

# THE NEW CHURCH STORY

*This article is a blog that was written on a previous website to describe the process of designing, building and moving into the new Church in May 2009.*

## Why a New Church?

The main reason is the state of the current fabric, and the lack of facilities. Saint Mary's was built in 1894, and it seems that the building has had problems since at least the 1940s: there are records from that date of damp on the Bury Road wall, a problem that was only controlled (to a limited extent) in the late 1970s - unfortunately by that time the damage had been done. We have also had problems with moving foundations, possibly due to underground water courses - someone once pointed out that it is called "Spring Lane" for a reason!

When the first major surveys of the building were done in the 1990s, two main problems were identified:

- The damp and moisture in the past had created the ideal atmosphere for a dryrot infestation: while this was mainly located in the back of the Church, being an airborne infestation there was no guarantee that any of the wood in the Church was untouched by it. A subsequent survey has raised questions about timbers near the front as well.
- Whether from faulty foundations or ground movement, the front gable wall was leaning significantly into the road. Cracks appearing in the plaster around the Church suggested that such movement was taking place elsewhere as well.

The surveys suggested remedies: a complete dryrot treatment of the building, including the replacement of affected timber, and the dismantling and rebuilding of the gable wall (facing Spring Lane). These were major works, and the list also included other significant items, such as roof works, replacing lead, and rebuilding works to the Presbytery. An estimate of the cost of such works in 1998 came to about £400,000.

Two things came from these surveys:

- We needed to decide what to do about the future of these buildings: repair, replace or start again?
- We needed to ensure that the present building was completely safe for the public to use.

And so in January 2000 we launched the "Parish Renewal Project" (PRP), to ask parishioners themselves what should be done.

## Making the Decision

The PRP did not just look at Church Buildings: it examined our Pastoral, Liturgical, Spiritual and Community Needs as well as our Buildings. Several things grew from the PRP - it was the origin of our Children's Liturgy of the Word, our Parish Magazine, several outings,

experiments in reflective prayers, and more. It also made it very clear that, while valuing this building very much, parishioners felt strongly that it was time for a new church, with more facilities for those very Pastoral, Community and Spiritual needs that had been identified.

By 2001 the Parish Action Team had been established, looking at ways in which these ideas could be brought to fruition: the most tricky, because of the costs involved, was the Church Building question. Nevertheless we set about doing what we could, and converted the sacristies into a Meeting Room and Brewing Station. An added problem was that at about this time the Diocese started the Faith in the Future process - and imposed a two-year moratorium on all building works.

In September 2003 the Bishop issued the results of the Faith in the Future process, and we were delighted to see him announce that as part of the plan for the Diocese there would be *"a new Church for Radcliffe, as soon as possible."*

We immediately began work, consulting and trying to create a working brief. A lot of this came from the PRP meetings in 2000, and discussions with the PAT in 2001 - 2002. The brief that emerged wanted a large church, to seat 300 people, with ancillary spaces such as a large social space, meeting rooms, offices and adequate parking. We began looking for a possible site.

This was where the problems began: we had not yet agreed with the Diocese how large this Church was to be, and so we were rather groping in the dark. To help keep the process on track, the Parish Buildings Group was formed. After several false starts, at a meeting at Wardley Hall in October 2004, the suggestion came that we look at the Primary School and the land that was already owned by the Diocese and available there. This then grew into proposals embracing improvements to the School, and eventually became a Church-School Development Project.

After further discussions, it became clear that we needed an architect, and so the Diocese appointed Greenhalgh and Williams (Bolton) as architects for the whole scheme.

## **May 2006**

By Easter 2006 Mark Thompson and Paul Flood, the architects from Greenhalgh and Williams, had worked out a scheme which was within a certain area (about 600 square metres) and gave us all that we needed - even if it meant going onto two storeys.

Part of the plan was to make use of a new School Hall as a Parish/Social Hall, though we would still have independent meeting spaces in the Church building.

This was an ambitious design, which would cost about £1,500,000. Initial reaction from parishioners was positive. Currently these proposals are being worked out with the Diocesan Board of Administration, who still have some unresolved questions about size and budget.

## September 2006 Update

It's quite a while since I posted any information on this page, so I thought it was time to update things. We've just put a display at the back of Church detailing progress over the last four months, so I shall try to reproduce it here.

