

ASSETS NOT BURDENS

*Using church property to
accelerate mission*

*By Tim Thorlby
January 2017*



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CONTENTS

FOREWORD.....1

**THE RT REVD ADRIAN NEWMAN,
THE BISHOP OF STEPNEY**

SUMMARY.....3

1. INTRODUCTION.....13

PART A - LISTENING: THE CHURCH TODAY

2. METHODOLOGY.....19

3. SURVEY: KEY FINDINGS.....25

PART B - REFLECTING

**4. THEOLOGY OF CHURCH BUILDINGS:
REASONS TO ACT.....47**

PART C - ACTING: THE CHURCH TOMORROW

5. CHURCH CASE STUDIES.....57

**6. PILOT PROPOSAL: CHURCH SPACE LTD - A NEW
MODEL FOR MANAGING CHURCH FACILITIES.....69**

**7. RECOMMENDATIONS: AN AGENDA
FOR CHANGE.....77**

AFTERWORD.....81

**THE RT REVD RIC THORPE,
THE BISHOP OF ISLINGTON**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....83

“Having recently chaired a group which produced a comprehensive review of the Church of England’s buildings, I welcome wholeheartedly this report’s vision of more churches opening to serve their local communities through the week. The report’s analysis, theology and call to action fit squarely within our own vision to see Christians using their buildings ‘to love our neighbour’ as well as to worship God. Church buildings should never be silent mausoleums but always vibrant centres of service at the heart of their local community. I encourage wide readership of this report and engagement with its recommendations.”

*The Rt Revd Dr John Inge
The Bishop of Worcester
Lead Bishop for Cathedrals and Church Buildings*

“I warmly welcome this research into the ways church communities utilise their properties. I grew up in Britain hearing horror stories of migrant Christian communities during the Windrush era struggling to find appropriate facilities for worship. Widespread refusal of use of church and school halls spurred Caribbean and African worshippers on to acquire - by sacrificial self-financing - their own buildings. Such acquisitions became symbols of migrant communities establishing themselves in their new homeland, and of independence - now being able to determine the use of their own buildings to suit their spiritual, social and cultural experience and practices. The warning in this report to beware buildings becoming mausoleums, objects of worship, places of pietistic retreat, or even places of exclusive cultural retreat, is apposite. All the resources which churches accumulate are intended by God to be put to use in the service of God and the mission of God in the world.

In this report, it is encouraging to read about a Black Pentecostal Church playing host to an Anglican congregation; and to hear that almost all church buildings have some form of social or community usage as part of their normal existence. But to discover that church facilities lie unused more than they are in use sends a clear message of how much improvement is needed to ensure that we become better stewards of what God has entrusted us with. It should encourage churches that in making more and better use of their buildings they will make more friends and perhaps more money too! This study’s recommendations are discerning and potentially transforming, so I encourage all churches to take note of and appropriate the spirit and letter of this revealing report.”

*Bishop Dr Joe Aldred
Pentecostal and Multicultural Relations,
Churches Together in England*

FOREWORD

Here is another timely contribution from CTC, full of utility and practical wisdom. For all the challenges of property values in London, there is an equal and opposite opportunity: land and buildings are historic assets offering huge potential for mission.

CTC's salutary research demonstrates that the church has a lot of work to do if we are to make the most of this opportunity, but the practical proposals outlined here may be just what we need to shift our mindset from 'liability' to 'asset', and to embrace our buildings as gifts and not burdens.

This is an approach that will appeal across the range of theology and tradition, and allow enough space for people to adapt the model to their own context and locality.

I hope that we will look back in a few years' time and see this as the catalyst we needed to raise our game and manage our buildings to the glory of God and in the service of his kingdom.

*The Rt Revd Adrian Newman
The Bishop of Stepney*



SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of in-depth research into how churches use their buildings. It is the first fully ecumenical study of how church buildings are used in the UK.

The report shows that almost every church actively serves its local community. But it also demonstrates the extent to which church buildings are underused and the need for an enterprise-based approach to the management of these assets.

The research has been designed and delivered independently by the Centre for Theology & Community (CTC) and has been grant funded by Allchurches Trust Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

In the UK, it is estimated that there are just over 50,000 Christian churches¹. The vast majority of these churches meet either in dedicated church buildings or third party buildings (such as school halls) rather than in people's homes, for practical reasons. This means that buildings are an important issue which most churches have to think about at some point.

Buildings can help or hinder the church's mission. Those churches which do not own buildings but must rent spaces from others face different challenges and opportunities which are no less significant.

This report sets out the findings of our research into how churches – of all denominations – use and manage the buildings within which they meet and identifies the challenges and opportunities that arise from this. This report does not focus on redevelopment but on the management of existing buildings.

The challenge is immense but so are the opportunities. We hope that this report will stimulate wide discussion of these issues and assist in pointing the way to fruitful action.

PART A – LISTENING: THE CHURCH TODAY

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on new primary research undertaken during the spring and summer of 2016. We have undertaken an in-depth study of how churches in north London use and manage their land and buildings, using the London Borough of Islington as a large and illustrative case study of the challenges faced by urban churches. The study includes findings from over 40 churches of almost every denomination and represents a good cross-section of urban church life.

The research has also included in-depth interviews with a selection of church leaders, background research and wider discussions with church property managers across London.

Our research was undertaken in London and primarily addresses an urban church audience, but its lessons have wider applicability.

¹ Brierley, P (2014) *UK Church Statistics 2: 2010-2020* ADBC Publishers, Ken

KEY FINDINGS

The key findings from our in-depth case study of the London Borough of Islington are as follows:

- We found 85 churches of almost every denomination in Islington – one church for every 2,500 residents in the Borough – and there may possibly be more
- The total estimated weekly Sunday attendance of 16,900 is equivalent to 8% of the local population
- Of the 85 churches, 23 (27%) are renting and these are mainly Pentecostal and Independent churches. All of the churches in our survey which rent said that they would prefer to own their own premises.
- Of the 85 churches, 62 (73%) own their own buildings. Between them, they own 59 worship spaces, 76 church halls and 149 meeting rooms.
- Many of the 'owning' churches are active in terms of property redevelopment; nearly half are either undertaking a redevelopment project on part of their property or are about to start one.
- Nearly every single church is using its buildings to benefit the community in some way, either by providing church-run activities or hosting the activities of other organisations. In our survey, 97% listed at least one, and usually many more, activities happening on their premises in the last year.
- The overall utilisation of church spaces is relatively low. Across the Borough and across every denomination, church spaces lie empty and unused for the majority of the week:
 - Church halls are empty 57% of the week
 - Church worship spaces are empty 69% of the week
 - Church meeting rooms are empty 75% of the week
- The estimated average gross income from church lettings is £23,000 per church per year. The estimated average gross income from the letting of church housing is £11,500 per church per year. So, for the 62 'owning' churches in Islington, the average gross annual income from property is £34,500 per church per year, which is £2.1m per year. (This is not evenly distributed between churches).

- 75% of local churches want to see increased community use of their buildings. 43% of churches also want ‘advice and support’ on how to go about letting out space more frequently

As a feasibility exercise, we have also drawn on the data gathered through our research to estimate the **potential lettings income** which churches in Islington could secure if they increased the usage of church spaces.

We have taken each church’s current usage levels and estimated the additional lettings income which would be generated if usage *increased up to 65% of the available times*. We have used the most cautious assumptions in every respect.

Across the 62 ‘owning’ churches, increasing lettings on these terms would generate an **additional £64,000 per church per year on average**. In total, for all of these churches, this would be an **additional £4m of gross income per year**. This is in addition to the £1.4m which we know these churches are already generating through letting out their spaces, and does not include any income from housing at all. **For every £1 of income which churches are currently receiving from lettings income, they could be generating a further £2.85 per year, even on modest assumptions**. There is enormous potential for each denomination to increase its income by making use of existing assets.

We do not believe that simply exhorting local churches to ‘try harder’ or issuing good practice toolkits will address this challenge. There are sound reasons why many local churches do not make more of their buildings – in many cases they simply do not have the time, skills or capacity to do so. Creative solutions are possible, and there are enough churches doing it well for us to be confident that significant change is possible.

PART B – REFLECTING

It is important to reflect theologically on the role of land and buildings within our churches today. There are some differences of emphasis between different denominations but much more that is held in common.

Much of the reason for establishing permanent church buildings is a practical one – it makes organising our church life easier. It provides a physical base to run activities from. It offers a tangible sign to the wider community of our presence and worship. They can even be beautiful. They can be valuable. For Catholics, having a permanent and consecrated church space where Mass can be celebrated is also of great theological significance.

When we do set aside places for worship they become special places, and there is much evidence that people find such places helpful in coming closer to God – spaces where there is less distraction and a more obvious focus on the things of God. They can also be physical symbols that point people outside of the Church towards God. They can therefore become places of great value to us and others.

