

The building project at St James

It was a cold February night in 2011 when the PCC sat in church, looking at and discussing what we needed to do to the church building to bring it in line with our vision, to make the building a community hub and a tool for mission. During the previous 12 months we had set up many activities such as a young people's drop in; elderly lunch club; family nights plus some big community events such as Christmas tree festivals etc.

Although the church was only built in 1969 and there had been some alterations which included a small lounge at the rear of the building, a kitchen and stained glass windows it had now started to age; it clearly looked like they had been additions rather than being part of the church's design. So with that as a starting point we decided to start at the front door, walk through and dream some dreams! By the end of the evening we had a devised a plan for redesigning which included a new reception area, a café (Starbucks design!), a new kitchen a youth and family room upstairs; hence we would have to build an upstairs.



A small prayer chapel upstairs, the redesign of the main worship area which included stripping out the raised alter platform and making it all one level, re-siting of the stained glass windows, redesigning the ceiling space, installing new technology to include screens, projectors and modern lighting. Always in these dreams we envisioned the building becoming accessible and available to all generations.

The next step was to engage the community in consultation which included talking to the local school to see how the usage of our building and their building; that are right next to each other, can be combined. We also spoke to many community partners and had some lunchtime events to which we invited local councillors, police, social services and many others.

The, DAC were also involved at the very early stage and we asked them to come along to look at our ideas, dreams and long-term vision. We then appointed Cyril Cambridge from CRC Designs and Architectural Services to start drawing up plans that would eventually become a reality. It was important to the PCC that local builders and tradesmen would be employed once the work started. Working groups were formed to cover various parts of the project.

One of the important working groups was the finance group who were tasked with looking at how we were going to raise the finances needed for this project. It was decided that funds would be raised by the giving from ourselves as a church; applying for grants and fundraising events.



Then after a period of much consultation over the drawings and plans with parishioners, school, community groups, diocese etc. we applied for planning permission to Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council. The planned work was split into phases to enable us to complete as the required funds became available.

A local builder, Tony Devine, was employed as the main building contractor who is well known in the area and has a very good reputation. So on 22nd September 2013 with everything in place and led by the Bishop of Burnley; Bishop John and a brass band we started our journey and finally moved out of the church building and moved into the local school, which was to be our base for worship during the building work. What an amazing journey it has been!

We have received many answers to our prayers, there has been many key points that we have learnt over this period:

- Ensure everybody has the vision.
- To help people to accept the change and feel part of it.
- To recognise that the church needs to have good facilities and resources to reach the next generations.
- A good architect who communicates and listens to our ideas and helps them to become a reality.
- A reliable builder whose quality of work is of a high standard and who is able to work alongside the architect on the project,
- A strong leadership team that listens to and supports others in during the process.
- Most importantly a kettle that is always on the boil!