

## Selkirk Parish Church Building

What do we want our building to achieve?

1. The priority must be a place to welcome and serve the community, to become "owned" by them and familiar locally as an accessible, welcoming and open space. In society at large and in Selkirk, our faith is more and more an unknown, not seen as relevant, not even for hatches, matches and dispatches! It isn't attracting folk. They don't see who we are and what we believe. They don't think about the church as a loving supportive family. So we need to change, to display (a light on a hill?) our faith in bricks and mortar and then demonstrate Christ's love by what happens there. Our building and what we do with it can make a big impact on the town. Mission! To use an old fashioned and frightening word to many of us!

2. A community hub first and foremost but also a sacred space, with God visible and acknowledged at its centre. We plan for the first and then fill it with Jesus by how we serve, love and worship. At the moment we are in decline and there is no point in planning for demise!

3. This means a big vision! Not simply redecorating, taking out pews and tidying up what we already have. It will involve a complete rethink of what we have, who we are and a change of priority to a building with paid staff and open daily; maybe spaces to rent; comfortable rooms for quiet chats or counselling or debt help? Maybe a full time café? Maybe a place to make music informally? Host weddings and maybe even attract couples back to thinking about marrying in church and exploring faith? Do research and work in partnership with other local groups to identify and achieve a terrific resource for the town? The activities taking place would be a response to the community's needs and the work of the Holy Spirit.

4. How can this happen with an aging congregation and limited resources I ask myself? We struggle to do what we do just now.

*This is the very reason we have to go for a different model of church and not perpetuate the status quo.*

5. There is a beautiful sanctuary in Galashiels which must have cost a lot of money to "do up", take out some pews, recarpet and repaint, which is now linked with the remnants of previous congregations. The intention was good but the direction of travel was about getting people to "come to church". They won't. They aren't. Why don't we envision our now 4 church fellowships to get behind a town project to "do mission" in Selkirk and the valleys. This is about seeing beyond our own parochial needs and managing decline, to a bigger picture of reaching the community with the gospel, in action, love and sharing of Jesus.

6. Could we be a church "centre" which employs staff to reach out and work locally and alongside the valley churches, to offer something for families there? One church in a rural area of Northumberland is using a tent which it pitches monthly in different locations as a sacred space, and all activities are outside. It's a small project but God is at work. "Pitching God's Tent Among Us" by Benjamin Carter is just one idea which emerged in one church as a response to their need to get alongside families across their parish, some of whom wouldn't do church in the usual way.

7. Read any book on "fresh expressions" of church or "pioneering" and it is all about building relationships, not building buildings! We may have premises here in Selkirk but essentially we are pioneers (a remnant like the children of Israel who were tasked with living God's way in an alien culture) and need to approach this from that perspective.

("Out of Nothing" by Andrew Dunlop, a book about a pioneer ministry. You can borrow mine if you are interested)

8. The task is daunting and there will be many "weak knees", mine included, but why opt for what isn't going to bring the good news to the community by going for a "crack papering" exercise which will please the congregation and feel safe and familiar.

9. From an “Open Door” perspective, maybe God has given us a wee taste of how things might be, before we think big. We approached it with prayer and caution and not a little anxiety. God opened doors... I remind myself of how we got our project name confirmed at Minsteracres as we sat in the chapel and gazed at the painting of the door ajar and were invited by faith to imagine Jesus there waiting for us. God has been in the detail. Through Open Door we have made positive links with the community and met many more local folk. It has been hard work but it has been an encouragement. We want to reach local families with food but what else can we offer them? Wouldn't it be great to have a lovely building to bring people along to, filled with opportunities and a welcome. We need to do more to reach more folk and we are none of us getting any younger! Let's think boldly!