If a church does have responsibility for a building then it should maintain the building and seek to ensure it is ‘fit for purpose’. There are two common spiritual pitfalls for these churches.

Firstly, those churches which own buildings must guard against idolatry – the risk that we come to love certain places and buildings too much and lose sight of their role in helping us to worship and become the thing we worship instead.

The second pitfall for the unwary church community is perhaps more common and flows from a misunderstanding of the nature of church buildings – the risk of pietism.

Jesus quite clearly calls us to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” and also to “love your neighbour as yourself”. (Matthew 22:37-39) The Church is called to do both. It always gets itself into trouble when it does one but not the other. To focus on loving God alone and ignoring our neighbour leads us to an other-worldly pietism. To focus on loving our neighbour but neglecting God leads to secularism. Just as our calling has two sides, belonging together, so our church buildings as a whole should rightly serve both purposes.

For Catholics, a church worship space is indeed for worship alone, but the rest of the church’s buildings (halls, meeting rooms, houses) have no such restrictions. For nearly all other denominations, even the worship space itself can be used for a variety of purposes as well, as long as this is done responsibly.

As we have seen in this report, most churches today do seek to use their buildings to serve their local community in some way. We know that this can be challenging. But to deliberately leave church buildings empty for most of the week is surely akin to the man who received money from his master and rather than invest it - chose to bury it in the garden (the Parable of the Talents – Matthew 25:14-30).

PART C – ACTING: THE CHURCH TOMORROW

CHURCH CASE STUDIES

The third part of the report tells the stories of three churches and how they have responded to the challenge of making good use of their buildings.

CASE STUDY 1: Creating and reviving church spaces to increase mission: Hope Church, Islington

This is a story of revival, redevelopment and partnership in the Anglican church of St David, Holloway which has seen old buildings brought back into use, new flexible spaces created and all of them now actively managed to support the mission of the church. For some churches, such a redevelopment is an important step to making the best use of their existing land and property; for others, this is not necessary.

CASE STUDY 2: Church partnerships for the 21st Century: the Ethiopian Christian Fellowship Church

This is a story of a new ‘diaspora’ church putting down roots in the UK and taking ownership of an old church to bring new life into it. It also includes a role reversal where a new pentecostal church now rents space to an Anglican church.

CASE STUDY 3: Active church property management: St Paul, Old Ford, Tower Hamlets

This is a story of a lively local church which actively manages its spaces to build up the life of the church and serve the local community.

PILOT PROPOSAL: CHURCH SPACE LTD

The report also proposes a new enterprise-based approach to securing a much greater utilisation of church buildings. We believe that this could bring significant missional and financial benefits to participating churches.

We believe that the core of any solution to the current underuse of church buildings should reflect two principles:

- that the capacity for marketing and managing church spaces will need to be provided outside of local churches (rather than expecting each of them to develop it for themselves)
- that the scope for income generation means that any solution should be able to pay for itself without imposing new costs onto churches

Our suggested approach is to establish a new independent ‘not for profit’ social enterprise as a pilot in one local geographical area (e.g. a London Borough). This organisation would offer a professional service to churches in that area to market and let out their church spaces, as they determined, and assist them in maintaining and managing those spaces. Participation by churches would be entirely voluntary – they would choose to ‘opt in’. Any income generated from those spaces would be shared, with the majority going to the local church and some retained by the new organisation to enable it to cover its own costs. Churches choosing to participate in the project would therefore be doing so on a ‘no win, no fee’ basis – that is, there would be no fees for participating, and if it did not work, they would lose nothing, but if their spaces are let out, they gain new additional income.

There are clearly some important practical issues that would need to be addressed, and the precise nature of these will vary from church to church, but we are confident that all are capable of resolution.

RECOMMENDATIONS: AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE

The solution to many of the church’s building challenges is actually mission - which leads to church growth. We need a change of mindset. Our buildings are assets which can be used for mission. There is an opportunity here.

And it is an opportunity which is within reach. We know this because some churches are already doing it. In this report, we have outlined several practical opportunities including a proposal for a significant new pilot project.

Increasing the community and missional use of churches not only opens church doors to new relationships and visibly serves the local community but it could also generate significant income. We suggest that improving the pro-active management of church buildings across the board is a theological, missional and financial imperative.

As already discussed we believe that any response should have two key features:

- Each denomination needs a strategic response to these opportunities – simply leaving local churches to deliver solutions for themselves is completely unrealistic
- If each denomination is prepared to work with others then an ecumenical approach is not only possible but may even yield greater results

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We recommend that the leaders of each denomination consider the development of a strategic approach to church property management. We hope this report will add new momentum to discussions on this issue.

2. We recommend the development and support of a pilot project to establish a new social enterprise (Church Space Ltd) to test the idea of managing the spaces of smaller churches in one area of London



1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of in-depth research into how churches use their buildings. It is the first fully ecumenical study of how church buildings are used in the UK. Its findings identify a major challenge – and opportunity – for the Church.

The research has been designed and delivered independently by the Centre for Theology & Community (CTC) and has been grant funded by Allchurches Trust Ltd.

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

In the UK, it is estimated that there are just over 50,000 Christian churches¹. The vast majority of these churches meet either in dedicated church buildings or third party buildings (such as school halls) rather than in people's homes, for practical reasons. This means that buildings are an important issue which most churches have to think about at some point.

Buildings can help or hinder the church's mission. They can help church communities to worship God, they can act as a physical witness to the local community, they can support church life and can assist churches in serving their neighbours. They can be valuable too – they are assets which require thoughtful stewardship.

Church buildings can also hinder, where their design is no longer 'fit for purpose', and can even become a burden – expensive to maintain – or can become a distraction from a church's true purpose.

Those churches which do not own buildings but must rent spaces from others face different challenges and opportunities which are no less significant; being footloose can provide flexibility to new and growing churches, but it can also be tiring where equipment has to be packed and unpacked every week.

The purpose of this report is to set out the findings of our research into *how churches – of all denominations – use and manage the buildings within which they meet* and to identify the challenges and opportunities that arise from this. This report does not focus on redevelopment but on the management of existing buildings.

We believe that our findings demonstrate both the extent to which church buildings are underused and the need for an enterprise-based approach to the management of these assets. The challenge is immense but so are the opportunities. We hope that this report will stimulate wide discussion of these issues and assist in pointing the way to fruitful action.

We have focused our research on churches in London and are primarily addressing an urban church audience with this report; exploring rural issues is beyond our remit, although we believe that many of our findings are likely to be relevant to rural churches.

¹ Brierley, P (2014) *UK Church Statistics 2: 2010-2020* ADBC Publishers, Kent

1.2 METHODOLOGY

This report is based on new primary research undertaken during the spring and summer of 2016.

We have undertaken an in-depth study of how churches in north London use and manage their land and buildings, intended as a large and illustrative case study of the challenges faced by urban churches. The study includes findings from over 40 churches of almost every major denomination and represents a good cross-section of urban church life.

The research has also included in-depth interviews with a selection of church leaders, background research and wider discussions with church property managers across London.

1.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

The rest of this report is structured as follows:

Part A considers new evidence on how the church currently approaches the management of its spaces. It reports the key findings of a unique survey into the habits and approaches of churches across most major denominations.

Part B reflects theologically on the significance of our church buildings and their purpose.

Part C looks forward and considers where the church might go next. It offers some case studies, a pilot proposal and a call to action.

PART A

**LISTENING:
THE CHURCH
TODAY**



2 METHODOLOGY

This section briefly summarises our research methodology.

2.1 ONLINE SURVEY OF CHURCHES

OUR AIMS

Our primary aim has been to understand how churches manage and use the land and property that they own (or rent), exploring both their approach as well as the impact of this. We have deliberately taken an ecumenical approach, seeking experiences across denominations, as many issues seem to be common to all.

CTC's work is focused on London so we have also restricted ourselves to researching and reflecting on the experiences of churches in the capital, although we are confident that many of the issues will be relevant to other urban churches across the UK and even to some extent those in rural areas, although we recognise that many rural churches have particular challenges of their own.

To achieve a good cross-section of churches, we selected one London Borough as a case study area – the London Borough of Islington. Home to over 200,000 people, Islington is a highly diverse part of London with extremes of wealth and poverty; it remains one of England's most deprived local authority areas but is also home to some wealthy communities within this. Its population is ethnically diverse and it has a rich mix of churches.

THE SURVEY

By contacting the various denominations, undertaking internet searches and also using local knowledge and contacts, we identified addresses and contact details for **85 Christian churches** which were active and based in the London Borough of Islington in the spring of 2016. These churches cover all of the mainstream denominations and many smaller church groupings too. From wider research¹ we believe that this may be a modest undercount of churches; in particular, some of the smaller and more informal Pentecostal churches may be missing, especially those which do not have either a web presence or any obvious visible presence on the street. However, we are confident that we identified the vast majority of active churches and certainly all of the ones with any properties.