You will recall that back in May we presented a proposal for our New Church, which was rejected by the Diocesan Board of Administration, mainly because of cost - it came in at a projected £1,500,000. The Diocese then set us a budget of £750,000 which they were willing to lend. So we had to go back to the architects and see what could be done for this price. This is what we have been doing for the past four months. Each design has to meet two criteria: it is within the budget, and it is a suitable building for our use (which means it has to be the right size and have the facilities we need.)

It would be very easy to design a Church for £500,000, but it would only be a chapel that would seat 90 people! Similarly, as we have seen, we could design a huge Basilica seating hundreds, but it would be way above our budget. What we have to do is find the middle course between COST and SIZE.

The May design was a two storey building, so give us the maximum floor space on the smallest site. This was the proposal rejected by the Diocese. In order to cut the costs but maintain the size, the architects suggested that we look at portal frame construction, a different building technique which is much less expensive than the methods previously suggested. Without wanting to alarm people, portal frame is the sort of building technique used for our current school halls, and for many large warehouses you see today. It consists of a row of large "arches" which are then filled in to give the walls, with a roof on top. The finish is entirely dependent on what the client wants and can afford - "wriggly tin" for B & Q and Asda, or brick, slate, stone or tiles if you want something more aesthetically pleasing!

The second proposal, which was done by July 2006, was for a large Church and a large meeting space, together with all the ancillary rooms we need, but this was all on one storey, and covered by a "portal frame". It was sent away to the Quantity Surveyor (QS), for him to add up the various bits and pieces and come up with the cost: it was £890,000. (Actually it was originally £940,000, but we tried to shave as much as we could off it.)

It was unlikely that the Diocese would go for this, so we had to go back to the drawing board. This building worked out at about £1,400 per square metre, so to get within our budget of £750,000 we have to shave off about 170 square metres - leaving us with about 450 sq.m. to play with. The architect thought he could do something, so back he went to his drawing board.

The proposal that followed in August was MUCH smaller! It was sent for costing and came in at £740,000! Yippee! We were under budget. However, when we looked closely at the design, we realised that it was far too small: in fact, it only covers 360 sq.m., which is a lot less than we thought we could get away with. So this time we sent the architect back to his board, to try and beef up the size, without pushing up the cost! One suggestion was

that we try and simplify the whole building - rather than having bits "poking out" of the portal frame, we would try and put all the rooms within the frame.

So, in September, this was the result: exactly 450 sq.m., and is a very simple shape indeed! We are currently (17 September) waiting for this to be drawn up properly and sent to the QS. As soon as we get a price on it, you'll know! And then we'll have to see what next...

## October 2006

As you know, our latest proposal was presented to the Diocesan Board of Administration last Tuesday. I'm delighted to report that the Board have approved this proposal. The final costing - including a small land purchase on the "Ratfield" - comes to £838,000: this budget has also been approved by the board. Whilst in the past the Board has given vague and general approval to the project they have now approved a specific building proposal - this is the biggest step forward we have made since the announcement in 2003 that we would have a new church.

With this approval we can now press ahead. The proposal as drawn up by the architects is only a rough sketch at this stage; over the next few weeks we will be putting more and more detail into this proposal. More plans, diagrams and drawings will be appearing very soon, and as soon as the design gets to a certain level plans will be submitted to the council for planning permission.

Thanks for all your hard work and prayers - it looks as though we're finally on our way! (Fr J - dictated from Poland!)

## May 2007

Our application has been registered by the local authority, and we are now in the statutory consultation period. You can follow all the procedure and view the plans and application documents on the Bury Metro website, in the ePlanning section.

## 21 August 2007

### **APPROVED!**

The Planning Control Committee, at their meeting on 21 August 2007, unanimously approved our proposal.

Our New Church Building can now go ahead!

Thank you to everyone who has worked to get us here.

## January 2008

As usual, things appear to have been very quiet on the New Church Building front, but a lot of work has been going on in the background! On the back wall of church you can see a display of some of the plans, drawings and sketches that have been produced to prepare our proposal for the next stage of the process, called "going out to tender." This is where the design for the building is sent out to a number of building contractors, for them to give their price to build it. I'm glad to report that all the plans and drawings (of everything from the windows and doors to the toilets and drains!) have now been completed and were sent out to seven building contractors on Wednesday.

