

# Diocese of Dunedin

Dunedin Diocese May 2008



## Strategic Property Consultation

2020



***Illustration on front page: a collection of some of the Diocese of Dunedin churches as of May 2008 (from the above image at Peter Mann House). The Buildings in Millers Flat and Omakau are no longer owned by the Diocese, St Michael's In Clyde has been going through a property commission process....***



# What issues are we facing with our buildings and properties?

The Diocese of Dunedin Anglican Parishes, local Churches and other Diocesan institutions have properties that are vested in the Diocese of Dunedin Trust Board. Over the years these assets have enabled the church to do its work and ministry, from providing places of worship, education, social care/support through to administration spaces and housing.

There has been a marked shift in activity surrounding property. Some continue to provide space for parishes and organisations to function as originally intended. Others are in the category where past or present activity is less sustainable due to significant changes, including:

- **Altering demographics** (some areas losing population, others gaining, change in the makeup of communities);
- **Outdated operating models** (e.g. providing a particular kind of care that is no longer required e.g. children's homes no longer exist in NZ, or a move to maintain older people in their own homes rather than fund rest home level care);
- **Changing Ministry needs** e.g. "traditional" Anglican worship needs versus mission for people who have no formal faith contexts or experience;
- **Evolving ministry requirements** e.g. some parishes not needing to provide a property for clergy accommodation, a shift from residential social services to community-based care

As many parishes and Diocesan organisations evolve, development of properties in response to this changing landscape has changed as well. **To date there has been no formal framework to aid the wider Diocese (parishes and organisations) in their strategic decision making for property assets.** At the same time, there has been an increased demand on the Diocesan Council and Dunedin Diocesan Trust Board to deal with "surplus to requirements"



properties, and this is likely to increase as some parishes struggle with ageing (not up to code) facilities and smaller congregations.

## Current Challenges

The Diocesan Council spends a significant amount of the time on property related matters, but with little in the way of guidance on how to make decisions. Over recent months, the Council has discussed the need for Property Strategy that is Biblically and Theologically based. This would help direct the Council and be of value to Parishes, local churches and other Diocesan Ministry Units. We are not alone in facing these issues, with other Dioceses (such as Auckland) recognising the need to establish more robust processes to manage property portfolios. This document is an attempt to take this conversation further and has some concluding resources to inform our thinking around this.

At Synod 2019 the following motion was passed to allow the current consultation to take place:

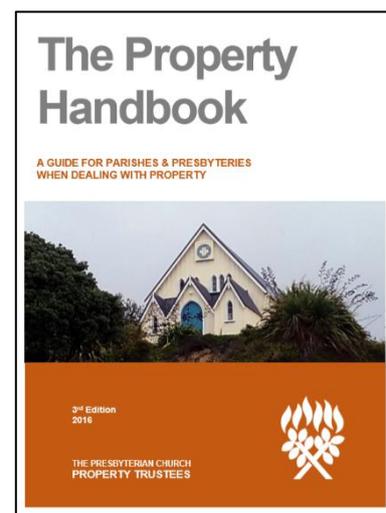
**That this Synod affirms the Diocesan Council intention to undergo a consultation process around the sale or other use of properties, buildings and other assets within the context of future mission within the Diocese.**

## How is this handled elsewhere?

We have few local examples to follow.

In NZ, the Presbyterian Church north of the Waitaki River does have a useful [handbook](#) on dealing with proper matters. It suggests property can be sold if:

1. It is no longer needed for mission purposes.
2. (A parish) wish to replace it with a property that will better fulfil God's mission
3. It has the approval of the Church Council, the congregation, Presbytery and the Trustees



Typically, larger (more urban) Dioceses can be in a situation where increasing property values leave the perceived impression of parishes sitting on (land) gold mines with assets that are potentially underutilised and unrealised. While this is a factor with some of our assets, there are other significant dynamics such as:

1. **A connection to existing sacred spaces**, sometimes stronger than an understanding of what they should represent i.e. mission within a particular context. At times the strength of a wider community's connection with a space is not fully expressed until there is a prospect of sale or disposal.



*St Michael's Church, Clyde – currently being reviewed by a Property Commission, with strong local feedback concerned about its potential disposal/future.*

2. **An increasing sense of helplessness relating to the upkeep of sacred spaces**, in particular to health and safety, earthquake strengthening and other requirements with an increasingly small pool of people/other resources to maintain them. Many of our facilities risk (or have experienced) demolition



*Former St John's Church, Invercargill – an example of one property a Parish was no longer able to maintain.*

by neglect due to the potential expense of this. Some Parishes are acutely aware of how their facilities are draining their resources and are not fit for use within the mission context. They can feel powerless to do anything about this.



