

BUILDINGS ARE A GOOD INVESTMENT IN MISSION

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We spent almost £2 million on redeveloping our church and as a result have ended up with a wonderful set of premises. But were we right or were we wrong to spend such a huge sum?

Some told us that we were wrong to spend that kind of money on ourselves. We should have given the money away to help smaller churches here at home or to the poor of the world. But that criticism is fundamentally flawed. If we did not spend the money on “ourselves” : we invested the money in mission, and in particular in a mission facility appropriate to the new millennium.

The fact is that people’s expectations have changed. The cinemas discovered that some years ago. They realised if they were to attract people to see their films, then it wasn’t simply a matter of having good films to show. It was also a matter of having comfortable seats in which to watch the films. So they knocked down their old ‘flea pits’ and built new cinemas instead, with the result that people now go to the cinema again. .

The parallel with church is clear. People are not prepared to put up with hard, uncomfortable pews, or with ill-heated and draughty buildings. What was good enough for their grand-parents, is no longer good enough for them. Just as the cinemas needed to upgrade their facilities to attract a new cinema-going public, so we churches, if we want to attract a new church-going public, must do the same.

Some critics have been more radical and questioned whether we need a building at all. After all, Christians didn’t have buildings until around 200 AD. Our experience of having worshipped in a school for some 19 months is that there are real disadvantages in renting other people’s premises. Setting-up for services was enormously time-demanding. And a school hall is not the most uplifting of environments in which to worship God. And as for the all the other activities we ran during the week, it was a night-mare re-locating our two mental-health clubs, our child-contact centre, and all the other activities one might expect of a busy church. It is difficult to engage in holistic mission without a building. Home groups have a role to play, not least in the area of enhancing and deepening fellowship, but they have their limitations when it comes to worship, evangelism and social service. Furthermore, the life-expectancy of churches which do not have buildings of their own tends to be much shorter than those which do invest in bricks and mortar. It is actually good stewardship to invest in church buildings.

It is true that buildings are not essential to the being of the church. The church is people, not buildings. The temple at Jerusalem was replaced by the Body of Christ. People therefore come first, buildings are only secondary. But buildings can serve the people of God. They can serve the people of God not least in providing them with a base for worship and for mission. Buildings are a good investment in mission.

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