Our churches are often underused despite being a focal physical point in each community. Whilst large building projects can transform our buildings, very simple adjustments can also result in these magnificent buildings being better utilised by local people or used more frequently for local mission opportunities.

Worship
Our parish churches are often the main focus for worship in each community and over the years local customs will have developed and liturgical items will have accumulated. Do take a fresh look at your worship this Sunday to see what can be done better, and whether any liturgical clutter is starting to impede your worship.

Spiritual Space
Do you have within your church a quiet corner for personal prayer and reflection? Such a space is often seen as important by the wider community as well as the regular worshippers. If you have such a space can it be improved? If not could something be created? Canterbury St Martin’s created an excellent ‘quiet space’ and Holy Trinity Broadstairs have effectively re-ordered their chapel into a prayer space.

Hosting Facilities
As well as being available as a venue for a wide use of appropriate events, there are examples of churches being used to host post offices (for example, Holy Cross Goodnestone), community shops and farmers’ markets (such as St Mary’s Rolvenden). I would encourage your PCC to open a creative dialogue with your local community (to include your parish council, village hall management committee, school governors and other key organisations) to discuss how the community buildings in your parish can be used more effectively by you all.

Spiritual Heritage
How many people sign your visitors’ book? The received wisdom is that you can multiply this number by 10 to get an idea of your visitor numbers. Do you make the most of the opportunity which this presents? Do you work in partnership with other local churches to produce church trails?

Ian Dodd, Historic Places of Worship Support Officer and Secretary to the DAC

Do you produce any resources aimed specifically at visitors? St Clements’s in Sandwich have piloted a successful spiritual trail both around the town and also around St Clements church itself.

Local History
Is there a local history focus within your community? If not could your church building host a display? Why not work on a joint project with your local schools? One example is the excellent local history corner at St Peter and St Paul, Newchurch.

How I can help
Along with my colleague, Caroline Pinchbeck, I am available to meet you at your church to discuss all aspects of how the building can be developed to better serve your needs as well as promoting a wider role within the community. The DAC is also here to provide guidance and advice on any project from its earliest stages through to the formal faculty application.
Our buildings speak volumes to those who visit them, what do they say to us?

Father Jim Rosenthal

The old hymn says it well:

We love the place, O God, wherein thine honour dwells; the joy of thine abode all earthly joy excels.

These words of William Bullock point to the true spirit in which believers in Christ might best approach the buildings that frustrate, energise, bring comfort, cost money, and stand as a symbol, so boldly of the majesty and welcome of Christ.

I am a priest serving a medieval church, the newly refurbished St Nicholas at Wade, as well as another congregation where the people ventured in faith to see how best the beloved buildings can bring renewed honour to Christ and the gospel. The dramatic answer came at St Mary the Virgin, Chislet, where in 1996 the powers at hand divided the chancel from the nave, which now can serve users in multiple ways, currently from badminton to craft markets.

Creativity does not equal destruction. One thing that has touched me very much at St Nicholas is the commitment of the people to keep this incredible church open daily, dawn till dusk. Why? Yes for the wandering walking tour or cyclist, or the weary mum or pensioner looking for a place of quiet and open welcome. (Being the community loo is also a true way to win friends).

Our hymn continues:

It is the house of prayer, wherein thy servants meet; and thou, O Lord, art there thy chosen flock to greet.

The Episcopal Cathedral in Washington DC has as its motto, ‘A House of Prayer for all people’. And so it is. Whether medieval or modern, old or new, ornate or plain, the building is there to house the altar where the great sacrifice of redemption is recalled, the Holy Communion. From that, as we hear and respond in the Dismissal at the Sunday Eucharist, we ‘Go in peace to love and serve the Lord, in the name of Christ Amen’.

Am I comparing our massive stone edifice as ‘petrol’ or a ‘fill it up’ stop along the way? Well, yes, in some ways, because it is here we worship the Lord and where we are compelled to bring people into the fellowship of the church. Yes the building is revered, created, maintained and renewed so that we may all be ‘built up’, whether a member for 50 years or a hiker passing by.

B. C. L. Muirhead, in another classic Anglican hymn, says this:

An altar stands within the shrine whereon, once sacrificed, is set, immaculate, divine, the Lamb of God, the Christ.

The creative use of the legacy of brick and mortar allows us to stand back in awe and wonder at the expense and the motivation that gives this day and Deo volente, for ages to come. Places like St Mary of Charity, Faversham; St Nicholas, Barfrestone; St Gregory and St Martin, Wye; and St Mary, Nackington, are a few of my own favourites in our diocese.