The contractors now have four weeks to work out their prices for the work, and these must be submitted to the Diocese by 22 February, the “tender return date.”

What then? Well, a lot depends on the costs they come up with: it is up to the Diocesan Trustees to appoint a contractor to get on with building the new church. All being well, it shouldn't take the diocese too long to do that, but it will depend on the prices quoted: until we know what they are, and how the diocese reacts to them, we can't give an exact timetable. As always, please watch this space! And thanks for all your support so far.

## **May 2008**

### **"THE WORK CAN NOW PROCEED"**

The last news was when the designs went ‘out to tender’, which was back in February. All seven companies came back with quotes on time, though all were in excess of the budget allocated for the building. Since then we have been in negotiations with the lowest bidders of the seven contractors, to see where savings can be made which would not impact on the size or appearance of the building. This has been quite a lengthy process, but has resulted in the Diocese being able to make a final decision.

They have decided to accept the amended tender from B & D Croft Limited, a local company based in Leigh. The budget has increased, and the new Church will cost just over £911,000 (with an additional £69,000 of contingencies held in reserve). This means that they are appointed as the builders for our new Church.

“The work can now proceed.” This is a quote from a letter from the Diocese, which gives us the go ahead to get on site and get building! This week (19 May) we have been in negotiations with a different contractor (who has already been working on modifications to the Primary School) to arrange demolition of the so-called “Year 6 Building” and prepare the site for B & D Croft to move in. We are hoping to arrange this demolition for the Spring Half Term holiday (26 - 30 May), and for our builders to be on site at the beginning of June.

From now on people will be able to see the new Church taking shape on Belgrave Street. The timescale will be worked out at the pre-Contract meeting on 28 May, but our architects (Greenhalgh & Williams) are talking about a build period of less than 12 months, which means we are looking forward to the new Church being completed at or near Easter next year!

## **June 2008**

The plan was to start demolition of the old Year Six building during the half term holiday - and everything went exactly according to plan! The big machines came in and took the building down while the children were on holiday, and for the next couple of weeks the job was to clear the debris and rubble. Now (13 June) the Year Six building is only a memory, its footprint marked by a scattering of light stone fill!

B & D Croft have been in meetings and on site since the pre-Contract meeting during the half-term holiday; a lot of work is still going on behind the scenes as decisions are being made about materials and a thousand and one other details. The next highly visible work will probably be the erection of secure fencing round the site (partly to protect our children at school, and partly to protect the building site), which should be happening before the end of the month.

## July 2008

B& D Croft were actually on site a week earlier than expected, and very quickly got to work clearing and setting things out. Half of the Junior Yard disappeared in the blink of an eye (just as well Summer holidays are not far off: the new Junior Yard will be finished in time for the new school year in September) At this point you could see quite clearly the footprint of the new building, marked out in the light grey rubble. The next job - a somewhat noisy one, for which we must apologise to all nearby - was the driving of foundation piles into the ground: a seemingly large number of piles were set in place, and now more than ever you can see clearly where the building is going to sit, and where the new roads and parking will be. All is a lot quieter now (which is just as well) as the builders consolidate the site office and their facilities.

## August 2008

Last week the foundations were completed, and concrete was poured to connect all the piles and steel foundation frames. The land was then covered with a layer of fill, just leaving those points where the arches of the frame would be connected to the foundations.

In the Amish and Mennonite communities of North America, a barn raising is still a significant community event, where family, friends and neighbours come together to help raise the framework of a new farm building. You may remember this from "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers"! In a sense, we had our own barn raising on Wednesday - though instead of farmers and wood, it was with the help of contactors, steel girders and cranes! One of the most significant steps - and certainly the most visible one to date - was the construction of the frame of the new Church. I have to admit this caught me by surprise! The speed with which the frame was assembled and erected was remarkable. It was quite amazing to be able to walk around inside the frame, and for the very first time get a real sense of the space that we will have inside the new church.

The frame for the school hall will go up before next Monday, and then the contractors will start setting out the walls. The site manager tells me that the bricklayers and roofers will be on site next week, and we will soon see roofs and walls emerging very quickly too!

