

Post-reordering Vision for St Michael le Belfrey Church

Draft 5

Introduction: St Michael le Belfrey Church

Since the growing community of St Cuthbert's planted into St Michael le Belfrey some 45 years ago, there's been talk of reordering St Michael le Belfrey Church in York. Finally, after all these years, this is now going to happen, and it's very exciting! As we proceed with this reordering it's important to be clear why we're doing this, and what for, and who for. In particular, what will a re-ordered St Michael le Belfrey Church be like? These kinds of issues and questions lie behind this short but important paper.

St Michael le Belfrey Church is uniquely situated, nestled close to the beloved York Minster - one of the UK's foremost tourist attractions - in a famous postcard view in the delightful city of York. It is a beautiful Grade 1 listed place of worship and sits on the site of a 2,000 year old Roman legionary. Previous churches have been located on this site, possibly going back near to 627AD, when Bishop Paulinus baptised King Edwin close by and established the first Minster near to our church. The present building, constructed in the 1530s is a fine piece of architecture, created to be a place of Christian *mission* and *worship*, expressing the *values* and *vision* of the church of the day.

This paper urges us to similarly consider how St Michael le Belfrey Church will best serve the (1) *mission*, (2) *worship*, (3) *values* and (4) *vision* of the people using this building today and in the coming years - that is, the people of The Belfrey.

In summary, **the reordered St Michael le Belfrey Church will enhance our mission, inspire our worship, reflect our values and strengthen our vision.**

1. Mission

York is a popular place to visit, and increasingly so. According to *Visit York*, the city attracted about 7 million visitors last year - a growth of half a million people in 5 years. Over the year these people added £564million to York's economy - an 18% increase in 5 years. *York Press* have also noted that many of these tourists are from overseas, and that this growth of international visitors is faster in York than any other part of England. This is fascinating, given Christ's *Great Commission* to his church to 'go and make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:19), because it seems that the nations are coming to us! So **there is a unique opportunity for mission which we need to seize.**

However, the missional opportunity is to not just confined to internationals. There are thousands of locals in York who've not heard or responded to the good news of Jesus whom we want to reach. They live, work, study, do business and shop in our great city. Many people from our region visit York regularly, identifying it as not only a 'nice place to visit' but somewhere they'd love to live. Not surprisingly York is growing quite quickly, with the latest census figures showing the population rising by over 9% in 10 years. Increasing numbers will visit our church every day if it's open, well promoted, attractive and celebrates its history and heritage. So in our reordered building we will tell the story of Guy Fawkes, England's foremost villain, whose baptism record we hold. We will display our invaluable medieval silver and our exquisitely beautiful and important stained glass. If more discoveries are found by archaeologists during excavations before and during re-ordering, then these too will be celebrated and seen. The opportunity to use these artefacts to better tell the story of our city and of faith - then and now - is immense, aided by our prime city centre location and passing footfall of our church building. The opportunities are even greater when we consider the capacity and reach of our long-established vibrant church community. With people from all ages, including many 18-30s (the so-called 'missing generation' of today's church) coming from a variety of backgrounds, we have the ability to motivate a sizeable body of people to reach out in mission to neighbours, friends, family and work-colleagues. Our recent designation by the Diocese of York and the Church of England as a 'resource church' should motivate us to be even more intentional in mission, making the most of all our resources. We recognise that a reordered building creates further missional opportunities for our friendly and welcoming community, so that our desire for 2019 to see 100 new disciples should increase in the coming years. Depending on the kind of space and extra meetings rooms provided, the opportunities for

developing new areas of ministry will be immense. However, it's unlikely that we'll do everything from St Michael le Belfrey Church. A reordered church will give us more flexibility and along with other buildings available to us (eg Belfrey Hall) we will be able to increase the amount of work we do in the community, especially for prayer, children and youth, and work with those who are vulnerable or have no home.

All this shows that the primary reason for reordering is to help us become more missional. It's not actually for *us* - for the benefit of the people of The Belfrey, but for those *outside* our community. This is crucial and reminds us that we exist for mission - something expressed so well by Archbishop William Temple when he famously said that 'the church is the only organisation that exists primarily for the benefit of non-members.'

So the reordered St Michael le Belfrey Church will **enhance our mission**.

2. Worship

St Michael le Belfrey Church is also a special place of worship. The Belfrey is a community who love to worship, as we give our heart-felt adoration to God, pray with expectation, listen to the message of the Bible and welcome the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. For many years we've been a centre for renewal where thousands of people have not just discovered faith in Christ but have encountered God powerfully and grown as disciples of Jesus. This continues to-day as we regularly hear testimonies of healing, personal transformation and renewal.