# What are some Biblical and Theological Imperatives?

It is challenging (as it is with anything biblical or theological) to arrive at any consensus on the part that physical property plays in the journey of faith (please look at some of the end resources in this paper). Very broadly, the following are two major themes:

**Temple theology:** This is very prominent in the Hebrew scriptures, with an ongoing influence in church settings today, especially in many Anglican churches. This tends to focus on a temporary (tabernacle) or permanent (temple) location where God is worshipped. They are sacred places, full of mystery and ritual that tells the story of God's dealing with God's people. These places also have layers of sacredness, with some areas reserved for people who have been specially set apart (priests). In local settings the Synagogue provided a place for people to meet and hear and discuss the scriptures, with Jesus being a regular participant in these settings. One pitfall of "temple" theology is the risk of idolatry i.e. where the focus is on an object/building rather than what it points to (God).

*Psalm 27: 4 One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple (English Standard Version)*

**New Testament House Church to developing Places of Worship:** Early references in the New Testament almost exclusively have Christians meeting in private homes (*Acts 20:20; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon v.2; 2 John v.10*) with an emphasis on God residing in people, not places:

*1 Corinthians 3: 16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that God's Spirit lives in you? (English Standard Version)*



However, after around 300AD the provision of designated buildings for worship became more common as the church became more established.

The question for us to ask is: have we moved from a more established (building focused) church setting to a missional context where we need to find new ways of making disciples that are not tied into bricks and mortar? What place does bricks and mortar play in identifying places and people of faith and speaking of God's love to God's world? How could buildings be used to support ministry... but also to provide sacred spaces? (see a paper in the other resources section by John Graveston: A Theological Reflection on Church property in the Diocese of Dunedin: Conversations That Count)



## Some Suggested Strategic Property Criteria

The Diocesan Council has been reflecting on some potential criteria that could help all of us in our decision-making. **In no order of preference or importance, these include the following:**

- 1. Maintaining a physical facility in response to identified mission.** This indicates that any building/property is fit for purpose and is flexible to meet future needs (or can be adapted). The key driver for this criterion is a definite plan and vision that the parish or ministry unit has for ministry, and what physical facilities (if any) are required.
- 2. Designation as Significant sacred spaces-takoa (tonga).** This can include nationally identified buildings (e.g. registered Category 1 and 2 Historic places) where preservation is of significant local and national importance. Note: **there are potential pitfalls in this criteria**, as demonstrated in what has happened in New Zealand after significant events like earthquakes and by community concerns that are expressed in any sale or disposal of a church building is proposed (see above).
- 3. Preserving Intergenerational assets for future ministry.** This criterion recognises that what we have is the result of what previous generations have provided and has been significant in allowing ministry to take place within geographic areas. Once something is disposed of, it can be difficult (but not impossible) to re-establish it in the future if property is required.



4. **Unlocking properties or resources that are underdeveloped/unutilized.** This includes property/resources that are not being utilised due to changing demographics, are not “fit for purpose” and re-purposing them would be expensive/inappropriate, or their placement is in an area with high land values. It could include clergy residences (vicarages) through to little-used or otherwise underutilised parish buildings. Alternative use or development may be able to “unlock” these in some way i.e. use them differently e.g. to generate income, without jeopardising the preservation of intergenerational assets or creating unacceptable risk.
5. **Surplus assets that have outlived their usefulness in their current situation that should be sold.** This would include property/resources noted in the fourth criteria, but where there is seen to be significant risk in leaving them as they are, or in trying to redevelop them. Disposing of these assets have the potential to release resources for new ministries.

## For Parish and Other Ministry Unit reflection and feedback

Diocesan Council has continued to struggle with these issues but feel that the conversation needs to be much wider. We want to ask you:

1. **What is your take on the suggested Strategic Property Criteria** - anything that is not right? Anything missing?
2. **In your setting, what is the most important consideration when thinking about property and how it can aid your ministry in the future?** (You may find the resources listed below helpful in seeing a range of arguments and suggested theological underpinnings)
3. If you were to **rank in order of importance** the suggested Strategic Property Criteria, what would this be? (NB: The Workshop will give an initial opportunity to do this and also weight the criteria)

*We will provide some opportunities at the archdeaconry level for Wardens and Synod reps to meet and talk about the above questions in a workshop*



*environment, and the content of this paper will be presented in a workshop. The workshop will include a “ranking” of the existing criteria ... but also the chance to share any ideas for criteria we may have missed.*

*There will also be a simple weighting process that will take place at each session to gauge what people feel are the most important considerations. Depending on the outcome of this, Diocesan Council may provide an opportunity to do some more work on the weighting process.*

*We hope at the end of this process to have some information that will assist the Diocesan Council and Faith Communities in their decision making around property, with the potential for motions/bills related to property to be taken to a future Synod.*

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## **Some other resources to help your thinking:**

If you have any trouble accessing or downloading any of the resources below or want a hard copy of this paper sent to you, please contact us by [clicking this link](#), or email the Registrar with “Property Resources” in your subject line.

