

The story so far...

...of the 'Wellspring Project'

to enable St Matthias Church to be fit to serve the next generation

What a fantastic Christian community this is to be part of. Young and old. And a wonderfully healthy spread of and appreciation

of the different ways in which we prefer to offer our worship. But we're united by our desire

- to worship God,
- to make new disciples for Jesus – and better ones of ourselves;
- and to work with the Holy Spirit to transform this community, our homes, our local and national communities more Kingdom of God shaped.

The reordering story begins way back, with a very faithful and prayerful community here just waiting for the fresh start that our arrival enabled.

A few months after we arrived in 2014 about 100 people did a six-week course called "Everybody welcome"- do you remember it?

When 90 or more of us met together at the end of the course, we agreed that while the church is beautifully lit, and wonderfully decorated and looked after, several parts of the furnishings – notice boards, library, pigeon holes, coffee serving facilities, cupboard storage are all either inadequate, or very tatty or both.

And the church looks dead on the outside...with the closed wooden doors, and no way to look inside from walking by...



So we agreed to start improving things to make the building work **for** us to offer God the Father's welcome to everyone.

- We doubled the number of people in our welcome teams
- We began to improve signage and website
- We resurfaced the car park
- And, we planned to start a new outreach service in the Hall for families 'Breakfastzone'

We also decided that we want to:



- open up West End doors with glass for people to see inside and use this entrance once again.
- upgrade the furnishings and create more space in a 'welcome area' at back (west) end of church nave.
- make seating more comfortable
- upgrade the audio visual in the church



So in the autumn of 2014 the PCC began to explore how we should go about this:

John Gingell didn't need any holding back to develop plans for upgrading the AV system which he had been wanting to work on for many years

And we were fortunate enough to have two tame architects to help us with some initial ideas:

Mike Burt, part of St Matthias family for many years helped us look at

- how we might get level access in through the West End
- turn some pews around and taking some out at the back
- maybe having a glass room for a creche
- have some sort of canopy to create a sort of false ceiling over the back part of the church

Judy and Paul Stannard's son-in-law Tom Ringrose developed these ideas further and in particular caught on to the idea of raising the whole level of the West End car park to make it easier to get into the church.

And then in about October 2014, the Rector, John, was powerfully struck in a bible reading about King Joash encouraging the Israelite priests to stop sitting on money they'd received to repair the temple and to get on with it! He came across the same text in a different place (it's once in 2 Kings and once in 2 Chronicles) on the very day the Friends of St Matthias were given a cheque for £150, 000 to be spent on a large project for the church.

It seemed a clear sign to us that we should begin work in earnest in looking for a suitable architect to begin to take the project forward.

And so early in 2015 we met with two local architects.

Unfortunately neither really inspired us and so the Diocesan advisors suggested a few more firms, among who were onto **Communion Architects**, led by Alex Coppock, who though he lived in Hereford had won national awards for church reordering which not only inspired us with their designs, but what was particularly noticeable was Alex's approach to working with us. He really did understand how churches worked.

By this time the church had also been given a further £45,000 in bequests which we were able to use to begin to pay the various fees and undertake the various surveys that we needed to take.

First amongst these was a detailed survey of the building, followed by a detailed report on the history of the building and of the furniture to assess its "significance".

If anyone wants to change anything in a grade '2 star' listed building, you need to demonstrate that your need for change is more important than any loss or damage to any of the significant structures.

And any proposed changes have to be negotiated with the Exeter Diocesan Advisory Committee for church buildings, the DAC, a group of historians and architects and other building specialists who also have to consider the views of people like Historic England (formerly English Heritage), the Victorian Society in our case and the Church Buildings Council.

It's only with the DAC's approval that plans can go before what is effectively the chief planning officer for churches, the Chancellor of the Diocese, who in our case is also a very busy High Court Judge.

A "building group" began to work with Alex Coppock to develop the plans. This was a group from the PCC and also included John Hart - chair of the fabric committee and from early on John Gingell joined us too.

We had all sorts of ideas at the start, many of which we just had to abandon when we discovered how significant parts of our furniture were.

In particular we realised that the west wooden screen and choir stalls had particular significance such that we would not be allowed to make major changes to these more intricately carved pieces.

We had wanted to completely remove the West screen at one point – but we knew then that there was no way that would be allowed.