## September 2008

After the sudden excitement of the frame going up, things seem to have stilled a little - but this is not the case! By the end of the month we had not just the frame of the Church, but a solid floor as well, not to mention a few walls! Like an iceberg, there's a lot you can't see under any building: this includes foundations, pipes and conduits for services, fill, and something called "membrane" which keeps gas and moisture from rising into the building. On top of this is a smooth concrete "slab" - the actual floor. All that needs to be done to this now is our choice of flooring: for the church this is going to be large natural slate tiles,

and for the atrium a smooth travertine tile, though of course the flooring will be one of the last things that goes in once the walls and roof are complete

The brickies have been busy too! There are several brick walls in the new plant - most notably in the new School Hall and the back wall of the Church. We also have four "side chapels" in the New Church, and each of these has a solid brick wall, one of which is pictured in its early stages here. The brick is a modern brick with an "antique" feel, which hopefully gives a feeling of quality to the building.

The next most visible aspect will be the roof: already the builders have been working on the frame to make it ready for the roof and tiles (we're having an artificial slate roof, which is cheaper and longer lasting than natural slate). The roof should start appearing in the next couple of week. As always, watch that space!

## January 2009

How quickly time passes - especially over Christmas! The last entry here was at the end of September, at which point we had a frame and a floor. Now we have walls, a roof and almost some windows!

Getting the roof on was the biggest job to be completed before the Christmas break, and wasn't without a few headaches. In the main it was the weather that was against us - snow and ice and freezing winds are not really the sorts of weather that make for happy roofers! We had a couple of delays due to the weather, but the roof over the church was practically finished when the builders stopped for the Christmas holidays, and the roof over the Atrium was completed as soon as they returned. We are lucky to have a fine slate roof, by the way - at one point in our plans, when the budget was looking rather grim, we were going to be having a "tin" roof - not quite the corrugated tin of old fashioned huts and garages, but it's definitely much more pleasing to have a smart slate roof!

The exterior walls are more or less complete now, with just a few bits of finishing at high level. Inside the building the walls are more or less done, but this looks less complete because you can only see the grey blockwork: eventually this will be plastered and finished.

We are still waiting for the windows to arrive from the makers, and there have been some delays here too. Hopefully the windows will be arriving soon, and when they are fitted the exterior shell of the building will be complete: this will mean we can then get on with all the insides! The Atrium (that is the first part of the building you will walk into, a large entrance hall and meeting room) has had its windows fitted: there are twelve big Velux skylights which will light it, since it is completely surrounded by rooms. These skylights will give a great sense of light and space as you walk into the Atrium.

The electricians have been busy too, laying ducting and wires and cables for lighting and heating: this has to be completed before the walls and floor are finished. There still have to be the odd changes, as it's noticed that a plug socket or a light switch will end up behind a cupboard!

Obviously there is more to a church than walls and wiring: it has to be fitted and furnished too. We have been busy in recent weeks ordering and taking delivery of the new church benches, a new organ from The Netherlands, new statues from Lourdes, icons from America, silverware from Rome and Assisi and many other items great and small which will turn this building into a Church. In the next few weeks we will be working on the new sanctuary furnishings (altar, lectern, tabernacle and font), and the removal and restoration of the great cross currently over the altar in our present church, and the stained glass in the porch.

There is a lot happening at the moment - it sometimes seems as though we are running frantically towards the finishing line, with more and more to do. But after many years of waiting, it is perhaps good that so much is going on right now, and we can look forward more and more to the day when we move into our new premises.

## **When I survey the wondrous cross ...**

Wednesday 11th March 2009. An historic day, which saw one of the first significant impacts of the new church on the old! The cross which has looked down on us for more than one hundred and ten years was gently lowered from its heights. This is so that it can be taken to be repaired and restored and placed in the new church, so that it can look on future generations!

One thing I hadn't realised is that the figure of Our Lord on the cross is not plaster but a solid piece of carved wood! It has obviously had at least two coats of paint in its history. It will be sensitively restored, so that the sense of its age and story remains in the new building - this is a part of our past, and so it won't be repainted to look as though it is brand new!

