildings – school gyms, movie theatres, purpose built modern churches, old store fronts in malls, traditional churches, cathedrals, outdoors... God is worshipped anywhere and in any space and is not limited by how we choose to design our churches. That being said, my personal opinion is that the space influences the worship. I find it jarring when the space and the style of worship are in conflict. I just can't settle and fully experience the worship because the message of the worship and the message of the space are saying opposite things. For example, if a service is trying to be sort of communal, intimate, reflective, it is lovely to have that in a small, close space like a chancel and when it is in a large, cold feeling space, like the centre of the Nave in Coventry, it doesn't feel communal, it feels isolating. Also, if trying to worship in a way that is about awe and the incredible beauty and mystery that is God, that is hard to feel when in an industrial centre former shop.

Basically, worship-theology-building all interact with each other. There may be some for whom church services are about awe and the wonder of God and in some ways being pulled into the otherworldly along with the communion of saints to encounter the Almighty God in a way that sustains them as they go into the rest of their difficult and challenging weeks. There may be some for whom their spirituality is based on a very embodied theology and so their desired church services are about community and more of a practical connection with Jesus through story and action. There are, of course, many other ways in which people connect with God and those play out in different desires as to what the building should do and what services should look like. I don't know that we always have words for why certain ideas upset or frustrate us but, in many cases, it may have to do with the underlying theology or values rather than the specifically, for example, the organ vs. band.

My hope is that through the process of trying to understand what to do to make the church long term sustainable, people come to understand their own faith and spirituality better and the mission of the church more. I hope everyone feels heard and their concerns cared about no matter what the end design.

### Church specific

I don't feel as though it is my place as an interloper to influence anyone towards any particular solution, I will however mention several things that, from my perspective, are important to think about when looking at what we do.

- This is anecdotal not statistically valid. I have had several conversations where locals have said 'I didn't know the church was open' or 'the church is always closed'. While the church community may know that some of the activities in the community centre are church sponsored, from the outside, people see a closed church door almost all the time. What message do we want the church building to give from the outside? Personally, I want the message to be you are invited, you are welcome, we are open. There are many ways to deal with this, from communication methods to opening the church building, to partnering with groups to use the church, to reordering and renting to .... Obviously, there are also funerals and assemblies to consider.
- It sounds bad but really, the church needs to have more money to sustain the building and ministry. We can't rely on regular giving to do so. How can the church be used in such a way as to increase income and make it more resilient?