

GEM 4/2/1999

£300,000 plans to change church

"EXCITING" plans, including the moving of the altar to a more central position, have been unveiled at Holy Cross, Cowbridge, by architect Alwyn Jones.

The church is preparing for the approaching millennium by making itself more "user-friendly" with a wheelchair ramp and immersion font.

The Parochial Church Council has approved the plans in principle by 22 votes in favour, none against and two abstentions.

The Rector, Rev Robert Paterson, said: "I was confident that they would be approved, but I didn't realise that it would go through with such a majority. It is fair to say that most people were pleased with the plans."

In his opening comments, Alwyn Jones said: "We can't be slaves to the past."

All the planned alterations will be reversible so that if, in the future, they wish to revert to the building's current state it will be possible.

The biggest change will be the proposed movement of the altar, from its present position at the far end of the chancel to a more central position in the tower.

This will create a chapel area for "more intimate worship" to the left of the altar and make the space behind the altar available for two meeting rooms.

Archdeacon of Llandaff, the Venerable Bill Thomas, commented: "I think the plans are imaginative and exciting. To make it more of a living thing will attract people to come in and see that the Christian faith is something that is living not a thing of the past."

Rev Robert Paterson added: "I think the plans are brilliant, we are very pleased with them, they are exciting."

A curved wheelchair ramp is to be installed leading up to the altar in order to make it more accessible. The combined pulpit/lectern will be brought slightly forward from the pulpit's present position to accommodate the new position of the altar. All the new seating will be moveable and it is hoped that the

seating in Llanquian Aisle could be removed mid-week to accommodate exhibitions and displays.

The most exciting change would be the new Baptistry, the location is as yet undecided but it is unlikely that it will be where it is shown on the plans. The Baptistry area will consist of the traditional affusion font and a complete immersion font situated against the backdrop of a stunning glass water feature.

It is unlikely that any work will begin before the year 2000, but it is estimated that the alterations will cost in the region of £300,000.

The plans will be on display in the church, at the end of Llanquian Aisle, for a week or two and all comments or queries about the proposed alterations should be directed to Rev Robert Paterson.

11/3/99

'Altar is a place of reverence'

Dear Editor

I WISH to respond to some of the comments made by Mr Perks in his letter to the Editor in *The GEM* on February 25.

I appreciate that he has to make certain comments to defend his enthusiasm for, as he puts it, reordering the Holy Cross. However, to make a case for the relocation of the altar by implying that worshippers are going to the altar to meaninglessly take Communion, not in the presence of God, gives him no licence to impose his beliefs on other worshippers.

I regard the altar, set in the sanctuary and in front of the stained glass eastern window portraying the life of Jesus, as the most holy place in the church. In the Russian Orthodox Church and the Greek Orthodox Church, it is regarded as a place of God, held in such reverence that it is enclosed and only the priests are allowed to enter. I regard it likewise, as do many other Holy Cross Church members.

I cannot comprehend the proposal to move the altar in order to give it more focus. The altar is not a stage. It is a place for each individual to have a personal intimacy with God in a secluded place of reverence.

One cannot compare modern hospitals and schools with churches like Holy Cross, nor will it become extinct as Mr Perks predicts. Holy Cross might be referred to as a relic from the past, but what a wonderful relic it is. It has stood for a long time and it will remain for a long time for God is ageless.

Finally, how sad it is that the proposals to change internally Holy Cross, instead of bringing people of all ages together, are dividing the church community.

Yours sincerely

W H Lewis, Cowbridge (lifetime Holy Cross member and 30 years Sunday school teacher; four daughters, all Sunday school teachers).

Ex. warden has his say!

Dear Editor

I AM reluctant to become embroiled in argument. However, there are times when one should just stand up and be counted. I may not have lived here all my life, but have been here for over 25 years and I was church warden of Holy Cross for seven years. I am still privileged to be included in the ministry team and I did refer to *The GEM* in a sermon recently.

Holy Cross Church is not an ancient monument to be consigned to CADW. It is a living church. But living things grow and change. The church exists not to maintain the status quo, but to bring people to the Gospel of Jesus. To do that, we need to be sure that our place of worship is suitably prepared and equipped.

We have, Praise the Lord, managed to improve facilities already; which has meant that more young families can now attend worship in comfort. Over the years, the PCC has struggled to find ways of improving worship and to encourage people to come to the main service on Sunday morning. The existing layout has long been an obstacle to real growth.

One point from my sermon though: I can agree that the Rector should not ask for money. He should not need to! If those of us who have serious faith will be prepared to give serious money, as the Bible tells us, then the church would be awash with funds to give to the Third World and still have money left to reorder the church to meet the needs of the millennium.

Finally, to quote from Archbishop William Temple, we are reminded that the church exists for the benefit of non-members.

Yours sincerely

John B Russell OBE, Cowbridge

'Don't change Cowbridge'

Dear Editor

SINCE the last war, the Cowbridge population has grown from 1,100 into the thousands. There are now more new people than old Cowbridge families.

Many have fitted in quite well and it seems that most want to live in the environment which has been enjoyed by the older Cowbridge families for generations.

It is the character of Cowbridge which some say is unique and is so important to us all and, while this is unspoiled, everybody is welcome.

