



THE PARISH OF CORPUS CHRISTI

The parish is part of the Archdiocese of Birmingham: Registered Charity No. 234216

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Dear friends,

It has been many years since the Church of Corpus Christi was redecorated and alterations made to its interior and exterior. It is now time to do so, with the aim of beautifying and enhancing the sacred space for ourselves and for future generations. We have a duty not merely to maintain our property but to make it more worthy and more attractive. The designs below have been drawn by our architect Robert Eyles MSAI ARB. Behind them are many hours of meetings and discussions and the advice of architectural, artistic and liturgical experts. I am now presenting them to the Parish. Robert's designs for the interior redecoration and re-arrangement are in accordance with written rationale below. He has produced five possibilities for the new Narthex.

The refurbishment of any Church building complex needs to express fully the nature of the Catholic Church. There are two overarching principles, A and B below:

A: The primary purpose the building of the Church is the worship of God and for His glory

In the Western (Roman) Catholic Church (though we do have celebrations of Eastern Catholic Rites, primarily Syro-Malabar, at Corpus Christi) this means the best possible architecture and space to celebrate the Liturgy according to Liturgical principles of Vatican II and subsequent Instructions from the Holy See.

While the whole Church building is a sanctuary, the main liturgical actions of the celebration of Mass are focused on the 'traditional' Sanctuary area. There needs to be the greatest honour given to the Tabernacle, which remains central outside liturgical worship.

During the liturgical celebrations, there are 3 major foci (focal points) –the Altar, the Ambo and the Chair from which the priest presides. These need correct emphasis. The Altar is central with the Ambo and the Chair on the right and left respectively. All of these need to be worthy, stable and fixed. They can be of the same/similar material (e.g. marble/stone/wood).

For Corpus Christi

The Altar at Corpus Christi is of the structure and material required. It is constructed of stone and consecrated, containing relics of the Saints.

The Ambo is of stone and worthy but needs more prominence by being re-positioned further forward and not immediately in front of the pillar.

The Chair might need to be redesigned and more fixed in position.

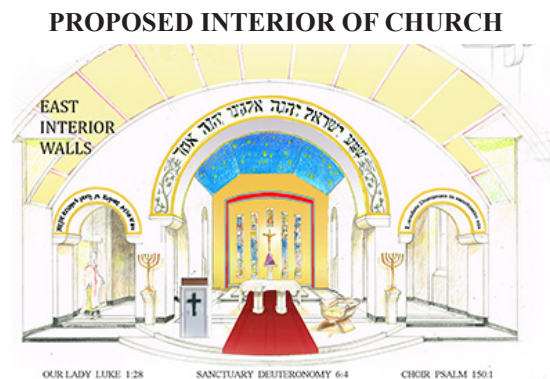
In order to enhance the Ambo and to upgrade the Sanctuary area, the front of the Sanctuary (nearest the pews) will be altered from a straight edge and extended into a semi-circle.

Baptistry: The Font, which used to be at the entrance to the Church and was then moved to the Sanctuary area, needs to be repositioned. In its present position it is cramped and undignified. The best and obvious place for the Font is where the flower/store cupboard is. This would create a proper Baptistry. The wooden paneling and door will be removed and the wrought iron gates on the opposite side (the original baptismal gates) would be repositioned there.

The Interior Decoration of the Church

Colour scheme

The whole area (walls and ceiling) – will be repainted using traditional Church colours, specifically red, blue and gold. These were the colours that for centuries were used to decorate the interior of all Churches and were sadly whitewashed away in England at the Reformation. These are deliberately vibrant imperial colours, pointing to the truth of the Lordship of Christ, the King of kings, present in the Blessed Sacrament to which our Church is dedicated. The East wall and Sanctuary walls will be gold with highlights of red. This will enhance and mirror the colours of the stained glass. The ceiling of the Sanctuary will be blue with gold stars, symbolizing the glory of heaven and those of the Lady Chapel and Choir Chapel will be painted a lighter blue. The ceiling of the Nave and walls will be of lighter coloured gold.