¹ In particular, discussions with Dr Peter Brierley, editor of many publications of UK church statistics

A questionnaire was developed, drawing on helpful insights and advice from church property managers across several denominations, and an online survey was run in March/April 2016. All of the 85 Islington churches were contacted and asked to complete a short online survey. Contact was made through email and telephone. The questionnaire was aimed at church leaders.

Churches come in many different shapes, sizes and traditions and so grouping them together can be a challenge. We have opted for simplicity here. In most cases it is fairly obvious which denomination a church belongs to. For Baptist and Pentecostal churches where there is more than one association/network/denomination we have grouped together churches within each broad church tradition and simply labelled them 'Baptist' or 'Pentecostal', but recognise that there are differences within this. Any church which was not obviously associated with a recognisable denomination has been described as 'independent' – these are mainly independent evangelical churches or churches with a broadly Pentecostal tradition, but which may not formally use that label.

RESPONSE RATE

A good **overall response rate of 52%** was achieved, with **44 churches** taking part in the survey. Those churches also include almost every denomination present in Islington so the response rate was highly diverse, as can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Churches participating in the online survey

	Total number of active churches based in Islington	Response rate achieved
Church of England	28	21
Baptist	9	5
Roman Catholic	12	5
Methodist	5	2
Pentecostal	14	2
United Reformed Church	2	2
Quaker	1	1
Orthodox	2	0
Congregational	2	2
Other independent churches	10	4
Total	85	44

Note 1 – there are no Salvation Army churches based in Islington

Between them the 44 churches in our survey have an average Sunday service attendance of just over **6,700 people** per week. Scaling this up, weighted by denomination, for all 85 known churches in Islington, suggests a total average Sunday service attendance in Islington of **16,900 people per week**. This is equivalent to approximately 8% of the Islington’s resident population. As noted above, we may have

undercounted some Pentecostal and independent churches, so this figure is likely to be a modest undercount.

Of all the 85 churches in Islington, some 62 (73%) meet within buildings which they (or their denomination) own and the rest (27%) are renting spaces from others.

Both churches which own their buildings and churches which rent responded to the survey. The response rate was higher from the more traditional denominations which own their own properties and lower from the more independent churches, particularly Pentecostal churches, many of whom are renting. We estimate that the response rate for those churches which own their own properties was **63%**, so findings in relation to these churches are particularly robust and strongly representative.

2.2 INTERVIEWS AND DESK RESEARCH

To complement the survey, we also undertook a number of face to face semi-structured interviews with a selection of church leaders and church property managers both in Islington and further afield across London to explore and understand the issues facing churches in more depth.

Desk research has also been undertaken, reviewing published reports on church property issues.



3 SURVEY: KEY FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of our online survey of how churches use and manage their land and buildings. We believe it is the first cross-cutting ecumenical survey in the UK on how churches use their buildings.

3.1 INTRODUCING THE CHURCHES OF ISLINGTON

What do we know about the churches in the London Borough of Islington? From our count of all churches and our survey (see Figure 2), we know that:

- We found 85 churches in Islington – one church for every 2,500 residents in the Borough – and there may possibly be more
- Nearly every denomination is active in serving Islington’s 215,000 population
- The total estimated weekly Sunday attendance of 16,900 is equivalent to 8% of the local population (although the total church-going population will be higher than this as some people attend one of the larger city-centre churches)
- The largest denomination is the Roman Catholic church, followed by Pentecostals and then the Church of England, accounting for 85% of church attendance in the borough between them
- Of the 85 churches, 62 (73%) own their own buildings with the rest renting – mainly Pentecostal and Independent churches

Figure 2: Churches in Islington (opposite)

	Number of churches known active in Islington	Estimated weekly Sunday service attendance (April 2016)		Number of churches using properties they own (or their denomination owns)
		Numbers	%	
Baptist	9	299	2%	9
Church of England	28	2,891	17%	26
Congregational	2	40	<1%	2
Independent churches	10	1,105	7%	2
Methodist	5	940	6%	5
Pentecostal	14	4,480	27%	1
Quaker	1	20	<1%	1
Roman Catholic	12	6,840	41%	12
United Reformed Church	2	16	<1%	2
Orthodox	2	221	1%	2
Total	85	16,851	100%	62

3.2 CHURCHES WHICH RENT

Most of the churches in Islington own their buildings. We identified 23 churches (27%) in Islington which meet in premises owned by other organisations – sometimes other churches, but also schools or other buildings. Most of those renting are Pentecostal or Independent churches.

Of the churches in our survey which rent, every single one said that they would prefer to own their own premises. There is clearly an appetite and a demand from these churches for a more permanent presence.

The same renting churches in our survey are also paying widely varying rent – from a small congregation paying £4,300 per year to a large church paying £115,000 per year.

3.3 CHURCHES BUILDINGS IN ISLINGTON

Note that the rest of this chapter relates to the churches which own their own buildings, or which use buildings provided by their denominations (ownership structures vary across denominations).

The survey asked church leaders what properties their church owned within Islington (or which their denomination owned on their behalf) and the answer is that they own a fair amount, as Figure 3 shows. These are all the various properties of the 62 churches in the borough which own their buildings.

Figure 3: Church buildings of the 62 ‘owning’ churches in Islington

Kinds of space	Number of spaces
Church worship spaces	59
Church Halls <i>(any space which can seat 30 people or more)</i>	76
Meeting rooms <i>(any space which can seat less than 30 people)</i>	149
Crypts	11
Usable outside spaces <i>(like gardens or allotments, not including cemeteries or burial grounds)</i>	33
Vicarage/Ministers houses	52
Other flats/houses	25
Other buildings/spaces	21

Source: Based on survey data for 39 churches, scaled up for all 62 owning churches in the Borough, weighted by denomination

This property ‘portfolio’ is eclectic in nature and varies significantly in age, design and quality. It includes everything from highly protected Listed buildings to concrete 1960s blocks to brand new facilities. There is, however, a clear preponderance of older buildings, with 58% of churches owning at least one Listed building. Nearly every denomination owns a Listed building in the Borough, with the Roman Catholic Church and Church of England owning the most.

The vast majority of the property is either owned by, or controlled, by the denomination to which the church belongs, although one in four churches do have at least one property which is owned outright by the local church.

This group of churches is active in terms of property redevelopment. Nearly half (45%) are either undertaking a redevelopment project on part of their property or are about to start one. Some 10% are also currently interested in selling some land or buildings. Of the 10% of churches which own some derelict property (mainly church halls and meeting rooms) all of these are actively pursuing some kind of redevelopment to bring new spaces into use. The redevelopment activity is broadly spread across the denominations too, with the only exception to this being the Roman Catholics who appear to have no current plans within the Borough.

3.4 COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES WITHIN CHURCH BUILDINGS

A very wide range of community activities take place within church spaces.

We asked church leaders to tell us about all of the activities which have taken place within their buildings in the last year in addition to their usual church services and groups run for members (Sunday services, bible studies, etc). Some of the activities are run by the church itself and some are run by outside organisations but using church spaces. Figure 4 lists the different kinds of activities and the proportion of churches hosting each one.

Figure 4: Community activities taking place within churches

Activities taking place within churches	% of churches hosting such activities
Meetings of other charities (e.g. committee meetings)	80%
Social events, including children’s parties	73%
Musical concerts	67%
Religious services run by other churches using your space	57%
Miscellaneous (any other activity not listed here)	43%
Children’s nursery	37%
Keep fit/physical health related activities	37%
Mental health, wellbeing, counselling services	33%
Public collection or distribution of food via a Food Bank	27%
Employment support, training, adult education courses	10%
Debt, money management or Credit Union activities	7%
Community Allotments	3%
Public services - e.g. Post Office, GP Surgery	0%
No such activities: only church activities for church members	3%

Nearly every single church is using its buildings to benefit the community in some way – either by providing church-run activities or hosting other organisations. In our survey, 97% listed at least one, and usually more, activities happening on their premises in the last year.

The most common activities are those supporting community life – hosting charity committee meetings, letting out spaces for social events and hosting music concerts.

The next most common activities are those involving service provision to meet local needs and promote personal wellbeing – children’s nurseries, counselling, keep fit, etc.

Some churches also help to support people’s economic circumstances – debt advice, job clubs, etc.

3.5 ASSESSING THE EXTENT OF CHURCH BUILDINGS USAGE

Our survey has also enabled us to assess the extent to which Islington’s numerous church spaces are used throughout the week. The findings are significant.

We asked each church to estimate the extent to which their main church worship spaces, their church halls and meeting rooms were in use through the week – that is, from Monday to Saturday (not including Sundays) and including mornings, afternoons and evenings. Usage includes any kind of activity, whether internal church activities or activities run by others.

Just over half of all ‘owning’ churches in Islington, including churches from every denomination, provided data through the survey, giving us a clear and robust view.