One of the realities we face with the historic buildings at our disposal is that there is a scrutiny and procedure when we seek to add or subtract, or even repair or replace. This is where the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) plays an important and powerful role, seeking to avoid the damage of someone making an arbitrary decision to destroy/erect something that is likely to have a poor end-result.

I remember flying over a bush area in Southern Sudan and seeing the outline of a cruciform cathedral - no homes, no shelters, but a cathedral built brick by brick by Australian Anglicans (their theory must have been everyone needs a cathedral). Stuck to the wall of the altar area was a plastic placemat of Canterbury Cathedral. I wonder if people realise that Canterbury Cathedral, a true instrument of Anglican unity, is so revered you find it echoed throughout the world - such as in the stained glass at St John’s Cathedral, Jacksonville, USA.

In placing our faith and practice in perspective, to ‘building and building up’, we might sit or kneel, giving thanks for those remembered in our churches, and also each time looking for something we haven’t seen before, sometimes in our own church. You will be amazed what you haven’t seen.

Our buildings must be built on a rock, bricks and mortar, all to keep all in order. Yet our faith, too, must be built on the rock, the rock of faith, so that we, like Peter, can be rocks of strength to those we encounter.

William Henry Draper’s words can help us see just what it is we have inherited as more than just custodians:

These stones that have echoed their praises are holy, and dear is the ground where their feet have once trod; yet here they confessed they were strangers and pilgrims, and still they were seeking the city of God.
Looking up at Bell Harry Tower at Canterbury Cathedral.

Yambio Episcopal Cathedral in Sudan. (Colehill)

Rogation Sunday lunch in the aisles of St Nicholas-at-Wade.
In Willesborough, Ashford, Community consultations by Ashford Council in 2006 and, again by the Church and the Council in 2012 identified the need for new community facilities for the local people.

Alongside this the Church has grown significantly over the last four years both numerically and spiritually, however the ministry is being hampered by the lack of a community space (there is no church hall).

At an away day in 2009 the Church family identified a desire to widen the use of the church building and following this, after a year of prayerful review, the creation of a ‘shared space’ became the first priority in the St Mary’s Mission Action Plan established last year. This project is laid on the hearts of the church family who, with God’s help, are delivering it in partnership with the Diocese and Ashford Council.

The aim of the changes to the building is to create a well serviced high quality flexible space in the nave of the church which will be used throughout the week to meet community needs and for worship.

The physical works will include:

- Open shared space in the nave.
- Flexible seating.
- Modern kitchen and toilet facilities.
- A new crèche/meeting room.
- A small intimate worship space.
- Under floor heating and improved lighting.
- Plenty of dedicated enclosed storage areas.

The objectives and expected outcomes from the use of the space and new facilities are the:

- Continued growth in church membership and new people coming into the church.
- Introduction of ‘un-churched’ people to the Christian faith.
- Encouragement of church members to develop new ministries related to serving the community and mission, resulting in deepened discipleship.
- Enhancement of frequency, variety and quality of worship in the church.
- Resolution of the current church annual funding deficit through giving from new members and income from letting out the facilities to external organisations.

Once the shared space and new facilities are created the intention is to immediately expand the membership of the Parent and Toddler and after school groups.

A ‘fresh expression’ of church and a weekly lunch for the elderly/lonely are planned to be introduced during the week, and the existing regular worship (including breakfast church, quiet mornings etc.) will be enhanced by flexible seating, choice of spaces, effective heating and new lighting.

The local Brownies have started meeting in the church and the new space will help them to grow numbers and enjoy better facilities.

A pre-school play group has registered an interest in using the new space and there has been an enquiry on the use of the kitchen as a café which would serve people when they visit the medical centre next to the church. Other activities are expected to include more frequent concerts and cultural events.

**Project information**

**Forecast cost £670,000**

**CONFIRMED FUNDING SO FAR:**
- Diocesan Mission fund £175,000
- Ashford Council £100,000
- St Mary’s PCC £100,000
- Legacy £70,000
- Deanery Mission fund £5,000
- Various councilor grants £10,000
- Community Grant £6,000
- local fund raising £10,000.

**FUNDING STILL TO RAISE:** £194,000 from further local fund raising and external grants.

**EXPECTED WORKS START:** Autumn 2014.

**WORKS DURATION:** Six months.
Funding the repair and maintenance of historic parish churches is a major struggle for most churches. After paying for the costs of ministry and general housekeeping there is rarely much left.

