

## THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

There is a tension in the parish between two options.

A: Keep the Church as it is

B: Alter the Church to serve us better in the future

### A: KEEP THE CHURCH AS IT IS

The arguments that support this view are:

- We like it the way it is.
- We think that this is what the wider community wants.
- People in the wider community will only give to the redevelopment if we keep it the way it is.
- People in the church will only give if we keep it the way it is.
- We want to get back to our church as soon as possible.
- We want to keep the cost down and change to the church will add to the cost and it will take longer to get back to our church.
- Keeping costs down are important because we are not a big church and have to be realistic about what we can afford.

Anecdotal comments made to me are: “When I sit in the church I feel at peace – I miss that”; “I remember us all scrunched up in a pew at a Christmas Service”; “I want my funeral to be in the church”; “we like the church the way it is and want it to stay the same”; “Why is it taking so long to get back to St Albans?”

### B: ALTER THE CHURCH TO SERVE US BETTER IN THE FUTURE

The arguments that support this view are:

- This crisis is a once in a lifetime opportunity to make changes that set up the church well for the future.
- Some of the changes may not be that expensive.
- If the space was more flexible the usage of the church would increase and that would mean more people would come to it.
- The need for the church to connect with younger generations is too important to not be prepared to make changes.
- Changes to worship patterns require greater flexibility.

Anecdotal comments made to me are:” why would you go back to a dark and gloomy church when we have this light and comfortable space with this magnificent visual connection to nature”; the people who want to go back to the church as it is hold their view so strongly that I don’t feel safe expressing my view”.

#### FACTS

- The Diocesan Trustees own the church building site.
- The Parish own the Vicarage and hall site.
- We cannot proceed with any plan without Diocesan approval.
- The Diocese has made clear that they won’t give approval if the project doesn’t “future proof” the church and increase its usage significantly.
- The church is in serious decline in the Western world. Congregations are aging and many parishes (including in this Diocese) will cease to exist in five years. Increasingly younger generations do not go to church. We don’t know clearly what church will be like in the future, but we do know that we need to be adaptable. Our ability to do this is affected by the flexibility of our context. Form affects function.

#### TWO NARRATIVES

Two narratives in the Parish and the different views are causing tensions. The fear is that “my” narrative will lose out. Winners and losers. Past and future in tension. In all this there must be a solution that creates unity and not winners or losers.

The only way to find this is not by more talking but by believing that it is in prayer together that God will show the way that builds his church and builds us together. I am calling us as a church to a week of prayer and fasting (for those who can) to seek God’s face and discover his solution. This will start on the first Sunday in Lent (1 March). More to follow in the New Year about the practical details of this.