Figure 5: Extent to which church buildings are in use through the week

Denomination	Church Worship Spaces	Church Halls	Church Meeting rooms
Baptist	17%	39%	29%
Church of England	31%	49%	24%
Congregational	39%	42%	24%
Independent	0%	22%	31%
Methodist	56%	31%	19%
Pentecostal	28%	28%	6%
Quaker	61%	n/a	67%
Roman Catholic	56%	28%	11%
United Reformed Church	6%	64%	42%
Orthodox	No data	No data	No data
Average for all churches	31%	43%	25%

Figure 5 shows the levels of use of each kind of space throughout the week. Church halls are the most used and church meeting rooms the least used. Levels of use are also reasonably consistent between mornings, afternoons and evenings overall for each kind of space.

The overall findings are stark.

Although the utilisation of spaces varies between churches and denominations, it is clear that the average levels of usage are not high, nor does any denomination buck the trend. **In fact, across the Borough and across every denomination, church spaces lie empty and unused for the majority of the week:**

- **Church halls are empty 57% of the week**
- **Church worship spaces are empty 69% of the week**
- **Church meeting rooms are empty 75% of the week**

This is both a major challenge and a major opportunity for the church, as we discuss below.

3.6 CHURCH INCOME FROM LETTINGS

INCOME FROM CHURCH BUILDINGS

We also explored the income that churches in Islington currently generate from letting out their various spaces. (Note that this only relates to income which comes to these local churches, it does not include the properties and incomes which may be owned by the regional or national denominational bodies, many of which have portfolios and incomes of their own).

Our survey identified an estimated gross annual income from the letting of church property (excluding housing and before any running costs are taken into account) to be approximately £700,000 across the 31 churches which supplied data. **This is an average gross income of £23,000 per church per year.**

If we scale this up for all 62 'owning' churches in Islington, it suggests that between them they have a total gross lettings income of **£1.4m per year.**

The level of income varies significantly between churches, due to both the premises which they own and their capacity and approach to management, as can be seen in Figure 6. More than half have a gross annual income of less than £10,000, with 22% generating over £50,000, including a couple of churches with incomes well over this.

The picture is one where the majority of churches earn modest incomes and a smaller number are generating significant income.

INCOME FROM CHURCH HOUSING

We also gathered data on the income which churches received from renting out any flats or houses which they owned. Across the 31 churches which supplied data, their total gross annual income from housing was approximately £355,000, which is an average gross income of **£11,500 per church per year.**

The distribution of this income between churches is heavily skewed, as some churches own no housing and many who do earn little income from it, so only 20% of churches are earning more than £20,000 per year from this source of income. As one would expect most church housing to be used for housing church staff at low rents, this is perhaps not surprising.

Figure 6: Income from the letting of church properties

Gross annual income	Gross income from property excluding housing % of churches in each income bracket	Gross income from church flats or houses % of churches in each income bracket
£0	0%	16%
£0 - £10,000	52%	48%
£10,000 - £20,000	13%	16%
£20,000 - £30,000	6%	3%
£30,000 - £40,000	6%	10%
£40,000 - £50,000	0%	3%
£50,000 - £75,000	16%	0%
Over £75,000	6%	3%
Total	100%	100%

TOTAL GROSS INCOME FOR CHURCHES

So, for the 62 ‘owning’ churches in Islington, our data suggests that the **average gross annual income is £34,500 per church per year, which is £2.1m per year for all ‘owning’ churches in the Borough.** Clearly, this income is distributed very unequally between churches, but it gives a clear overall sense of scale for the church as a whole.

Given the relatively low utilisation levels of many church spaces, it is not difficult to see that this income level could be improved upon, as discussed below.

3.7 INCREASING THE COMMUNITY USE OF CHURCH BUILDINGS

Our survey also canvassed opinion amongst local churches as to their aspirations for the future.

The majority of these churches are keen for the local community to use their buildings more often; **75% of local churches want to see increased community use of their buildings.** A handful were not sure and wanted more information to help them decide, and only 11% said no. This means that almost 90% of churches are either keen for, or maybe open to, a greater level of community activity within their church.

We explored the key factors which might help to achieve this.

The single biggest factor for 44% of churches was the need for **staff time** to undertake the necessary management required to let out spaces.

Nearly 90% of Islington churches have at least one paid member of staff, although the size of staff teams varies significantly between churches. The survey identified an average of 1 paid member of staff (including clergy and non-clergy) per 60 members of the congregation, overall.

Only a handful of Islington churches (11%) have a paid property or facilities manager who can focus on property management and letting out spaces as a key part of their job. In most churches the Vicar/Minister or the church administrator do this as part of their work, which is the nature of the obstacle. **Any solution which sought a significant increase in the community use of church buildings would require the time to be invested by someone other than the church leader or church administrator.** We believe that this is an important issue.

Some 43% of churches also wanted ‘advice and support’ on how to go about letting out space more frequently.

These churches recognised that they do not currently have sufficient knowledge to do it.

Related to this, many churches were also interested in advice and support for using their spaces ‘more missionally’ (30% of churches) and for ‘running social enterprises in’ (23%). It seems clear that there is quite an appetite for assistance amongst churches for the greater and more imaginative use of their buildings.

Some churches also wanted to see some investment in their properties, to repair and/or improve them, to make lettings easier to achieve.

INCREASING INCOME TOO?

Related to this discussion is a concern amongst churches about increasing their income. Our survey of ‘owning’ churches identified that **64% of churches were concerned about the cost of maintaining their buildings each year**, with only 36% describing them as ‘affordable and sustainable’. On top of this, 60% did not believe that their buildings were in ‘a good state of repair’.

It is clear that finding ways to increase income levels would be of great assistance for many of the Borough’s churches.

3.8 POTENTIAL FOR INCREASING CHURCH LETTINGS INCOME

As a feasibility exercise, we have drawn on the data gathered through our research to estimate the potential lettings income which churches in Islington could secure if they increased the usage of church spaces.

We have taken each church’s current usage levels and estimated the *additional lettings income* which would be generated if usage *increased up to 65% of the available times*. We have used the most cautious assumptions in every respect:

- Spaces are never available on Sundays and no space is used more than 65% of a week (a week being Monday to Saturday and including morning, afternoon and evening sessions)
- In addition, every space is 100% unused for 8 weeks of the year to allow for festivals and holidays

- Each type of space is let out at modest hourly rates, in each case below the rates currently being charged in many churches in Islington:
 - Church worship space £25 per hour
 - Church hall £15 per hour
 - Meeting room £10 per hour
- We have not assumed any additional income from church-owned housing
- We have excluded the income already being generated from spaces, so this is purely additional income

Across the 62 ‘owning’ churches, increasing lettings on these terms would generate an **additional £64,000 per church per year on average**. In total, for all of these churches, this would be an **additional £4m of gross income per year**. This is in addition to the £1.4m which we know these churches are already generating through letting out their spaces, and does not include any income from housing at all.

For every £1 of income which churches are currently receiving from lettings income, they could be generating a further £2.85 per year, even on modest assumptions. There is enormous potential for each denomination to increase its income by making use of existing assets.

There are four practical points to note:

- In practice, any such income would be unevenly distributed across churches according to their size, location and the nature of their premises, but the overall picture is one of great opportunity for most denominations.
- There would of course be new costs to incur in letting out spaces more often, so this is a statement of gross income, but it is of such a scale that a generous net income could certainly be delivered. The assumptions used to calculate the income are also very modest.
- Any new approach to the management of church spaces would also see changes to the way that existing lettings are managed, so it is

also entirely reasonable to suppose that potential also exists there for increased income – amongst both church spaces and church housing. We know that some churches continue to charge very low rates out of historic habit rather than policy.

- The increased usage of church premises does not in any way imply a dilution of the church’s Christian identity or mission. For example, some churches choose to use their worship space for worship and prayer alone; this would not preclude the active management of other spaces. Nor does active management imply letting premises for any or all activities for the highest price – there are many approaches to managing space in an intelligent and responsible way. (This is discussed in more detail later in the report.)

3.9 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The key findings from the survey can be summarised as follows:

- We found 85 churches of almost every denomination in Islington – one church for every 2,500 residents in the Borough – and there may possibly be more
- The total estimated weekly Sunday attendance of 16,900 is equivalent to 8% of the local population
- Of the 85 churches, 23 (27%) are renting and these are mainly Pentecostal and Independent churches. All of the churches in our survey which rent said that they would prefer to own their own premises.
- Of the 85 churches, 62 (73%) own their own buildings. Between them, they own 59 worship spaces, 76 church halls and 149 meeting rooms.
- Many of the ‘owning’ churches are active in terms of property redevelopment; nearly half are either undertaking a redevelopment project on part of their property or are about to start one.