We then thought of moving it elsewhere and putting in some extra windows into the West end of the church to let in much more light, but we discovered that we were never going to get permission for that either!



We had wanted to remove the middle section of the unbelievably uncomfortable choir pews in the chancel to create more space in the middle of the chancel for other services – even to have special new pews! – but again, there was no way we were going to be able to remove any of these highly intricate and highly significant pieces of carved woodwork.

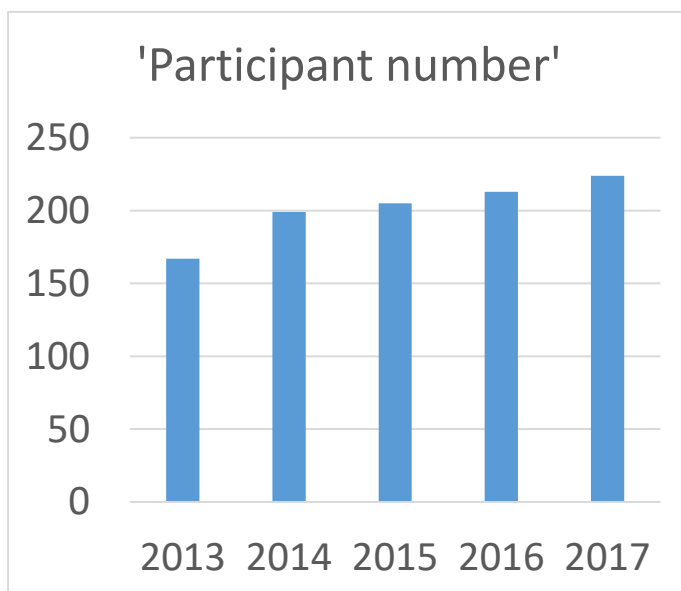
(About 18 months later, we have agreed a compromise solution with the authorities that will preserve each choir stall but adapt them slightly. They would then be more comfortable, but by moving them back against the side walls it would create a larger space in the centre).

We'd already just begun the new 'Breakfastzone' service, as intentional outreach to families with young children, since the number of children in church had dropped to an average of only 13 per week.

One year on and the Larkin Hall was also completely full with many new families and children...wonderful! Thank God!

Here it is in November 16.

We have found that many younger families are happy to come along. People are comfortable sat around a table, with their children, and in a more contemporary environment – though we're sure the bacon helps too! Yet one year on, and still today, it is hard to find people enough seats as they arrive.



Overall, we have grown by about 35% over 4 years – and while the main growth has happened in services held in the Hall with many more children and families coming along, we're delighted that the more formal services have been growing too.

But it quickly became apparent that if we were to continue to try to make disciples for Jesus, to share the Good News with everyone then our current buildings were – **and still are** - stopping us growing any further.

Research into church growth finds that "A worship service will tend to stop growing when 80 percent of the desirable seats are occupied on a regular basis" (Alban Institute "Raising the Roof").

Sadly, this had been true for a while - Prayzone has been operating at more or less capacity for the Hall for the last 8 to 10 years.

We simply have to move these informal services into a bigger space and since the only available larger space is the church we knew we needed to be more radical in our plans for the church. The pews just do not give the **flexibility** we need to run services where people sit around tables, with hands on activities; prayer stations, craft on tables...and it was already restricting what we could do in Messy Church – where the hall is no longer a big enough space either.

The pews aren't all bad, no one has to move them, buy new ones, and you have somewhere to put your hymn books, but...they're hopeless if you are in a wheelchair, or pushchairs. Further, people end up sitting somewhere where they cannot see, and though some would disagree, most people do not find them the most comfortable seats in the world!

We knew then that we needed to remove over half of the pews.

To try out how having more space would help we managed to get temporary permission to remove four pews at the back of the nave – and we haven't looked back from that at all.

But we still needed to do more about the flexibility because we simply could not move these hall services into the church when there are fixed pews.

The PCC had already started looking at what our options might be - and took the minibus around to visit local churches:

Could we get the flexibility we needed by:

- Have a mixture of pews and chairs – as at Bishopsteignton?
- Putting the pews on castors – as at Littlehempston?
- Shortened them to make them movable?
- Buy new pews that would stack as at Ideford and St Giles' Sidmouth?
- See what an all chair solution would look like as at All Saints in Sidmouth

What we did know by then was that the political landscape had changed so that there was no way we would ever get permission to have upholstered chairs, so whatever the solution it would have to be a wooden bench or chair...but this wasn't as awful as it might sound!