For many, the idea of raising enough to put in toilets or a kitchen, or improve the space for community use, will be a huge challenge. Nevertheless, parishes can and do find large amounts of money for church building projects.

### Check List

#### Parish reserves
Many parishes run on a fairly hand to mouth basis, but others have substantial reserves. Churches lucky enough to have some money should be willing to use some of it to fund their building work. Grant making organisations are unlikely to give money to a church which wants to keep large reserves for a rainy day.

#### Trusts and other grant making bodies
It’s absolutely normal for a parish to expect to raise most of the money they need from trusts and other grant making bodies. The bad news is that there is enormous competition for these funds and most of the money will have to come from somewhere else.

#### Major donors
In theory it should be easier to find one large donation than a lot of small ones, and seeking large amounts from individuals is one of the ways professional fundraisers work. It’s worth exploring this option, although we recognise that this is a difficult area for some parishes.

#### Fundraising events
The received wisdom is that you’ll never raise £80K from jumble sales and cream teas, but an enormous amount is raised in parishes by various local fundraising events, and the amounts aren’t necessarily tiny. Fundraising events also have a value which goes far beyond the money raised. As well as raising money fundraising events help the church reach out to the community, and can be a lot of fun.

#### Legacies
Legacy income is sometimes used to fund repairs and other building works in churches. In 2009 churches in our Diocese received well over £1 million in legacies, much of which was used to pay for repairs, kitchens, toilets and other building works.

### Gift days
A gift day can be run when the target is almost reached and a final push is needed. The church membership and others living in the locality are asked to come to the church on a specific day and give a gift. Significant amounts can be raised in this way.

### Friends’ schemes
People living in a village who are not churchgoers are often happy to contribute to the maintenance and repair of the church, particularly if it is beautiful or historically important. A ‘Friends of St Whoever’ organisation is an effective means of galvanising support from the village.

Information on fundraising from trusts, gift days, legacies and friends’ schemes can be found at: www.canterburydiocese.org/stewardship
Holy Trinity Broadstairs is an early 20th century building near the harbour strongly influenced by the Oxford Movement. It is light and spacious with great acoustics, having been enlarged from the original 1830 church which was described by Charles Dickens as a ‘petrified haystack’. But it is a single room. In 1980 a ‘Lady Chapel’ was created in the south east corner using what had been the rood screen as a divider, and an impressive statue of Our Lady by John Doubleday was installed in a niche.

The chapel is used regularly for daily prayer, mid-week Eucharists, a prayer group and Mothers’ Union meetings as well as a quiet place for individual prayer when the church is open to visitors. However, we felt there were limitations to its use as it was draughty and impossible to heat independently, the furniture was fairly inflexible and the noise levels from the main part of the church could sometimes be disruptive if two things were happening at the same time (the café area is just behind in the south aisle) and rain damage in the past had left its mark on the ceiling and walls. Our task then, was to re-order to improve this with the minimum of fuss or cost.

The PCC decided to tackle the project to create a ‘Quiet Space’ in simple stages. Phase one was to remove the platform, the communion rail and the heavy altar against the east wall and redecorate. This was carried out under an Archdeacon’s licence and included replacing the old carpet tiles with a decent plain carpet. We now have an attractive chapel with simple and clean lines which can be used much more flexibly. Adding a warm colour behind the statue has transformed it and contrasts with the plain walls and ceiling. It has been very well received and both regular users and visitors are pleased with the result.

The second, and more costly, phase now follows to add glazing to the open screen and to the space above, a glass door, and electric heating. This will transform the space without interfering very much with the openness or the sight lines from the rest of the church. Although we do not have the same issues that a mediaeval church would have to face, we still have to carefully plan the detail of the glazing so the detail of the screen is not lost, and there is a challenge in glazing the space between the screen and the stone work above, but we are confident it can be done - there are good examples around the diocese for us to learn from.

Costings are still to be submitted but we hope the project can be completed under £20,000, the vast majority of this is covered by some recent legacies. Finally we are about to undertake the essential re-lighting and re-wiring of the whole building which will allow us to install independent heating and ambient lighting in the chapel.

As this has been phased, the completed project will have taken over 18 months to be brought to fruition, but had we not received further legacies we were content to take a longer period to put the capital in place and ensure we do the best we can for the long term.

We are delighted that through this relatively simple and inexpensive project we are creating a useful and flexible space that enhances the spiritual engagement for church members and visitors.

“We hope the project can be completed under £20,000, the vast majority of this is covered by some recent legacies.”