### **1. In favour of preserving Sacred Spaces**

[Church Buildings aren't just buildings](#) - from the Christian Century. Talks about the ambivalence many feel about buildings, but how the fact they are more than buildings, they are places of worship and “home” for families of faith.

[A Biblical Theology of Architecture](#) - a (lengthy) from an evangelical perspective, arguing there are biblical imperatives for creating sacred spaces. *“The two components that are always in tension in religious architecture are the immanence and transcendence of God. As the church, as new community distinct from Israel emerges, it is concerned with idolatry and the misuse of such spaces due to the idolatry, legalism, and misuse of the temple in Israel’s history. There is a great danger in over-emphasizing either the architecture of immanence in the tabernacle or the architecture of transcendence in the temple, posing a difficult question of how to wed the two together. The Lord will answer this question of material faithfulness in the most physical way: the Incarnation.”*



[The Underrated Strategic Value of Church Buildings](#) - from a USA context reflecting on the pressure to re-purpose under or unused church buildings into other developments such as housing, arguing that there is a mandate for preserving church buildings.

[Everywhere Present: Christianity in a One-Story universe \(link to Good Reads reviews of book\)](#). In this book, Stephen Freeman (currently an Orthodox Priest in North America) argues among other things the value of sacred spaces. This is in the context of not buying into a two-tier system where we have ordinary things on earth with God “upstairs” i.e. remote, absent and unreachable. In Chapter 4 (The God Who is Not There) he talks about how in the Orthodox tradition church buildings themselves are seen as holy, but within it there is a Holy Place – the space surrounding the Altar. Many people see holy places as being everywhere and anywhere, but there is something about having a defined holy space that is able to communicate the presence of God in a profound and unique way.

## 2. Changing how we see the place of property in church life

[Blue Pears in the Wilderness](#), a reflection from former Diocesan Ministry Educator Rev’d Alec Clark on how we need to move from inherited church (often represented by our buildings) to a future, much more flexible and mobile church state - and to recognise that we are currently in a transition zone. We need to think about traveling light, focusing on what really matters and attending to human need.

[Church Buildings or House Churches](#) - an article from an evangelical perspective arguing for the biblical and practical advantages for meeting within homes, with some useful biblical references.

[2 Wrong Ways to Think About Church Buildings](#) - an article from Christianity Today which talks about new buildings but also has some interesting points to make about a common problems: that most churches thought their building was a permanent representation of their congregation, whereas we need to be thinking of how we can flexibly respond to shifting demographics and needs.

[A Theological Reflection on Church property in the Diocese of Dunedin: Conversations That Count](#). John Gravestone (Diocese of Dunedin Child Youth and Family Educator) reflects on Old and New Testament perspectives on buildings, looks at the difference between church property and church sanctuaries and the need to carefully review what we do have in the light of increasingly changing environments for mission.

## 3. Both points of view

[Church Building Projects UK website](#) - looking at why buildings play an important role in the life of a church - having a place/identity in a community, having a “face” (for good or ill!). Buildings demand commitment - but need to be flexible. See [another example](#) of country churches in England who are starting to use their buildings for other local services.

[The Importance of Place: What Should we do with Old Church Buildings?](#) Reflections on church buildings in a UK context encouraging consideration of the needs and values of a church congregation, the physical church building and an understanding of “place”.



[The High Cost of Selling Churches](#): Recent article in Otago Daily Times - *“The sight of these distinctive and dignified structures going the way of gracious old post offices and railway stations, passing out of community use and into private hands, might gladden the hearts of atheists and free marketeers, but also suggests that churches - I now mean the people - need to do a far better job of dealing with their property.”*

## 4. Strategic and Ethical Property investments

[Mission Real Estate Development](#) – Trinity Church in Wall Street have an interesting ministry around helping the wider Episcopal Church in USA build financial sustainability for ministry through the creative development of assets. They are working in a missional way in various places in Africa to help Dioceses build up their strategic assets to generate income for future ministry.

**Ethical Investing** has been on the agenda at various times in General Synod and is making inroads into other Diocese in New Zealand, with the effect of looking at how investments are handled, but also what can be done to use property assets differently. Most of this is connected with [Mission Aligned Impact Investment](#) i.e. Motion 11 passed at General Synod 2018. The Diocese of Wellington have created a new role to look at strategic property development differently, including through this kind of lens.

[New Ways of Investing in Our Communities](#) (Social Housing provision with property partners). Currently in the Diocese there are some who are doing some more thinking about how the church could build partnerships to actively use existing properties for ministry or redevelopment land that they have to have a missional impact. For example, two parishes have been exploring this with a community housing provider to offer housing to meet social needs. This is a “win-win” situation with the church retaining land ownership but receiving market rent for properties that are being let. The link above is to a presentation made to the Dunedin Diocesan trust Board last year giving an outline of resources available to assist with this via the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (the Diocesan Registrar is available to talk through this presentation with any interested Vestry or other Committee).

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