Wooden chairs are more durable, stack well and there are some VERY well designed and comfortable wooden chairs – in particular the Howe 40/4, which had been around in St Pauls' Cathedral for 30 years or more, and stacked 40 high – and look great - as we saw at St Joseph's Teignmouth *pictured here*.

The trouble was that we were getting very stiff resistance to replacing a substantial number of the pews from all of the outside agencies.

But within the church too, a few people were beginning to wonder whether this was the right direction to go in.

Towards the end of 2016, an outline plan was put forward to extend the Larkin Hall, so that the informal services could carry on for a while longer without needing to reorder the church.

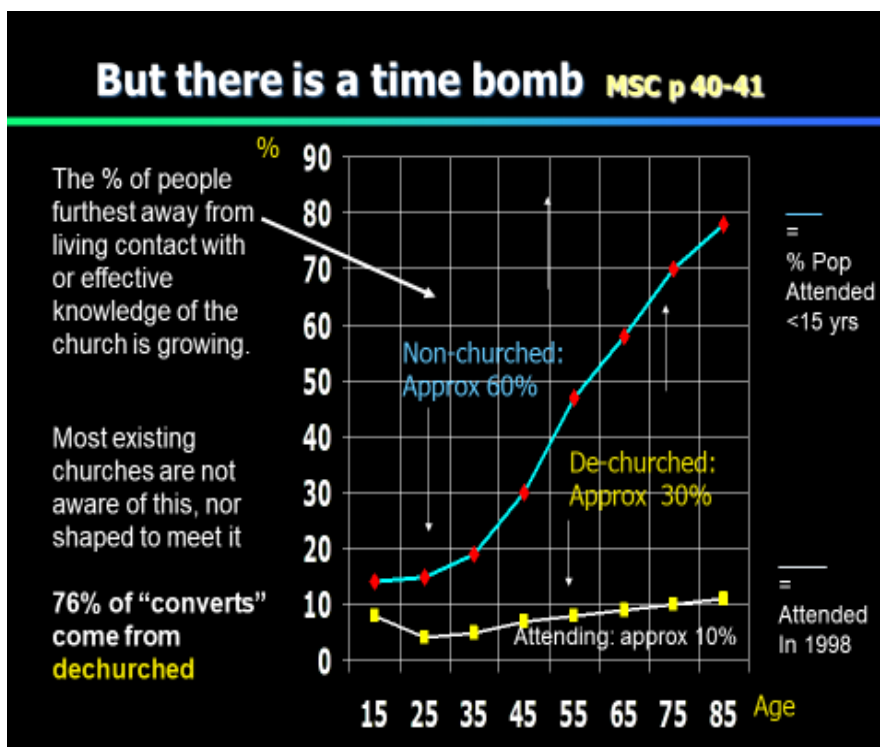


Unfortunately, this would only ever have created a longer thinner Hall, and only about 25% larger in area (we all knew we would never be able to widen the Larkin Hall for planning reasons) though it would have provided us with a larger kitchen and perhaps a lift to the downstairs and some larger toilet facilities.

However the PCC were very clear that even though we would like to have many of those extra features available to us, this was not the right course of action at this time.

1. A long thin Hall would be very difficult to use when we were relying a lot on screens for presentation for example.
2. It would still cost a lot of money – and we'd still have needed to buy a lot of chairs
3. Perhaps the clinching argument for the PCC was that even if we did upgrade the hall, if current trends continue, what happens to the Victorian church we have in 20 years' time if we have more and more of our worship in the hall?

It's an uncomfortable truth that not everyone appreciates but which this graph below from the 2003 report 'Mission Shaped Church' aims to portray: that while our more traditional worship services are growing – almost all of that growth is from people returning to church (*the 'de-churched' in this diagram*), moving church or moving into the area from other churches, or are returning to church – and not from what is called the '*non-churched*'. And all the evidence points to the fact that we are fishing for 'churched' disciples from a diminishing pool of people.



The Chancellor of the Diocese came to agree with us exactly – as you can read in his judgement. He also agreed that to extend the Hall without changing the Church, would be denying this generation the experience of worshipping in this beautiful and inspiring space.