## **The time has come!**

After a meeting with the Bishop and lots of discussions with the architect and contractors I can announce (with about 90% certainty, assuming no major disasters!) the opening date for our New Church:

**Our New Church will be opened in a special Mass for all parishioners presided over by Bishop Terence Brain on the evening of Friday 29th May .**

**Our first weekend, therefore, in our new church will be the weekend of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church and a most fitting feast to celebrate this new beginning. Bishop Brain will return on Pentecost evening (31 May) to lead an Ecumenical Vespers to celebrate the new building.**

**We will be saying farewell to our present church with a special mass and celebration on the evening of Tuesday 26th May, the feast of our patron, Saint Philip Neri. This will be the last ever Mass celebrated in this building.**

Further details of these celebrations will follow shortly, but for now please make a note of these dates. It's taken a long time but now we actually know when we're moving!



# Introduction to the New Church 1

In the beginning, the Church worshipped in private homes. The important thing was to gather together with other members of the community in prayer - listening to the Word of God, celebrating the 'breaking of bread', being sent forth in charity. The place was of secondary importance. Partly this was because of the restrictions on places of worship in the Roman Empire: it wasn't until after the beginning of the fourth century that Christians were able to build churches. Even then, they were modelled on those earlier Roman houses.

A key feature of these houses and early churches was something called the "atrium" - a courtyard where people gathered before going into the place of worship itself. This was where the community came together - where they met and chatted and established links and friendships. I remember very vividly seeing this happen in one old Roman Church - San Silvestro in Capite. This ancient church is the home of the Filipino Catholic community in Rome, and the ancient cloister-like Atrium echoes on a Sunday morning with the sound of greetings and kisses as people meet up after a week of work. In fact, I remember from my days there a great hubbub in the atrium - but this was compared with a wonderful hush in the church itself, where people were lighting candles, kneeling quietly in prayer, sitting in silence.

Our new church has been designed with something similar in mind. When you go through the doors, you do not go straight into the church, nor do you enter a small porch, like here. You will go into a room called the **Atrium** - a big square space, that is the centre of the whole building. Everything opens off the Atrium - the Church itself, the Sacristy, the toilets, the kitchen, the offices. The Atrium is designed to be the place where we come together for our various activities. It's not an open-air space (our climate wouldn't allow that!) - but it has a series of skylights that allow a wonderful bright light in, which together with white and pale yellow walls and a warm golden travertine marble floor create a sunny, open room.

This Atrium is to be our gathering and meeting space: it is equipped with various things to help this: there will be a set of comfortable chairs and coffee tables set out all the time to allow people to sit and have a cuppa and a chat whenever the building is open. We even have a pool table - which will be cunningly disguised as the welcome table for newsletter and literature when not in use for playing games. It would be great if both on weekdays and at weekends people come together for a chat in the Atrium before or after Mass - catching up with friends, getting little bits of business done, just spending a little time with each other.

As part of this I am asking for volunteers for something new - serving refreshments after weekend masses. Whether this happens or not will depend on teams of people willing to do it. We are a big parish, and we should be able to field enough teams of people who can be on a rota once every four weeks or so. The Atrium will then be able to function as it was designed - as a meeting and gathering place for our parish community.

It will also be our room for special groups and meetings: the UCM will meet there, as will Sacramental programme groups. It may be hired out to other groups - such as Weightwatchers - and it will be used for Parish social events. It will be where our Tuesday coffee morning will continue, and it is a place that could be used for other weekday gatherings, like pensioners lunch clubs, or simply as a place in the warm where our elderly friends could pass a cold day to save on their heating bills.

Part of the Atrium can be separated off by a folding screen, which creates a smaller room for other groups to meet in - such as Baptism preparation groups, RCIA groups, or the SVP. This smaller room will also be where our school age children will go for the Children's Liturgy of the Word.

If you go on holiday to Italy or Spain, you will see how important the Piazza is: an open air gathering space where people meet and spend time. It is my hope that the Atrium will become a place where our parish family will come together in a variety of ways, to meet, to chat and to get to know each other more and more. And as we gather together socially and in friendship, to be bound more closely together as we prepare to enter our Church, there united with each other to meet the Lord who invites us to his table.

## **Introduction to the New Church 2**

Last week I talked about the Atrium - a place which will gather us together as God's family in many different ways. As we pass from the Atrium through the doors into the new Church, we will walk under a stone lintel with this inscription "I HAVE LOVED, O LORD, THE BEAUTY OF THY HOUSE" - very familiar words that usher us into a very special place - our new church itself. What will we find there?