However, our present building was established for the kind of worship practiced long ago. Future generations have adapted it, with the last significant work being done by the Victorians, who added the fixed pews followed by the West end frontage. This means, though, that today's church is configured for Victorian worship and so needs further adaptation. Flexibility will be crucial, allowing the building to be set up for worship - and over events too, including conferences, meals and events of varying sizes - in a variety of configurations. The ability to store chairs and be creative in the use of space will be important. Music in our church today is not provided by the Victorian pipe-organ, as it needs repair and is to go to St Lawrence Church, but rather involves a variety of musicians using contemporary sound systems and multi-media technology. As technology and taste changes, the building will be reordered in such a way as to allow future technological innovations to be easily introduced.

For a number of years we've used projectors and screens in worship, rather than books and sheets. This not only allows flexibility but also frees hands and bodies to be expressive in worship. A reordered church building must continue to help us in this, with visible screens not only showing words of songs but also being an important means of communication - of sermons, of themes, giving notices, telling stories. As previous Vicar Graham Cray says, 'Screens are to today's generation what stained glass were to previous generations.' Digital screens will be used not just in worship but for all sorts of communication means, especially when the church is open midweek. The possibilities of using the reordered building for showing films and linking more closely with York's creative community, inspired by York's Unesco status as a city of digital media, will be enormous.

In both mission and worship we have for many years valued and used contemporary language, media and artistic expression. So a reordered St Michael le Belfrey Church will help us excel in this, enabling us to give our very best to God and will help future generations see that following Jesus is not something for past generations that is confined to museums but seen in the vibrant worship and lifestyle of a contemporary church.

So the reordered St Michael le Belfrey Church will **inspire our worship**.

3. Values

When asked to describe St Michael le Belfrey Church at present, the following words and phrases are often shared: dark entrance; cluttered; tired; busy; uncomfortable; drafty; sometimes cold; poor sight-lines; inflexible; inadequate toilets, and unsuitable for those with additional needs. These contrast starkly with our four key values as a church, which are: simplicity, festivity, generosity, and humility. Much work is therefore needed to **create a building that is beautifully de-**

signed and highly functional, better representing our values and which addresses these and other challenging aspects of our present building.

Our church site is relatively small, so the reordered building will make better use of all the space we have, including the open grassed space at the west end and along the side of the building, opposite York Minster. We will have preserved and restored important historic items and worked with archaeologists, the City of York Council, Historic England and various conservation groups and amenity societies.

The reordered St Michael le Belfrey Church will be a high-quality structure with a new entrance, reconfigured interior and be fully accessible for people with additional needs. It will be well-designed, light, whilst being welcoming, contemporary and innovative. It will be as efficient as possible – utilising the best of green energy, water and materials – as we seek to care well for the created environment. It will, in the end, be a building that is not ostentatious but is of significant architectural interest. It will be a building of which we, our city and region is proud.

So the reordered St Michael le Belfrey Church will **reflect our values**.

4. Vision

Finally, the reordered St Michael le Belfrey Church will **help the people of The Belfrey better fulfil our wider vision of *Serving God's Transformation of the North***. In this building women and men will continue to hear about Jesus and put their faith in him, not just in our services but as the building is open during the week. Many will find community here and want to be part of the vibrant body of people based in this lovely building. Hundreds will be trained for leadership. It will be common-place for people of all ages to be filled with God's Spirit, having dreams and visions birthed in them for transformation, being empowered and sent out to lead and make a huge difference in many spheres of society. From St Michael le Belfrey Church many will begin new missional endeavours with some intentionally sent to revitalise struggling churches or begin brand new communities. This means that future communities well beyond York will benefit from the money spent on this reordering. School parties will visit. Training events and conferences will take place. Tourists will enter and want to linger, to ask questions, to pick up literature, to purchase books, to worship, to pray, to encounter God in the carefully designed, beautifully renovated and reordered building.

When the project is completed we will have enjoyed working with our design architect who, as well as being a specialist design partner, will have been someone who's relished the complexity as an opportunity, who's been sensitive in bringing everyone along with them, and who really understands what our vibrant church community is all about.

So the reordered St Michael le Belfrey Church will **strengthen our vision**.

Conclusion

The reordering of St Michael le Belfrey Church will greatly affect the people of our church, as we become encouraged and envisioned by the Impact project. Anne Watson, previous elder under the leadership of past Vicar David Watson, wrote prophetically about this in a letter to me in 2018, saying that as God reorders the church building he will also reorder the church people. This re-ordering will produce a people more committed to mission, more passionate about worship, more embracing of our values and more confident in our vision. Sharing the journey of the reordering will have been important, especially the aspects that stretch us and cause us to become more prayerful and more sacrificial. Coming through Impact and out into our restored church will therefore bring greater unity, help us understand each other better across the generations, stimulate us to grow in faith, create a greater sense of belonging to our church and empower us to be greater advocates for God in all our networks - whether leader, member, adult, student, child, business leader, single parent or former homeless person. As such the reordering will itself be a tool of transformation, equipping us to be a people used by God for greater transformation.

Matthew Porter
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