

We've inherited a building that reflects how worshippers before us saw and thought of God. Some of these ways still resonate and some do not. Some are helpful and some are not.

Personally, here is a list of what I find spiritually uplifting and an aid to worship in our current building and our exterior, then a list of what I find a barrier and at odds with my worship.

Uplifting and communicating God's presence and action-

Outside - the trees and all the nature, the garden, the benches to sit on and the open space, also the fact we are in the local community

Inside - the high pretty roof, the candle tray we should make more focal, plenty of space inside, the big hall for play, chat and creativity. The kitchen and tables that say - we show you love by feeding you and taking an interest in you.

Barriers to communicating God's love and welcome

Outside - the wee wall that keeps folks out, the chuckies. (Take up time weeding, need raked, sore to fall on for kids). All grass or more natural would be preferred. Go Wild outside if possible with space to sit, ponder or play. Let more people know that there's a secret garden at the back.

Inside -

There is a plethora of old things from the former amalgamated churches that don't mean anything to most people anymore (or not to seekers anyway) in the entrance and upstairs. This makes us seem a bit like a museum.

The church sanctuary looks like a courtroom and unwittingly gives off some unhelpful subconscious vibes of hierarchy and a distant God who needs intermediaries

For me, this is what says this -

Facing the high pulpit we don't use

Facing three stained glass Windows we don't understand and one of which shows a grumpy old man (subliminally this man in the middle will be interpreted as God for some)

Having chairs facing front in rows says this is a court, assembly or school where you are to listen and learn, but not fully take part. The action is at the front for you to observe and absorb. I used to agree with this but now feel it belittles and silences each individual's experience of God which is just as valid as those up the front.

I suggest to have no pews, sit in a horseshoe, circle or with people who are contributing being throughout the building or more in the centre. This seems more levelling and equal. In our modern age of the internet and higher education we don't all need the minister or a spiritual elite to give us spiritual teaching we can't otherwise access, and we know that God speaks through little children and all ages and abilities of people.

We could/should have an area at the heart of worship for youngsters/families that is bright, clean and inviting. Similarly for those with disabilities so they are not an afterthought. Lots of consulting should go into this.

God uses colour throughout creation but within our church sanctuary itself there is not a lot of colour. This can make God seem bland.

The size and focal point of the organ pipes suggests that music is a big part of church worship (which it is) but it has had organ music at its heart for too long. This music does not resonate with all people, and can seem triumphalist or dirge-like depending on the tune and how it is played. A variety of instruments used in worship is better (as we try to have).

The choir being at the front says 'singing music is important here' which it is, but it is not how everyone accesses God all the time. Space for more art, candles, movement even might also be considered.

I also strongly feel that alternative outdoor spaces should be used much more for the future - as the decor and ambience is already there shouting God's splendour, abundance and creativity in the woods and be the rivers. Many people are not worshipping in churches, as they are connecting to God outdoors in a more sensory, experiential way. Less words and more just breathing and being.

We won't make a perfect worship space with our planning, but we can make a more accessible, inclusive, creative and joyful space the more people we consult.