At the centre of every Church is the altar - not always literally in the centre, but in terms of meaning the centre of the building is the altar. And this is because the altar represents Jesus Christ, who is truly the centre of our faith. The altar is more than one thing: it is the table of the Last Supper, where we eat and drink with Jesus, and it is also the place of his sacrifice - the cross of Calvary, where he also gives himself to us. We believe that when we celebrate Mass, we are present both at the Last Supper and at Calvary, receiving from Christ the gift that he gives of himself, his life, his Body and Blood. This is why the altar is the centre of our Church.

When you remember that the first Mass was the Last Supper, and think a bit about what it looked like, the picture is probably very different from a church you know. The Last Supper was domestic, round a table in a room, as we saw last week, with only thirteen people present. But at the heart of the Last Supper was something which is still true for us every time we celebrate Mass - that Jesus gathers his friends around him to give them the gift of himself, as he is doing for us here and now.

There are two models of the arrangement of Church seating - processional and gathered. The processional model sees all the seats or benches arranged in rows, facing the

sanctuary, normally in a long and narrow church building. The gathered model has people surrounding the sanctuary.

At a very early stage in our new church building design I had to make a decision about which ours would be. For a long time I stressed and fretted about this, and I worried that the decision would end up being one of taste and style - and I worried that it would run the risk of me imposing my taste or style on the parish. So I went back to the books and the documents and the church's teaching to see if I could find anything there that would help. I came across two things: first the emphasis that the altar, which represents Christ, should be the "centre of the church", which implied that we must all be focussed on it, and on Christ, in our building. The second thing was the principle of "full, conscious and active participation" that the Second Vatican Council asked of us all - we are not to be passive and inactive spectators at Mass, but all of us are to take part in it, albeit in different ways.

These two principles, together with some research on how we take part in activities in public buildings, led me to the conclusion that our new church must be in the gathered style: no one should be so far away from the altar that they would be distant from the "action". And that Christ wishes to gather us together in Himself, so that we do not take part as individuals, but as a gathered community of his friends.

This is why, when you walk into our new church, you will see the new benches fixed in this pattern - and I say 'fixed' deliberately, because you will all remember the time when our benches here would wander from week to week as I experimented with finding a solution for this church! The benches in the new church will be staying put!

We will all be gathered around the sanctuary: the altar will be at the centre of our attention. This is to help us to see Jesus Christ as the true centre of all that we do as a parish family - to let Him gather us closer to each other, not just at Mass, but in all things.

I have deliberately tried not to make this too challenging: some modern churches have all their benches facing "in", and I know from experience that this would not be comfortable for some of us, so a lot of the benches will still be in a traditional position - facing forwards towards the sanctuary. But wherever you end up sitting in the new church, your bench will be pointing you to the altar.

And I hope the altar itself will be a worthy focus: it is a brand new altar, which tries to tie these things together: The base is made of rich granite, reminding us of the altars of sacrifice of the Old Testament, and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. The top is made of wood, like the table of the Upper Room, reminding us of the Last Supper and the meal we share with the Lord. And just to drive the point home, carved around the wood is an inscription which reads "THE LOVE OF CHRIST GATHERS US TOGETHER AS ONE", as a permanent reminder of what the altar, and this arrangement of seats, is trying to do.

## Introduction to the New Church 3

While last week was mainly focussed on the altar and our benches surrounding it, and I was talking about our place at the Table of the Last Supper and the altar of Calvary, there is more than just Mass which goes on in a church building. It is a place, if you remember, where we come together to meet God: we also do this in celebrating the sacraments and in our own devotions and prayers. So any new church must have places for these to happen!

In our church one of the most notable features is the place for baptism. Since the Second Vatican Council in the 60s baptismal fonts have meandered around churches quite extensively. Back in the old days, very few people attended baptisms (I've been told that at my own it was just my parents and my godmother), so fonts were generally in their traditional position at the back of the church, near the main entrance. This touched on the symbolism of baptism as entry into the family of the Church. But as more people were invited to these celebrations, fonts began to wander to the front of the church, for the simple reason that everyone could see. Sometimes they wandered back again, as people rediscovered the symbolism of water at the entrance to the building.