One of the real encouragements for the church has been the way that God has enabled the PCC to be unanimous throughout this whole exercise (with one proviso from one person at one point –

that we chose a comfortable chair!) – and we have deliberately maintained a large PCC of 25 people or so through this process –so that we are more likely to represent the whole church better

One of the other key parts of the story was the public consultation in November 2016.

We had an open afternoon for the public and over a month or so, the congregation were invited to study the plans as they were and comment on them. We were really encouraged by the positive supportive response. But it was important that we also listened to concerns:

We tried to visit those with particularly deep seated worries, but here are the main areas that some people voiced their concerns about:

Yes	<i>This seems a great idea</i>
Yes	<i>But I have these concerns or suggestions...</i>
Don't mind	<i>I am happy to accept the decision of the PCC</i>
No	<i>I really wouldn't want this to happen because...</i>

	Yes	Yes with questions	Don't mind	No
1. West end redevelopment	102	12	8	1
2. Glaze in Chapel	109	4	10	0
3. Recover Chancel use	103	10	9	1
4. Replace pew with chair	92	12	11	7

The main concerns were:

- **Who moves the chairs?** *we already have an army of chair movers in the hall to set up and down for coffee - there may well be more work needed between morning services...*
- **What about kitchen smells/secular use of church?**
we intend to keep cooking bacon at least in the main kitchen...but we are looking forward to creating a new space that has level access that can be used for church and community groups and have opportunity to have coffee or warm up some soup...
- **Is it really value for money?** *Good question – we won't know until we get tenders back – around Christmas 2018 – and it may well be that some features are considered poor value –but we decided to seek permission for all the things we might want to do and go from there...*
- **Where will we put bibles and hymn books?** *– talking to other churches, they find people adapt very quickly to collecting hymn book and or pew bible on their way into church – though we have agreed to get some book holders for end of the rows for pew bibles though we anticipate that with words on screen, and more people with bibles on smartphones now the pew bible use will decrease...*
- **Will we keep some pews?** *We plan to keep just 4...a representative sample – the current pews are not original to the building, and unlike the west screen and choir stalls, were made very quickly and are not great pieces of art...*

However the decision to remove almost all of the pews is another part of the story that it's important we all appreciate...

For some time we knew we needed to remove at least half the pews, but it was only later that the various authorities agreed that keeping half and removing half would look such a mess and be so totally against the Victorian architect Pearson's aim. His design was to provide seating that was uniform, so as to lead your eye towards the beautiful east end of building. A mixture of seating would not do this, so it was agreed that we needed to take all of the pews out and replace with chairs – or none of them!

Since then we've taken an age to agree which chair and what colour!

The PCC have had several 'sitting tests' and voted for looks, comfort, cost, how they link together...

We've had to argue our corner that we wanted to have them light oak and not dark oak – since we plan to keep the lovely wood block flooring and are able to sand it down and stain it a light colour – so that the whole nave space will be so much lighter.

For a long while we'd wanted to go for the Howe 40/4, but it was so expensive...but then, only about a year ago, a well-established Irish Church Furnishers designed a Howe look-alike, with a more sturdy construction, and one which many people found even more comfortable. It also happened to be £35 cheaper than the 'Howe 40/4', so it's the 'Icon 40' which won the day.



Most of the final parts of the story took place between the summers of 2016 and 2017, with many site visits, reports, different solutions offered and rejected, until in September 2017 we finally got permission to present the plans to the Chancellor.

Unfortunately, we were then rather held up by two things:

One, that, unexpectedly we had formal objections from 3 people here, and predictably from Historic England...

And then the Chancellor took more than six months to reach his decision, even though he had all the information he needed since January 2018!

The story so far is nearly up to date, but we thought it may help you to know some of the things we've wanted or considered and also to have a view of a rather rough and ready video of how it might all look:

On the inside:

- We would not be allowed upholstered chairs
- We could not remove any mosaic tiles
- We had to keep the main wooden doors still – though these will be permanently fixed open
- We cannot even remove the little fanlight above the west screen doorway
- We've had to add a narrow wood surround to inner door and notice screens
- We decided against having extra drop down screens and projectors for the aisles, but plumped for much cheaper and more versatile TVs with some great wireless technology to distribute the signal
- We spent a long time working out the best place to put the sound desk
- We had to reduce the amount of fitted carpet around the dais – though we hope to add some rugs (and a sofa or two) at the back and a large rug for the children in due course
- We're still wondering about how to best get wheelchair access to the chancel
- We're still discussing whether we need heat loss curtains on the north door or not and what sort of heating solution we need to bury the radiators at the west end of the nave.