- Nearly every single church is using its buildings to benefit the community in some way, either by providing church-run activities or hosting the activities of other organisations. In our survey, 97% listed at least one, and usually many more, activities happening on their premises in the last year.
- The overall utilisation of church spaces is relatively low. Across the Borough and across every denomination, church spaces lie empty and unused for the majority of the week:
 - Church halls are empty 57% of the week
 - Church worship spaces are empty 69% of the week
 - Church meeting rooms are empty 75% of the week
- The estimated average gross income from church lettings is £23,000 per church per year. The estimated average gross income from the letting of church housing is £11,500 per church per year. So, for the 62 ‘owning’ churches in Islington, the average gross annual income from property is £34,500 per church per year, which is £2.1m per year. (This is not evenly distributed between churches).
- 75% of local churches want to see increased community use of their buildings. 43% of churches also want ‘advice and support’ on how to go about letting out space more frequently

There are two important stories running through all of this data.

The first story is about the ‘renting church’. Mainly Pentecostal and Independent, these churches are required to be mobile, often have to move premises, and are desperate to own their own premises or at least achieve greater long term security and certainty over where they operate from. Given the excess and underused space that is evident in other denominations, one might think that an ecumenical solution would not be impossible (not least as present trends continue to show the growth of ‘new’ churches)¹. Indeed, as we describe in one of our case studies in a later chapter, such things can be done and are being done in some places. At the very least, there are likely to be

¹ See Brierley, P, already cited

benefits from the more established denominations developing a greater understanding of the nature, work and challenges of newer or more recently arrived churches; and it may be mutually beneficial.

The second story is about the ‘owing church’. As we have seen, there is a huge challenge and opportunity facing the denominations which own their own premises.

Nearly every church runs activities for the benefit of the wider community, but very few are making full use of their property – the church’s property assets are, in most cases, seriously underused. For churches which are serious about mission and anxious to improve their financial sustainability, this is an opportunity too important to miss.

As we have seen above, a more active and systematic approach by churches to property and facilities management could increase lettings income by a substantial amount, even on modest assumptions. Achieving an increase in income of even half this amount would be transformational for the finances of the churches involved. It is also entirely possible for the greater use of church buildings to be done in a fully Christian and missional way – it is much more than just a financial issue, it is a sharing of space with neighbours for mutual benefit; a solid foundation for relationship building and faith sharing. What could be more mission-shaped than that?

We do not believe that simply exhorting local churches to ‘try harder’ or issuing good practice toolkits will address this challenge. There are sound reasons why many local churches do not make more of their buildings – in many cases they simply do not have the time, skills or capacity to do so. Creative solutions are possible, and there are enough churches doing it well for us to be confident that significant change is possible. We propose practical solutions later in the report which address the core challenge of lack of facilities management capacity.

PART B

REFLECTING



4 THEOLOGY OF CHURCH BUILDINGS: REASONS TO ACT

It is important to reflect theologically on the role of land and buildings within our churches today. There are some differences of emphasis between different denominations but much more that is held in common.

4.1 CHURCHES AND THEIR BUILDINGS

Christians are called to worship “in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). It is just as possible to worship God and feel his presence in the great outdoors as it is under a roof. The Church is, after all, the people of God - it is not the building they meet in. The early church met in people’s homes or outdoors.

Yet there are good reasons to establish permanent church buildings. Some of these are very much practical reasons – it makes organising our church life easier. It provides a physical base to run activities from. It also offers a tangible sign to the wider community of our presence and worship – a witness. Buildings can even be beautiful. They can be valuable. For Catholics, having a permanent and consecrated church space where Mass can be celebrated is also of great theological significance.

Those churches who rent temporary premises – for example those meeting in a school hall or a community centre - know only too well how much work and effort is involved in having to constantly ‘set up’ and then ‘pack down’ their equipment every Sunday. Many of the independent and Pentecostal churches in our survey were in this category. So, we know that a church building can be very helpful.

There is however, more to it than just this. We also know from biblical revelation that ‘place’ matters to God.

When God chose to enter the world, it was not in some ethereal generic manner but in a particular family, in a particular town, in a particular country with particular socio-religious practices. Just as Christ “became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood” (John 1:14 The Message), so also the people that comprise the local church... are meant to be a tangible expression of God’s love in the everyday reality of life¹.

The incarnation is a demonstration of God’s abiding interest in the real, material world - his own Creation. Why would he not be?

¹ P. Sparks, T. Soerens and D. Friesen, *The New Parish. How Neighbourhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community* (London: IVP Press, 2014), 24

This is not to say that some places are more important than others, more that every place matters in some way.

In the [Bible] there is no timeless space, but there is also no spaceless time. There is rather storied place, that is a place which has meaning because of the history lodged there. There are stories which have authority because they are located in a place. This means that biblical faith cannot be presented simply as an historical movement indifferent to place which could have happened in one setting as well as another, because it is undeniably fixed in this place with this meaning. And for all its apparent ‘spiritualising’, the New Testament does not escape this rootage².

Or as Eugene Peterson (the writer of the Message Bible, the paraphrased Bible) has said – “there is no theology without geography.”

The implication for the church community is that when we do choose a place to meet and worship God on a regular basis – sometimes over centuries – our actions give that place a new ‘story’, a new significance. That place becomes ‘special’, even ‘holy’ in some sense. It is not that the land or place itself was special to begin with, but rather that we have chosen to set aside a place to worship God – rather like we set aside the Sabbath, a portion of time, as a special time to honour God. They become symbolic places, which can help God’s people to worship. They also act as physical reminders to the rest of our communities that God is worshipped here:

If the heavens declare the glory of God, the skyline of our country is dotted with towers and spires which point heavenwards to witness to the fact that this world is not a system closed to itself.³

God can be worshipped anywhere, but when we do set aside places for worship they become special places, and there is much evidence that people find such places helpful in coming closer to God – spaces

² W. Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (London: S.P.C.K., 1978), 187

³ Church of England (2015) *Report of the Church Buildings Review Group*, Church House (para 104)

where there is less distraction and a more obvious focus on the things of God. They can also be physical symbols that point people outside of the Church towards God. They can therefore become places of great value to us and others.

Different churches and denominations have varying understandings of what ‘special’ means in relation to worship spaces in particular and there are sometimes special designations (‘consecrated space’) and restrictions on which activities can and cannot take place there. However, many churches today are fairly flexible on this – there are surprisingly few rules and most approaches are based upon local church habit and culture. For Catholics though, church worship spaces are restricted for this purpose alone.

Across all denominations, however, there is great flexibility and relatively few rules about the use of ancillary church spaces like halls and meeting rooms. (The practical implications of these issues for the greater use of church premises are discussed later in the report.)

4.2 TWO SPIRITUAL CHALLENGES FOR CHURCHES WHICH OWN BUILDINGS: IDOLATRY AND PIETISM

It follows that if a church does have responsibility for a building then it should maintain the building and seek to ensure it is ‘fit for purpose’. This is common sense. Within this, however, there are two common spiritual pitfalls for these churches.

LOVING THE WRONG THINGS

Firstly, those churches which own buildings must guard against idolatry – the risk that we come to love certain places and buildings too much and lose sight of their role in helping us to worship and become the thing we worship instead. This may be a particular risk for those whose church buildings are Listed or in some way part of our national heritage. Whilst beautiful and interesting places and worthy of investment and care, we must retain a proper sense of priorities. Jesus himself had little time for those who were more excited about the

Temple building itself than the people inside it or the God it was meant to point towards.

In the same way, we are warned against becoming too attached to places given that we are “foreigners and exiles” in this world (1 Peter 2:11). As the church is a people who are ‘passing through’ we need to keep our eyes on the Kingdom of God not the trappings of the world around us.

For those churches which own their own buildings it is also worth remembering that they are nearly always inherited from a previous generation and will often be passed on to the next generation. Rather than seeing ourselves as ‘owners’ it is often therefore more appropriate to think of ourselves as ‘stewards’ or ‘tenants’ who need to think carefully about what we are handing on to others in the future.

LOVING OUR NEIGHBOUR

The second pitfall for the unwary church community is perhaps more common and flows from a misunderstanding of the nature of church buildings – *the risk of pietism*.

Jesus quite clearly calls us to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” and also to “love your neighbour as yourself”. (Matthew 22:37-39) The Church is called to do both. It always gets itself into trouble when it does one but not the other. To focus on loving God alone and ignoring our neighbour leads us to an other-worldly pietism. To focus on loving our neighbour but neglecting God leads to secularism. Just as our calling has two sides, belonging together, so our church buildings as a whole should rightly serve both purposes.

For Catholics, a church worship space is indeed for worship alone, but the rest of the church’s buildings (halls, meeting rooms, houses) have no such restrictions. For nearly all other denominations, even the worship space itself can be used for a variety of purposes as well, as long as this is done responsibly.

For centuries in Britain, many church buildings were traditionally the hubs of their communities – hosting public meetings (the origins of local government), meetings of local guilds (business meetings)

and even being used for threshing and storing grain at harvest time with local fairs and markets often held in churchyards. Even our great Anglican Cathedrals have a long tradition of community use – in medieval times, they would host Mystery Plays and even fairs.