Our font is at the centre, right next to the altar. There are a lot of reasons for this: one is simple and pragmatic – so that people can see and take part in the celebration of baptisms. But there are also scriptural and symbolic reasons. The font is very close to the altar - almost too close, some might say. But this is deliberate. In the account of the Lord's crucifixion, the Bible tells us that after his death on the cross, his side was pierced by a spear, and immediately there flowed out blood and water. Saint Paul, Saint John, and many other early Church writers, interpreted this event: the blood and water flowing from his side as signs of the sacramental life of the Church: blood representing the Eucharist, and water Baptism. When you look at a crucifix, you will see the wound on Christ's side - to the left as we look at him. This is where the font is placed in relation to the altar - slightly to the left as you look, just where the wound in Christ's side would be.

There is another Scriptural reference: the vision of the prophet Ezekiel in the Old Testament has the prophet seeing a flow of water from “the right side of the altar” in the Temple in Jerusalem: this water becomes a mighty river, giving life and health to all on its banks. This is for us a symbol of what our font will do: letting the life of Christ flow from the altar to all who are baptised.

The church will also be equipped with all that is needed for the other sacraments: there will be shelves for the holy oils of Catechumens and the Sick, and the Sacred Chrism. There will be a good clear space before the altar for couples to sit and kneel as they are married, and for coffins to rest at funerals.

The Church is also to be the place of our prayer and devotion. Foremost among the places of prayer is the Tabernacle, the place of the true presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The tabernacle must be a dominant feature in a Catholic Church, and it is hoped out new one will be exactly this. In a very pale church, with white walls, translucent windows and lots of golden pine, the tabernacle will be against a deep red painted wall. It

will be more than just a box to contain the Blessed Sacrament: in the tradition of the Church it will be a tower from floor to ceiling - this new one constructed in shining steel. There is a symbolism in the tabernacle too: in the journey of the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt to their freedom in the Promised Land the Lord was present with them, in the tent of meeting (which is where the word “tabernacle” comes from). God had also been present to Moses in the Burning Bush, and in the pillar of cloud and fire. On the front of our tabernacle column will be a design, both cut out in the steel and applied to it, of a burning bush and flames on its whole height. Together with the design, lights will adorn it, and a new, unique Sanctuary Lamp will burn by it all the time, to make it a focus of our prayer and devotion and a worthy place to repose the Blessed Sacrament.

Any Catholic Church throughout the world is adorned with many images - statues and pictures of saints and events in the story of salvation - and ours will be no different. We have a new statue of Our Lady for the new Church, which will fit into its own Chapel on the left as you enter: it comes from the *Monasteres du Bethleem*, a religious community in the south of France which hand carved wooden statues. This will be a special image, not produced in a factory, but produced in prayer. Votive candles will be available in front of it, to continue our prayer when we move on. Opposite this, on the right as you go in, is a Chapel dedicated to Our Lord, with another new statue of Jesus the Good Shepherd - a young man with a shepherd’s crook and a lamb draped over his shoulders. Our prayer here will be for His protection and care for us and those who are dear to us.

Further up, on the left, is a Chapel with the somewhat cumbersome name “Chapel of Those Who Have Gone Before Us” - this is where we will remember saints and the faithful departed. The Book of the Names of the Dead will lie open in this Chapel, and behind it will be four new images of the saints. These are the saints special to our Islands: Saint George for England, Saint Andrew for Scotland, Saint David for Wales and, of course, Saint Patrick, the great saint of Ireland.

The fourth Chapel, opposite this, is currently empty! It is a seasonal chapel, whose contents will change depending on the time of the Church’s year. So it will be the place for the crib at Christmas and the Easter Garden, and many more things yet to be imagined!

Currently we have a large statue of our patron, Saint Philip Neri, tucked away in an alcove. He is too big to come with us into the new church, so instead a new picture has been created from an engraving of the saint taken while he was still alive. This “true likeness” has been made large - very large! (About five foot by four!) He will watch over us from the back wall opposite the Children’s Chapel.

Around the church will be the fourteen Stations of the Cross - our current Stations again are too large, but they have been photographed and turned into smaller pictures which will adorn the columns around the Church.

All in all, it is to be hoped that when you walk into the new Saint Mary’s there will be much to distract you, much to look at - but the distraction will lead us in our prayers and thoughts to the purpose of our Church once more - to meet our God together.