In front of each of the two pillars (behind where the Ambo and Font are now placed) will be a seven-branched candelabrum (Menorah) on shelves. These recall the furnishings and worship of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Inscriptions

A bold feature of the redecoration will be the inscriptions. The arches in the Church will be expanded in depth so that the texts can be of a worthy height. The three languages over the Cross of our Lord will be used - Hebrew, Greek and Latin. These texts are carefully chosen to proclaim central truths of the Faith:

The central Sanctuary arch in Hebrew: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One” (Dt 6:4)

The arch of the Lady Chapel in Greek: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee” (Lk 1:28)

The arch of the choir area in Latin: “Praise the Lord in his sanctuary” (Ps 150:1).

The central arch at the back, above the gallery in Hebrew:
“You must love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord” (Lev 19:18)

The arch of the new Baptistry in Greek:
“You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3)

The arch of the doorway from the porch in Latin:
“May the Lord guard your going and coming” (Ps 121:8).

Over the niche of the Sacred Heart will be the inscription in Latin:
“Come to me, for I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29).

The use of Hebrew reminds us of the centrality of the Old Testament, written in Hebrew, and of our Jewish heritage. The text over the Sanctuary is from the great Shema – the command to love the One God, appropriate as we face the Altar. The text above the gallery is a reminder of the command to love our neighbour as ourselves, appropriate as we leave the Church and go out into the world. These two texts point to the purpose of the whole of the Torah and are repeated by Our Lord Himself as the two great commandments (Mk 12:29-30). The use of Greek reminds us of the fact that the New Testament was composed in Greek, the language of the early Church. The inscription over the Baptistry points to the enormous importance of this primordial Sacrament, the door to eternal life. The one over the Lady Chapel summarizes the role and intercession of Mary, the Mother of Jesus and of the Church. The use of Latin reminds us of the ancient and

wonderful tradition of Latin in the Church throughout the centuries and the fact that the Vulgate remains the normative version of the Scriptures for the Church. The inscription over the choir chapel reminds us that praise of the Lord is doubled by singing and music. The one over the back right hand entrance/exit is the prayer for God's blessing, originally for pilgrims going up to and coming away from the Holy City of Jerusalem. Every time we come into and leave the Church we are similarly on pilgrimage.

The Lighting

The lighting will be renewed and altered to low energy lighting and will highlight the three focal areas, enhance the new decorations and the existing Stations of the Cross, and illuminate the Church for public worship.

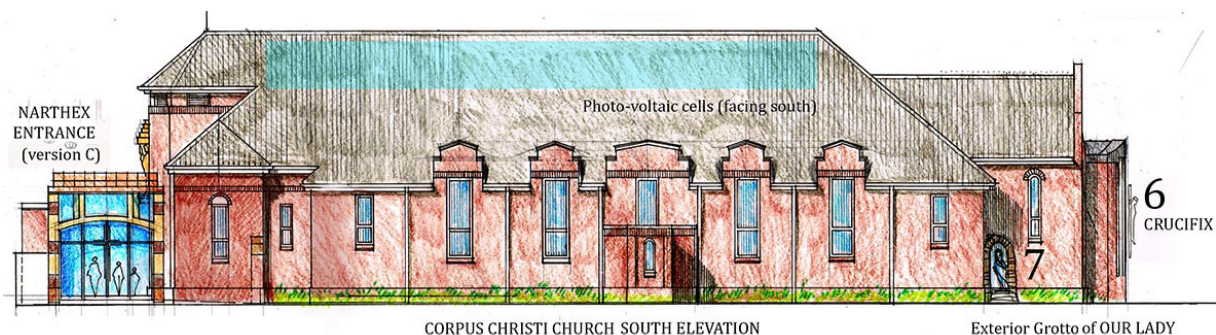
B: The secondary purpose of the Church building is the best use of space for the gathering of the people

The building of a Church is to allow the faithful to gather comfortably. Historically in the Western Church, as in many of the Eastern Churches to this day, there were benches only around the edges of the Church for those who could not stand. The interior of the Church was without furniture and the faithful moved around the Church, gathering around the Ambo for the Liturgy of the Word, the pulpit for the Homily and the Altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Whilst we now have pews, it is important to remember the aspect of space and movement.