As we have seen in this report, most churches today do seek to use their buildings to serve their local community in some way. We know that this can be challenging. But to deliberately leave church buildings empty for most of the week is surely akin to the man who received money from his master and rather than invest it - chose to bury it in the garden (the Parable of the Talents – Matthew 25:14-30).

PART C

**ACTING: THE
CHURCH
TOMORROW**



5 CHURCH CASE STUDIES

As part of our research, we identified some interesting and helpful examples of how some churches have sought to make good use of their spaces. This is not a comprehensive list of all approaches possible, nor are these the only examples of practice but they offer practical examples of how different kinds of buildings can be used well by churches for mission.

Each case study points to one possible approach for making greater use of church assets:

- Case study 1** **Creating and reviving church spaces to increase mission**
Hope Church, Islington
- Case study 2** **Church partnerships for the 21st Century**
Ethiopian Christian Fellowship Church, King's Cross
- Case study 3** **Active church property management**
St Paul, Old Ford, Tower Hamlets

CASE STUDY 1: CREATING AND REVIVING CHURCH SPACES TO INCREASE MISSION: HOPE CHURCH, ISLINGTON

This is a story of revival, redevelopment and partnership in the Anglican church of St David, Holloway which has seen old buildings brought back into use, new flexible spaces created and all of them now actively managed to support the mission of the church. For some churches, such a redevelopment is an important step to making the best use of their existing land and property; for others, this is not necessary.

CONTEXT

The Parish of St Mary Magdalene and St David, Holloway is an Anglican parish situated in the heart of Islington, known as Hope Church Islington. The parish includes Highbury Corner and the Arsenal Stadium along with much housing. There are two churches within the parish, run by one integrated team – St Mary’s is the larger church on the busy Holloway Road and St David’s is situated on a quieter residential street.

The church of St David was first built in 1869 to serve the rapidly growing population of the area and enjoyed over a century of lively activity. However, by the 1970s the congregation was dwindling and eventually in 1984 the church was closed and the buildings declared as redundant. This could have been the end of the church. Eventually the main church building was rented out to a local Greek Orthodox congregation for a low rent while its long term future was contemplated. In the end, the Greek Orthodox community made good use of it for nearly 20 years, before moving to permanent premises of their own nearby.

In 1992, St Mary Magdalene sent a small group of people to re-start the church. They met in St David’s Church Hall, adjacent to the old church. Over the following decade, the congregation slowly grew to about 50 people (adults and children). The hall was well used through the week, often rented out for community uses or in use by the church, and so the renewed St David’s congregation became used to using the

same informal space for lots of different kinds of activities – it actually helped to shape their identity. As the congregation grew though, it became clear that the old church hall was not going to be large enough.

REDEVELOPMENT

In 2004, when the Greek Orthodox church vacated the main church building and it became empty again, the St David’s congregation resolved after much discussion to take back the church and refurbish it to make it ‘fit for purpose’ for the 21st century. The decision was not taken lightly, nor was it inevitable. There was great trepidation at first at the thought of taking responsibility for the church again, particularly given how much investment it needed. It also required a feat of imagination as the church was not in great repair and was in a very formal style which did not particularly fit the character of St David’s congregation. Nevertheless, after much prayer and discussion, the church’s leaders at St David’s developed a vision of how the church might be ‘re-born’ to serve the present mission of the church and decided to attempt it. When the Parish appointed a new Vicar in 2006, Revd Paul Zaphiriou, he fully supported the work.

The project to refurbish the church took 9 years in the end, finally opening in its new form 2013. It is a case study in persistence, but the final outcome was worth the wait.

The redevelopment project benefited from the expertise of the Revd Jonathan Rust, who was a Curate at St David’s from 2000 – 2003 and then stayed on to become their Associate Vicar (and still is today). From the outset, he project managed it for the church, drawing on his previous professional background as a Development Surveyor for several large private-sector property developers.

A fuller description of the £4 million church redevelopment process is available separately as a CTC Case Study¹, but, in summary, part of the church’s site (including the old church hall) was redeveloped for private and social housing, which generated most of the capital to fund a comprehensive refurbishment of the main church building. The difference was made up by charitable grant funding.

¹ All CTC Case Studies are available to download on our website at www.theology-centre.org

The refurbished church now includes:

- On the ground floor - A well equipped kitchen, toilets, offices and a prayer room, together with an attractive reception area and the main church worship space
- Upstairs – Two floors of space, wrapped in a ‘u’ shape around the main worship space, currently used by The Courtyard, a specialist school for children with autism, which is part of St Mary Magdalene Academy, the local Church of England secondary school
- In the basement – a suite of 8 classrooms and a ‘cinema room’ were created, currently also being used by St Mary Magdalene Academy for teaching purposes
- Two parish flats – a two-bed flat which is part of the church complex and a two-bed flat which is part of the adjacent housing development.

MANAGEMENT AND USE OF CHURCH SPACES

Since the church building re-opened in 2013, the congregation of St David’s now has the benefit of a bright, new worship space in which it can meet and worship and into which it can grow. The church has also retained use of the basement rooms and most other spaces on Sundays and in the evenings for running children’s church and other church activities. Some additional rooms are also available for church use all day. There are plenty of attractive and flexible spaces for the church to use throughout the week for its mission of growth and serving the local community.

Today St David’s has approximately 40-50 adults and children people meeting on a Sunday morning –a diverse group including many families - and there are 40-50 adults meeting on a Sunday evening. Together with its sister church St Mary’s, it runs activities for older people, for parents and toddlers, for students, outreach events like Soul in the City and even an (outdoor) Pet Service.

Most of the newly created spaces, in the basement and upstairs, are currently rented out by the adjacent Church School, who are obviously a key partner for the church. With the exception of the spaces on the first floor, all of the other spaces are available for use by the church in evenings and on Sundays. Sometimes these spaces (and the main church itself) are let out to other users on a regular or an ad-hoc basis; for example a Czech language school uses a number of spaces each

Saturday at the moment.

The church currently earns over £160,000 per year in income from renting out its various spaces; this includes income from all of the church spaces, the two parish flats and some modest ground rent from the adjacent housing development (which the church still owns the Freehold of). After the costs of managing and maintaining these spaces, it is estimated that perhaps £130,000 net per year is available for the church to spend on what it chooses. Needless to say this is a very helpful boost to the parish in its mission as a whole.

The Parish employs a part-time (3 days per week) Premises Manager to manage all of its buildings, manage lettings, liaise with tenants and oversee any repairs. She is also assisted by a couple of part-time vergers who undertake a range of practical tasks.

LESSONS

- Any significant church redevelopment is likely to be difficult, time-consuming and expensive. They are not to be undertaken lightly; but experiencing problems does not mean that it is a bad scheme, it just underlines the nature of the challenge. Nevertheless, when they conclude successfully, they can deliver a great enabling resource for the church which may benefit several generations. The advice from St David’s is “dream big...then pare back if you need to”.
- In choosing how best to manage its spaces there is a ‘triangle of tension’ between the church retaining use of its spaces for church activities, the renting out of spaces for income generation and using spaces to serve the local community (which may cost money). Finding an appropriate balance may take time and may also change over time as circumstances require. “A redevelopment should enable more mission... not just make our lives more comfortable.”
- Church spaces require pro-active management if they are to be well maintained, repaired and used effectively. It does not just happen accidentally.
- Hosting non-church activities on church premises does not automatically lead to ‘mission’ if those building users do not engage with the congregation themselves or have the time or opportunity to enjoy the building as a church. Any such engagement of users requires thought and intentional planning. Mission needs to be intentional.

CASE STUDY 2: CHURCH PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: THE ETHIOPIAN CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

This is a story of a new 'diaspora' church putting down roots in the UK and taking ownership of an old church to bring new life into it. It also includes a role reversal where a new pentecostal church now rents space to an Anglican church.

CONTEXT

The wars and unrest in Ethiopia and Eritrea since the 1970s have prompted various waves of immigration to the UK. The number of Ethiopians living in the UK is small, just over 15,000², with most are living in London. Many have lived here long enough to establish families so the community has grown and also changed over the last forty years, as each new generation has grown up.

The Ethiopian Christian Fellowship began in 1980 as an informal group of Ethiopian students meeting together in one of their homes for Christian fellowship. It grew and also proved helpful to new arrivals to the UK, whether Ethiopian or Eritrean and even if not Christian. Many immigrants welcomed friendship, support and help with orientation.

In 1994, the fellowship became a church. Its members were drawn from various denominations in Ethiopia but in London they put these differences aside and met as one Christian community. The church initially met in Kensington Temple, Notting Hill Gate, an Elim Pentecostal Church. As it continued to grow, it kept moving premises.

The church considers itself to be broadly pentecostal and evangelical in its approach and has been 'loosely' affiliated with the Elim Pentecostal church in the past but is independent. It draws its members from across London.