Lately we have seen the rise of a group called Keep Cowbridge Special, who have resorted to a campaign favoured by some and not favoured by others; however, their feelings are no doubt sincere.

Keeping Cowbridge special obviously means preserving its special character and traditions without alteration.

It is with this reasoning that I ask the Keep Cowbridge Special group to campaign against the plans for carrying out major alterations at Holy Cross Church affecting the Altar, Chancel, making a submersion Baptistry and removing all pews at the cost of £300,000.

Replacing all this with a new feature is out of character with this ancient 13th/16th century church as it is the most special building in Cowbridge, especially enjoyed by the older Cowbridge families who regard it as their inheritance, together with their new and not so new friends.

Yours sincerely
Vera Harris, Cowbridge

Holy Cross, debate is the aim

Dear Editor

I WISH to put in perspective the Rector's comments (The GEM, March 4) relating to my original letter on behalf of a number of people concerned about the proposed alterations to Holy Cross Church, Cowbridge.

He implies that we wrote to The GEM having been counselled against such action. In fact, his letter to me was received several days after my letter had been sent to The GEM, as was the invitation for further face-to-face discussion. The Rector is mistaken to imply otherwise.

The plans under discussion will significantly alter Holy Cross, in our opinion considerably for the worse. Our purpose in writing to The GEM is to bring these proposals to the awareness of the wider public and to arouse others to join the growing number of local people who oppose the plans.

I do not think we deserve, and we certainly did not expect, such remarks made by the Rector in treating our genuine honest feelings as "an implicit attack on the wisdom and integrity of the lay leadership of the parish". We wish to encourage debate and, of course, gather support.

We are also very sad at the implication that the early Sunday morning and Friday Eucharist services were somehow inferior to the Sunday 10.30am service. It especially saddens my wife, who has attended both these services for 50 years.

My reference to doubters has been clearly understood by others to mean those people who cannot agree to the alterations, but could be persuaded to agree by the reversibility of the plans. To think that my statement was directed to include the architect of the alterations is a misinterpretation.

The Rector justifies the plans as being magnificent for God. I question whether God is better served simply because he is worshipped in more lavish surroundings. That is not how I understand God.

I do not propose to comment further on individuals involved, but will defend any adverse comment on my character.

I look forward to reading further views on the proposed alterations to Holy Cross in your pages.

Yours sincerely
W H Lewis, Cowbridge

Facing up to neglect

Dear Editor

IREFER to recent letters in The GEM regarding the proposed expenditure of an estimated £300,000 on internal alterations to the Holy Cross Church, Cowbridge, to which I also add my dissent.

These proposals are akin to the thinking and actions of politicians who, being in control of their various authorities, come up with 'grandiose' ideas at anybody's expense, as long as it is not out of their own pockets, while failing to spend on matters of vital importance.

I trust the various persons and authorities – CADW, the Archdeacon, etc – who allegedly have spoken highly of the proposals at Holy Cross Church, have visited this building recently. If they have, they will have observed the sad neglect of the main archway to the Chancel/Nave and the arches to the Llanquian Aisle/Nave, as well as other defects in plasterwork and decoration.

Would any thinking person consider extensive and costly internal works to their own house if the ingress of the elements continually persisted?

Sadly, we have seen the deterioration of the fabric of the church for the past four to six years without any sign of remedial works being undertaken. This leads me to my earlier reference to politicians and the sad state of the old Grammar School building and the prefab classrooms.

Are we to stand by and see Holy Cross Church become another victim while money (which will need to be borrowed) is spent on internal alterations which the majority of church members and Cowbridge townsfolk are showing their dissent to?

I would mention, in conclusion, that I served as a member of the Parochial Church Council and building committee in the 60s and 70s when major maintenance works, including the new roof to the chancel, was undertaken.

Yours sincerely

Haydn V Woods, Brynsadler

Church moves are on hold

Dear Editor

I AM grateful to Mr Bradshaw (GEM Letters, September 9) for his concern about Holy Cross Parish Church, Cowbridge, though I can't think why he has chosen this time to write about the proposed alterations, because the major refurbishing plans are on hold while we work on the vestry.

I suppose it is incumbent upon me to explain once more that the plans have already been subjected to considerable scrutiny and, in due course, will have to pass through a lengthy process of approval, during which anyone can make comments, suggestions and express approval or disapproval.

The Parochial Church Council will not be ready even to begin that process for some time.

The procedure to which he refers – faculty procedure – has been in use for about 70 years, though in the last decade or so has been made considerably more rigorous. It is operated by the Diocesan Advisory Committee – there is one of these for every Anglican diocese in England and Wales – and each DAC invites comments from the public, sometimes refers suggestions back to the parish and ultimately makes a decision in favour or against. Even that decision may be challenged.

If a case is of sufficient merit and deadlock is reached, a Consistory Court may be held in the building in question. Mr Bradshaw has read a newspaper report of one of a number of such cases which are heard every year.

So, the answer to his final question is that what is debated about a 19th century church in Cheltenham can have no bearing at all on plans submitted for any other church of whatever age, as each case is considered on its own merits.

The Parochial Church Council of Cowbridge is an eminently sensible body of people who understand these procedures and will do what is right and will do so openly and charitably when the time comes.

Yours sincerely

Robert Paterson, Rector, Parish of Cowbridge

16. 9. 99