

The funds from the sale of the Glebe will give the church a significant opportunity to enhance the ongoing delivery of God's message to the Parish through the improvement of its premises. It is an opportunity which may not come again for at least a generation and it is vital that any planned action is well thought through, discussed and assessed to ensure maximum benefit and impact.

I see the opportunity as affecting three "physical" properties i.e. the Sanctuary, the rest of the church building and the current manse all of which could be improved with the objective of enhancing the delivery of the message of our faith to the Parish which our church serves.

The Sanctuary

Our Sanctuary and the beliefs it represents is a place where all can worship as one. How sure are we that it fulfils this purpose certainly for one group of people i.e. the disabled? We put in a ramp and toilet facilities as part of the renovation project which certainly enables access and comfort. What about enabling worship? Currently where would disabled people with wheelchairs or other physical difficulties actually be situated during a service? Possibly up the side of the pulpit and choir area? Just in front of the pews to the side? Those options give me an impression of disabled people being put into "special areas" and being treated as different. Whilst I disagree about taking out all of the pews why could the front rows not be taken out and modern seating installed to enable wheelchair bound and other disabled people to worship within the body of the Kirk and other worshippers? I feel particularly strongly about this issue and believe the benefit and impact on people with disability could be particularly significant and rewarding.

I am aware that there has been ongoing discussions for a long time about removing the pews and installing modern chairing. As stated above I am not against some form of pew removal and realignment of seating however I would not be in favour for full scale removal of the pews (although I would want full replacement of the pew cushions). My reasoning is as follows:

The Sanctuary is a place for all, young and old, firm and infirm, frequent and infrequent attendees. Some people may find comfort in the physical continuity of pews in the Sanctuary, some people may find the physical stability of the pews really helpful when standing up and sitting down (including holding on to the back of the pew in front!) and whilst the Sanctuary is on many occasions quite empty on some occasions it is almost full to capacity. As a Parish church the Sanctuary must have the flexibility to cope with such variances. What would be the cost in terms of feelings of sentimentality and memories, physical "assistance" and capacity if modern seating was installed throughout? One further consideration when considering seating is the heating system. I remember when I was Property Convener speaking with someone (Roy Storie?) about heating options and it being pointed out to me that the current system whilst old actually delivered the heat where it was required i.e. at people's feet and not lost "up in the air". It may be this system could be renovated and made more cost and heat effective.

I am sure there are modern options which could be considered such as underfloor heating however at what cost both in terms of installation costs and opportunity costs on how such money could have been otherwise used? It may be that there is a strong body of opinion in the Session/Congregational Board in removing all the pews and if that is the case then I would recommend that the following be undertaken:

Seek the views of the Congregation

Seek the views of the wider Parish community

Assess the worth of the outcome by visiting other churches which have gone down this route

Assess the benefits to be achieved against the benefits lost by not using the money on some other project.

The organ is not used as much nowadays with the piano and other instruments being used. Whilst the use of other forms of delivering music enables the music to be tailored to the needs of the particular service/event (as well as helping cover a lack of people to play the organ) the music of the organ itself fills the Sanctuary with a majesty, reverence and inspiration to worship which is hard to create with other forms of music. It also provides a secondary function in supporting other musical events in the church. I know there have been concerns about the state/cost of the organ in the past however am not aware of the current situation. In my opinion it would be a sad loss to the Sanctuary should money not be found to enable the organ to continue fulfilling its role. As a side note on this issue why not seek someone who would already have the basic musical skills and motivation to learn and play the organ and the church pay for such tuition to increase the pool of people?

Other issues affecting the Sanctuary are:

Renovating the windows

Renovating the floor covering downstairs and upstairs

Replacing and enhancing the glass partition between the Sanctuary and the Meeting House

Renovating the Meeting House

All of the above would protect the fabric of the Sanctuary, manage any risk issues from poor quality flooring and improve heat retention.

The Church Buildings

When the hall renovations were carried out there was discussion about storage which was resolved by the change of use of the then ministers room/office. In addition views were expressed about the size of the kitchen and storage of the garden tools and equipment. The success of Open Door and the development of the back garden project with school children will presumably put pressure on these issues. There was some discussion at the time to extend the kitchen into the garden area and incorporate storage for the hall chairs etc. with a door directly into the hall by possibly replacing a hall window with a door. In addition there may be changes to the ministry of the Parish (for want of a better description) when Margaret retires (see below) It may be worthwhile revisiting the idea of extending into the back garden area although I accept this could impact on the garden project.

Finally when considering garden ground I have thought for a long time that the creation of a "Peace Garden" at the front of the church could be beneficial to the community by creating a small area where people could sit, reflect, and share some time with others whilst enjoying the open air and a small piece of nature. It would consist of seating, plants and flowers, small memorials (the seats themselves?) and scope for outdoor displays on various issues all linked by the concept of peace. I do appreciate that the area could become a target for vandalism however I would like to think this risk could be reduced by involving the likes of Rowlands in its design and implementation. The views and influences of your peers can be quite powerful. I know that this idea may be seen to be a bit "way out" however I put it in for people to at least consider. After all Peace is one of the main messages of "church" It is also just a small step from sitting outside enjoying the "peace" to come in and join in celebrating the "Peace".

Ministry of the Parish

When Margaret retires the church will be faced with how to replace her. I do appreciate this would be a difficult task given the lack of ministers coming through and that more churches are having to/or think about the ministry of the Parish without a minister. However I do think that Selkirk Parish should be an attractive proposition to a minister. This brings up such issues as "would the new minister need an office in the church"?, "is the Loanside Manse fit for purpose"?

Any new minister may want an office not just for paperwork, planning, preparation etc but to give a "safe and peaceful" location for people who may want counselling, advice, guidance etc. on any number of issues. It could also double as a small meeting room for groups of people from the Parish. All of this would enhance the ability of the church to carry out its ministry of the Parish. That leads on to the current manse. Again you may remember that questions were raised in the past about if the manse would be suitable in the future if a new minister had a family. One idea was to convert the garage into a bedroom and building a carport. Possibly some other kind of extension could be considered although space would be an issue. The reinstatement of an office at the church would reduce the need for a study at the manse. The sale of the manse and purchase of another may be seen as a way forward. Loanside Manse has been the home of two single ministers for a number of years and the Church has not required to think about accommodating a family. I am of the belief that a Parish such as Selkirk which is lively and taking ideas and concepts forward needs a minister to continue to develop the future of our faith and worship building on the very good work done to date. That means having a proposition that is attractive to as wide a range of candidates as possible. Such a proposition include includes appropriate accommodation. Whatever the outcome on how to provide such accommodation money will be involved. It would make sense to keep a fund aside for any manse changes when Margaret retires.

In conclusion I appreciate this is a long email however I do hope it is useful to any discussion about how to use the money freed up by the sale of the Glebe manse You may remember the plan in the 80's to radically alter the church (creation of an upper floor in the Sanctuary) to deliver better facilities with the objective of a better Ministry for the Parish. I do not want to even think about how much that would cost nowadays however I hope that some of the above ideas capture that objective as benefitting the times we now live and worship in.