² The 2011 Census identified just over 15,000 residents of England and Wales as born in Ethiopia

THE CHURCH FINDS A HOME

In 1990, the Ethiopian Christian Fellowship was an informal gathering of about 50 people. By 1995 it was a church with a membership closer to 150 people. By 2000, it had over 400 members, with five (paid) pastors to lead it and a Board of Elders elected by the congregation to oversee it.

During this decade of growth, the church had to move premises five times. Initially based at Kensington Temple (Kensington and Chelsea), they then moved to a Baptist church in Chalk Farm (Camden), then back to Kensington, then to an Anglican church near Marble Arch (City of Westminster), then to another Baptist church in Plaistow (Newham) and finally to a school hall in Camden. As one of their pastors put it "place was a problem for us".

By 2001, it was clear that the congregation was too large to meet in one place and many of their members wanted to meet somewhere more central, so a new congregation was planted in Fulham, West London (approximately 70 people) from the main congregation in Newham, East London (over 300 people).

At the same time, the church began to develop its youth ministry. They became aware of many unaccompanied young people who had come from Ethiopia and who were vulnerable. They developed a youth service and ministry to support their young people which became a congregation of 100 people from age 15 to 21, meeting in one of the halls owned by St Mary's, Islington.

In 2009, they came across a redundant church building in King's Cross which had closed in 2006 – formerly the Kings Cross Welsh Tabernacle, a congregational chapel. They decided to buy it and brought their east London and Islington congregations together to be based there. Today, 400-450 people meet in the Kings Cross building on a Sunday (of whom 200 are under 16), and over 120 continue to meet in Fulham. Four more Ethiopian churches have also been planted across London now, each one independent.

The purchase of the old church was made possible by years of saving (for the deposit), a mortgage and a generous and committed congregation. It has made a "big difference" and allows them to save money in the long run. They view their building as an asset for the church's activities and mission.

MATURING AND DEVELOPING

In a development which reflects the wider experience of the Ethiopian community in London, the church began to run an English language Sunday service for its older teenagers (mainly aged 16-19). All of its other services are in Amharic. The younger generation of Ethiopians are British nationals, speak English as their first language and mix freely with people of other cultures at school and elsewhere. So, at church, they want a different cultural experience to their parents. They want to belong to a church which is more multi-cultural in nature. This congregation is being planted out to become a church in its own right and with its own approach.

In 2011, the Ethiopian Christian Fellowship Church was approached by a new Anglican church plant 'KXC' who asked to use their buildings. They agreed and so KXC began to rent the church space on Sundays to meet in. Today, after rapid growth, KXC runs two Sunday services in the afternoon and evening, for about 500 people.

REFLECTION

The Ethiopian Christian Fellowship Church is a 'diaspora' church, originally consisting mainly of people from another country but now evolving as its people put down roots and their children grow up as citizens of the UK and who have never lived anywhere else. This is a challenge for the church, as it goes through a time of transition, but a great opportunity too as they become more interested in working with their neighbours and other churches.

As one of their pastors put it "This is now our home and our country and so we must love it and pray for it....and we must be good citizens here." This pastor himself arrived in Britain in 1990 with only £250 in his pocket and no-one to meet him at the airport, but is now settled here. He is "deeply grateful for the generosity of Britain". He wants to see his church working with others – of all denominations – to serve this country together in mission and evangelism.

Renting out their church to KXC is one small part of what 'working together' might look like. It benefits both churches. Is this one early sign of what a deeper partnership between denominations might look like on the ground?

CASE STUDY 3: ACTIVE CHURCH PROPERTY MANAGEMENT: ST PAUL, OLD FORD, TOWER HAMLETS

This is a story of a lively local church which actively manages its spaces to build up the life of the church and serve the local community.

CONTEXT

St Paul is an Anglican church in Old Ford in Tower Hamlets, a few minutes' walk from the Roman Road street market and not far from the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The church was built in 1878 and enjoyed a century of life and work before safety concerns led to the building's closure in 1991.

After 13 years of hard work and fundraising, a fully refurbished and remodelled building was re-opened in 2004. St Paul's now has not only a worship space for 120 people, but also four storeys of flexible spaces built inside the church, which are used for a range of purposes.

The church is lively and diverse with, typically, over 100 people gathering for worship on Sundays. The church is actively engaged in outreach and mission, particularly reaching out to local young people through a range of activities. It also runs bible studies, a craft group and has an active Mothers Union group.

CHURCH SPACE AND ITS MANAGEMENT

St Paul's has a number of physical spaces after its remodelling, which includes:

- The main worship space, seating 120 people
- A small church hall, which can seat 40 people
- Two smaller meeting rooms holding 5 and 10 people
- A small church office
- A café space in the entrance to the church, open to the public
- Two floors of space let out to long-term tenants

St Paul's is not an unusually large church, but following its remodelling it has a larger number of discrete spaces which it is able to use for different purposes.

The two upper floors have been let out at modest rents to long term partner organisations, very much as part of the church's mission to the local community. On the top floor, in the old roof space, Ability Bow provides a fully equipped community gym and support to people with long term health challenges. IntoUniversity on the floor below runs a learning centre which works with local young people to encourage them to aspire to university education.

On the ground floor, the café is open every day providing affordable food and drink and a drop-in social space for the local community.

The other rooms are either used by the church to run its own activities or let out to local people and groups on an ad hoc basis for a wide range of activities from keep fit to children's parties to film auditions. Each room is used most days.

The parish also has a second church St Mark's which is no longer used for regular worship, but which is rented to a Montessori Nursery.

The management of all of the church's spaces and tenants is undertaken by a full-time Venue Manager, and a full-time assistant who supports her and who does much of the financial administration. This team also includes a café supervisor and a part-time cleaner.

The church also has other staff, including two clergy and a youth worker and pastoral assistants.

REFLECTIONS

In 2014, the church earned nearly £130,000 in income from letting out its various spaces, which provided 60% of the parish's total income for the year. The parish does not in fact make a great surplus on its property management, as it also employs staff to manage it and has overheads to cover, but the income enables the church to provide a range of services it was not providing before – it can host charities for a reasonable rent, let out spaces for others and provides a community café.

The church's policy is not to maximise income from its spaces, but to balance income generation with the provision of services to the local community in a way which broadly breaks even. Hence, the café is not profit-making but is subsidised by other activities/income. Most of its

income comes from the regular rent from its established partner tenants.

Every church will have different spaces and opportunities and a different approach to managing those spaces. The experience of St Paul, Old Ford illustrates how a lively church with a number of spaces can actively manage them to support church life and mission.



6 PILOT PROPOSAL: CHURCH SPACE LTD A NEW MODEL FOR MANAGING CHURCH FACILITIES

In this chapter we propose a new enterprise-based approach to securing a much greater utilisation of church buildings using an enterprise-based approach. We believe that this could bring significant missional and financial benefits to participating churches.

6.1 UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE

As we have seen, much church space is underused. A great opportunity exists across our many denominations to use this space more effectively – to promote mission and generate income. Yet most local churches lack the capacity to achieve this.

Some of the larger and better funded churches are well placed to manage their own spaces effectively; some already do, and with some encouragement and support, more could follow suit. However, the majority of churches which are smaller and less well funded are unlikely to be in this happy position any time soon; they lack the staff time, the skills and the know-how to effectively manage their spaces. No amount of exhortation or ‘good practice tool-kits’ are likely to overcome the core problem either – which is a lack of capacity. This was confirmed in our survey – ‘lack of time’ was cited by busy vicars and ministers as a major obstacle.

If church denominations are to make the most of their buildings on any sort of scale or with the hope of systematic improvement in the situation then any solution must address the question of the lack of capacity at a local level.

This chapter proposes an enterprise-based approach to solving this problem which would pay for itself, generate income for participating churches and by its voluntary nature be relatively quick to establish. It could also operate ecumenically, eliminating the need for every denomination to create its own solution.

6.2 THE PROPOSAL – CHURCH SPACE LTD

We believe that the core of any solution to the current underuse of church buildings should reflect two principles:

- that the capacity for marketing and managing church spaces will need to be provided outside of local churches (rather than expecting each of them to develop it for themselves)
- that the scope for income generation means that any solution should be able to pay for itself without imposing new costs onto churches

Our suggested approach is to establish a new independent ‘not for profit’ social enterprise as a pilot in one local geographical area (e.g. a London Borough). This organisation would offer a professional service to churches in that area to market and let out their church spaces, as they determined, and assist them in maintaining and managing those spaces. Participation by churches would be entirely voluntary – they would choose to ‘opt in’. Any income generated from those spaces would be shared, with the majority going to the local church and some retained by the new organisation to enable it to cover its own costs. Churches choosing to participate in the project would therefore be doing so on a ‘no win, no fee’ basis – that is, there would be no fees for participating, and if it did not work, they would lose nothing, but if their spaces are let out, they gain new additional income.

The letting of spaces is likely to be a mix of ad hoc lettings to one-off users, regular users (e.g. organisations looking for regular weekly slots) and dedicated partners who may want sole use of a particular space during the week (e.g. nurseries). The mix of uses will depend on the local demand and also the nature of the spaces and the wishes of the church involved.