We also need comfortable places to gather before and after Mass so that we can be with each other, mingle and talk. This helps to make the interior of the Church more clearly a place of prayer and worship rather than socializing.

For Corpus Christi

The volume of space inside the Church itself and the Church pews serve well the needs of the Assembly.



The most important areas for renewal concern the complex of the entrances, foyer, links with the Hall and kitchen, toilets and outside space beyond the existing exit into the back of the kitchen. This involves constructing a worthy Narthex, which is light and welcoming and forms an imposing new entrance and extension to the Church. It is proposed that this whole complex, subject to planning permission, would extend outwards beyond the present building line on Margaret Road. The present entrance porch to the Church would be incorporated into this, as also the entrance to the Hall, so that the entire area becomes a proper foyer and place of gathering – before and after Mass and other functions and ceremonies such as baptisms, weddings and funerals. The area would also include space for a Repository (religious shop). The interior details of the Narthex – flooring, walls and roof areas – will be presented in a separate plan. The existing internal outside space at the back of the Hall is to be developed into a utility area and as a flower sacristy. The Hall will be redecorated.

Photo-voltaic cells are to be placed on the roof of the Church to generate electricity and solar panels over the Parish Kitchen to supplement the hot water supply. Insulation to a higher degree than the statutory requirement will be installed throughout the new buildings. At every stage eco-considerations will be given priority.

Exterior Additions

Two other features are to be added: an external Crucifix on the brick wall of the East apse and an outside Grotto of Our Lady in the corner of the apse on the Margaret Road side.

Financial Considerations

We have been blessed by a generous and substantial legacy to the Parish to use precisely for the refurbishment of the Church. We will still have to raise some monies for this project. But the brutal fact is, unless we spend this legacy now, indeed as soon as possible, the Diocesan Treasury will take it from us. They have already tried to do so and we must not let this happen. There will be time later for discussion about how to raise extra funds for this project. Of course, eventual costings might mean that some elements of the designs have to be modified.

I hope the above is a clear explanation of the rationale behind Robert's drawings. The buildings of the Catholic Church are an important presence in and for our society and they need to be dignified and worthy for the glory of God and for the community. The proposals are for a building and redecoration that will enhance the beauty of our Church and witness to our faith with a design that will be unique in Oxford, perhaps in England and indeed perhaps in the world! This does not mean that we push aside our on-going concern for the underprivileged in our midst and our charity towards our brothers and sisters in need throughout the world. Indeed this needs to be constantly enhanced. St. John Chrysostom taught that it is right and necessary to make our Churches and their furniture beautiful, but not if we forget the poor.

The full set of drawings are attached

Please let me have your comments, ideas and, where appropriate, your professional advice. Please indicate your preference for the design of the new narthex. Such comments are best sent by email to me at Corpus Christi: corpuschristi.oxford@rcaob.org.uk. For clarity and efficiency, would you kindly write CHURCH PLANS in the Subject line and use one of the following statements:

For the interior re-decoration

- I like the plans
- I like the plans and would add the following comments....
- I do not like the plans because....

For the Narthex

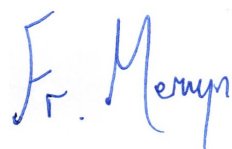
- My preferred option is...
- I do not like any of the options because...

I would be grateful for a reply within the next three weeks, by July 12th. Please share these plans and this letter with anyone you know who does not have access to the internet and with any of your family and friends elsewhere. Because of the current rules, we cannot display these plans in the Church, even during the periods of opening for private prayer.

Obviously we need to go through the normal process of planning permissions, obtaining building and decoration quotes, choosing the best ones and employing experts for the execution of the details of the designs. This will take some time, but we need to begin the process now.

With my thanks and prayers,

God bless,



Canon Mervyn Tower MA, SSL, PhD