Outside:

- The DAC made us create some sort of design on the cobbles – which the Local authority are now happy with
- We had to change the gaps between bollards on the boundary wall
- And we came to the sad conclusion that we cannot improve the wheelchair access to the lower ground from the outside very much



Here are some features you may not realise we are putting in:

- A kitchenette that folds away (because we're moving font to be opposite the pulpit, allowing much better visibility for baptisms)
- New extra lighting in west end and porch (and Francis chapel)
- Bookstalls on walls
- Mobile notice boards that can act as screens too
- Spare Chairs on dolleys
- Automatic doors to linkway and North porch entrance
- Welcome desks
- Coat hanging area and extra radiators in the inner west porch
- Clear ceiling panels in the inner west porch
- Lots of storage for chairs, tables, flower equipment, extra staging
- There will be a very large flexible space for whole community to use
- Extra garden planters
- A shorter ramp to the Centre, glass edged, nicely lit
- Disabled parking spaces will now be on the north side
- A cycle rack by the North porch



As a PCC, we hope you are excited by the plans we are proposing. We hope you are a bit clearer about what is likely to happen and importantly why.

Please continue to pray as we go through these changes since not everyone will find them easy

And we do need more money....

We are blessed with a large legacy of £150K left to the Friends and with other legacies left to the church of about £145K. We also have been given or pledged nearly £240K...the amazing response to the first stage of the appeal held in Lent 2017.

So we have over £500K towards the £800/850 target already.

For all of the reasons we've given, it's really important that we get on with the interior work as soon as possible – and we're hoping we can start in the spring of 2019.

We ordered the chairs in September 2018, but need about another £100K to ensure we can pay for that inside first stage – and a further £200K to finish off the proposed works.

We've just employed someone to give us professional advice about trying to get some grant money, and we're very grateful to the 'Friends of St. Matthias' for agreeing to raise money for the project at the Dream Auction in two weeks' time - but the reality is that we as a church will need to give most of this.

Last Lent about 100 people helped raise £240K – there are over 200 regular worshippers here – so if you gave last year –thank you very much – if you didn't or can give more, please do think and pray hard about what part God wants you to play.

Maybe start off paying for a chair to sit on and one for the guest you can bring along? £164 each chair?

Maybe reassigning some bonds or shares that are performing so badly you've given up on them!

Maybe God is calling you to pay for a substantial amount...or offer a loan to help the cash flow?

Only you and He knows...

Remember. There are many things that are not working as we want them to –

Why we need to change...

- Church looks closed from the outside
- **Outgrown the space for informal worship which limits our capacity to reach others with the Good News!**
- Pews convenient, and traditional but:
 - **inflexible** – for informal worship, Messy church, wheelchairs and pushchairs, only give train-carriage like seating, don't give milling around space, or for concerts and exhibitions
 - **largely uncomfortable**
 - **dark and Victorian ambience**
- Need more storage
- Cannot serve enough people for coffee in the hall alone
- Can't use the chancel
- Can't use the space well for choirs/orchestras/community events

And there are some great things about what we hope to achieve, God willing:

The change will be good because...

- Obviously open and welcoming church with glazing and noticeboards
- More flexible seating – allows growth
- More comfortable seating
- More light and more contemporary ambience
- Plenty of storage
- Another space for serving coffee
- Another 'room' with easy access for wheelchairs etc
- Enjoy the chancel once more
- More people from the community can use the large space

Remember, this is not about change for changes' sake. It is not about making things 'modern' for the sake of it – we have not got that choice with a Grade 2* listed building anyway!

It is simply about following Jesus command to make disciples for him in the best way we know how to at this present time.

What can each of us do?

- Pray
- Talk together to listen and to share good things about project.
- Give generously.

We're stepping out in faith. And we want to step out in faith together, continuing to love one another, longing to share the love of God in Jesus with as many people as we can – for now and for the next generation.