The nature of lettings may vary but all will be meeting local needs and demand for space – this is a service to the community in itself. The level of income generation may vary too; for some charitable/missional purposes, there may be no charge at all – e.g. entering into a partnership with a local Credit Union to operate an Access Point once a week. For other uses it may be appropriate to charge a more commercial fee – e.g. a privately run exercise class. The nature of mission may also differ between uses – although it is possible to be intentional about mission with every user. For some uses, mission may be indirect, simply through the brief relationship between the church and the user. For other uses, it may be more direct, where the church deliberately selects partners to use its space for very missional purposes. For example, KXC in Islington have established a co-working space to help build community amongst freelance workers (see our separate CTC Case Study for more information). This also generates income.

There are clearly some important practical issues that would need to be addressed, and the precise nature of these will vary from church to church, but we are confident that all are capable of resolution:

- Quality of spaces – each space would need to be appraised for suitability of letting. It is possible that some that are in a poor state of repair may not be lettable, but most spaces are likely to be usable. Hourly rates would be realistic and reflect the nature of the space and the location of the church.
- Access – spaces would only be let where security of the rest of the premises can be ensured and where arrangements are in place to unlock and lock the spaces involved.
- Cleaning – spaces would need to be more cleaned more regularly to ensure they are ready for use, the costs of which would come out of the new additional income, so there would be no net increase in costs for churches.
- Marketing, booking, deposits and payments – all of this would be managed by the new enterprise, and undertaken within a simple and transparent legal agreement set up with each participating church. Spaces would be marketed through an attractive, professional website, providing a ‘shop window’ through which the local community could easily find appropriate and affordable spaces to hire.
- Property maintenance – most churches manage their own building maintenance, but it is possible that this service could be extended to include the regular maintenance of buildings for those churches interested in this.

To be viable, such an enterprise probably needs at least five churches at the outset, with a good selection of lettable spaces. After this, other churches could opt in.

A successful pilot would then give confidence to other areas to follow suit. It is likely that such an enterprise-based approach would work well in a local area (e.g. a borough) which was large enough to be economically viable but small enough to allow a personal and locally-relevant service.

6.3 ADDRESSING THE MYTHS

Such an approach may be new to most churches, but similar enterprises are already well established in the private sector for commercial spaces. There will be understandable questions and concerns from churches, but we believe that these can be addressed and an enterprise could be operated in a way which is entirely missional and appropriate for the church.

Typical questions may include:

- **Will we lose control of our own church hall?**

No, each church would only participate if it wanted to, agreements would be time limited (e.g. 6 months) so that churches can opt out again if they decide it does not work for them. Each church would also be able to set clear policies on which activities they would not be comfortable having on their premises (e.g. not permitting alcohol or formal acts of worship by people of other religions).

- **Wouldn't this just make the church a money-making machine?**

No, far from it - the underlying purpose is missional. Increasing the use of church spaces by the local community will increase the scope for building new relationships with neighbours. Any enterprise would pro-actively encourage participating churches to ‘think mission’ in relation to their spaces and good practice already exists in how churches can build relationships with the users of their premises through the week. The increased income could also be used by churches for many good purposes. Churches will also be able to vary the rates charged for each space – e.g. local charities could be offered cheaper rates than private organisations. Churches could also be encouraged to work with specific partners to develop new missional uses for their space, some of which may also generate income – e.g. nurseries, co-working spaces, cafes, sports activities, etc.

- **We want our church worship space to be used for worship only**

There is no problem with doing this and there is no pressure to let spaces you do not want to let. If you have other spaces, such as halls or meeting rooms, just let those instead. Church policies on the use of worship spaces vary significantly – some are flexible (within limits) about how they are used, whereas others only use them for worship alone.

- **We're interested, but don't believe there is the demand for our space**

Demand for spaces is indeed likely to vary. However, because participation by a church in such a project would be free of up-front costs, there is nothing to lose. Also, the new organization would be providing a professional marketing service to the local community and as it establishes a reputation and its profile grows, it is possible that old spaces may find new users who were never previously aware of them.

- **Will this just create extra work for the church leader?**

No, precisely the opposite. By allowing an external (not for profit) organisation to market and let your spaces and undertake the administration for this, a church leader may well be freed from some tasks and given time to focus on the missional aspects of building relationships with users of their buildings

6.4 NEXT STEPS?

Undertaking a pilot project for one geographical area seems a sensible way forward. A detailed business plan would be needed, and some initial capital to get the organisation up and running, but an initial assessment suggests such an enterprise could become self-sustaining relatively quickly.

Are there churches and partner organisations interested in making this happen?



7 RECOMMENDATIONS: AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE

OVERVIEW

Church buildings help the Christian community to worship God, they provide a physical symbol of his presence to others and they enable the building of community within the church as well as practical service to the wider community.

Yet discussions around church buildings often only focus on the problems they bring – and on the time and the costs required to address these.

In fact, the solution to many of the church's building challenges is actually mission which leads to church growth. We need a change of mindset. Our buildings are assets which can be used for mission. There is an opportunity here.

And it is an opportunity which is within reach. We know this because some churches are already doing it. In this report, we have outlined several practical opportunities including a proposal for a significant new pilot project. Increasing the community and missional use of churches not only opens church doors to new relationships and visibly serves the local community but it could also generate significant income. We suggest that improving the pro-active management of church buildings across the board is a theological, missional and financial imperative.

As already discussed we believe that any response should have two key features:

- Each denomination needs a strategic response to these opportunities – simply leaving local churches to deliver solutions for themselves is completely unrealistic
- If each denomination is prepared to work with others then an ecumenical approach is not only possible but may even yield greater results

RECOMMENDATIONS

- We recommend that the leaders of each denomination consider the development of a strategic approach to church property management. We hope this report will add new momentum to discussions on this issue.
- We recommend the development and support of a pilot project to establish a new social enterprise (Church Space Ltd) to test the idea of managing the spaces of smaller churches in one area of London

AFTERWORD

When the Bishop of London revived the See of Islington in 2015, his purpose was to create a role that was focussed on planting new churches, revitalising old ones and encouraging existing churches to grow. Whilst it may appear rather mundane, using buildings wisely can multiply missional potential in many ways.

Churches need buildings of various kinds to serve their needs and, for many, it is simply easier to own your own building so that they can promote their vision and mission more easily. But as this report shows, these buildings are vastly underutilised. We are called to be good stewards of our resources and this report shows that there is a long way to go in this area.

The opportunity for churches lies in using these buildings more wisely to gain much needed extra income for their missional purposes but also to do this in a way that fulfils their vision, values and mission as churches.

Leaders of churches tend to be great pastors and teachers but not so skilled asset managers. Use of buildings does not come high on their list of priorities. Yet if they knew that, with wise stewardship, they would release income to pay for more workers and welcome more unchurched people into contact with them, I am sure they would say, “Yes, please”.

The gap is one of capacity. Most churches don't have building managers. They cannot afford them. That is why this report is not just helpful in highlighting the huge opportunity for using buildings more effectively for mission, but also hopeful because it points towards a very practical solution. If individual churches threw their lot in together and decided to appoint an individual or company to manage their buildings more effectively, they would not just enable more income and more mission, but release those leaders from absorbing energy doing something they've never been equipped to do, let alone doing it well.

I have been particularly interested in the way that KXC have used buildings. Kings Cross Church, in the South West corner of Islington, rent space from the Ethiopian Church but have leased additional commercial space to serve some of their missional goals. They have done this by offering some of that space for developing social enterprises that bring in an income as well as serving a missional

purpose, connecting with the local community and enabling work spaces for young solo entrepreneurs. Their own congregation has fully embraced the idea by encouraging friends to get involved and they are excited and proud to be providing something practical, welcoming and enabling for a group of people in the community they are trying to reach. Churches that own their own spaces could do even more.

I want to thank CTC for opening up another area where there is so much to learn, embrace and act on. I want to encourage every church, that has buildings of any kind, to consider working with others to start a social enterprise aimed at using their buildings more commercially. This will release more income for churches, enabling more workers in the harvest field, and more connections to the communities that they are trying to serve. That in turn will grow the church. It starts with just one church saying to another, “let's do it... together”.

*The Rt Revd Ric Thorpe
The Bishop of Islington*

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The photograph on p1 was kindly provided by Hope Islington. The rest of the photographs in this report were taken by the author on his travels around Islington and Tower Hamlets.

“Church buildings should never be silent mausoleums but always vibrant centres of service at the heart of their local community. I encourage wide readership of this report and engagement with its recommendations.”

The Rt Revd Dr John Inge, Bishop of Worcester

“This study’s recommendations are discerning and potentially transforming, so I encourage all churches to take note of and appropriate the spirit and letter of this revealing report.”

*Bishop Dr Joe Aldred,
Pentecostal and Multicultural Relations, Churches Together in England*



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