

Church of St Hugh of Lincoln
Victoria Road, Knaphill, Surrey
for Reverend B McCarthy PP

It is always with a sense of some excitement that one receives the offer of a new commission and such was the case when I had a telephone call from Diocesan Authorities asking me to arrange an appointment with your Parish Priest, Fr. McCarthy.

During our first meeting we were able to establish a confident and happy relationship which has helped in many ways during our discussions and in arriving at the final scheme which is now a reality on site.

My instructions were to investigate the possibility of designing a church with a minimum seating capacity of 200 places together with a maximum cost limit of £20,000, which was to include all furniture, fittings, external works & car park and all professional fees; it was to be designed also for future extension.

I realised immediately that here was a problem and a challenge. A problem, because for some years now, it has been almost impossible to achieve these requirements by normal constructional methods without losing something of the essential nature of a place of worship.

This latter aspect was the challenge. I believe it to be vital in church design to achieve what one could perhaps describe as the right 'Environment for Worship'. I would go so far as to say that I would consider I had failed in my duty if it were not achieved.

It is my sincere hope that your parish priest and all the parish community will find this building wholly satisfactory to its ultimate purpose.

Some brief comment about the design procedure may be of interest.

Fr. McCarthy and I made arrangements to visit several buildings of the pre-made but permanent construction type; these we knew would come within the cost limit. After spending some time in each we came to the conclusion that they would not provide the environment we felt necessary for church worship.

At this stage I know, we both felt we were faced with a dilemma as to what to do next. Almost at a loss I asked for time to think about the problem a little more. The time was generously given, and I say generously, because I know that nothing is worse than having to wait whilst someone else 'thinks'; particularly is this so when the pressing need of the parish is present all the time.

The time was spent in analysing in detail the essential elements of the accommodation required. The accommodation could be separated into various units, i.e. Nave, Sacristies, Entrance space, Chapels etc. Of these, the Nave is clearly the major structural unit - it requires a structural framework, large clear span and much more height than is necessary for any of the other spaces; in other words its structure and function is quite special in relation to the other accommodation units.

Perhaps one could design a Nave structure and place the other units around it, almost anywhere. Further, the smaller units would not need a structural framework of steel or concrete; in these circumstances, brick walls, timber roof construction etc. all in the traditional manner, would prove more economic than any alternative. This approach appeared to be giving a reasonable and logical answer to the cost problem - certain parts of the space required had at least been isolated in a way which would allow these to be constructed at minimum cost and in materials which could be easily handled by ordinary tradesmen and would be suitable in all other respects.

The next investigation was to find some solution to the Nave construction which would be extremely economic and yet give the essential atmosphere required. I was sure the answer did not lie in the usual pre-made type of structure. There was however another sphere covering more sophisticated methods of construction which, whilst based upon component design and produced by factory methods, might provide the economic structure required together with the environment we were seeking.

These were the 'Industrialised building methods'. Most of these are covered by patents - many rely entirely upon a particular material such as steel or concrete. Some however do allow for considerable variation in external finishes. Altogether there are over a hundred possibilities and I read the brief specifications of them all.

It became clear that some would be quite unsuitable; those designed specifically for housing intended for large local authority schemes, some for factory or warehouse purposes etc. etc. Some proved too expensive for the relatively small area we had to enclose.

Eventually three specifications were investigated in detail and the one eventually adopted was obviously quite exceptional. It comprises a structural steel framework, patent insulated inner wall panels, patent insulated roof construction, suspended acoustic ceilings and aluminium windows. All of this, apart from the suspended ceiling is erected very quickly in about two weeks on this contract.

It provides as a result a totally enclosed envelope at a very early stage, so that all other trades can begin work much sooner than would be the case using traditional methods. It is aptly named 'The Dry Envelope'.

In addition almost any material may be used for external finishes, and the structure requires no maintenance. Foundation works can proceed whilst the components are being manufactured. This has resulted in your church being constructed and available for use within a period of 30 weeks from commencement on site.

Brief comments about the building as it has been planned are as follows:- The sacristies at the entrance end of the Nave allow for procession to the altar at the beginning of Mass. A very practical reason also is to allow for future extensions without involving unnecessary demolition work. The Font is placed amongst the Nave seating so that the sacrament of Baptism may be participated in by all, at Mass. It will probably remain in this relative position even when the church is extended. Both these aspects of the planning are well related to the present liturgical procedure. At the present time small shrines have been provided for devotions to Our Lady and St. Joseph. When the church is extended it is proposed to include small chapels for this purpose.

Originally, the organ was to have been placed amongst the pews where the shrine to St. Joseph now is. However, the need for maximum seating at the present time lead to the provision of a small space at the rear of the Nave and its final position will be considered again when and if the church is extended in the future.

Your church as now completed will seat approximately 220 persons and has been erected within the permitted cost limit.

It is hoped that by the methods used, and through the use of good materials, bricks, joinery, etc., a church worthy of the special and sacred use for which it is erected, and worthy also of the people of the parish, has been achieved.

The parish has been well served by the general building contractor engaged to carry out the works; the director of the company has shown outstanding appreciation of the nature of the contract and his workmen have been careful and conscientious at all times, exceeding by far the necessary attention which would normally be expected. I find this very often when dealing with church buildings generally - something extra seems to be offered from those engaged, simply as a personal contribution to the very nature of the work.

Many other aspects of the work cannot be mentioned here but I do wish to record most sincerely my deep appreciation at all times for the help and understanding received from your Parish Priest, Fr. McCarthy. I leave the commission having found a very true friend.

My association with Diocesan Authorities has been most happy and again I have received full confidence, kind understanding from all concerned and also considerable encouragement at all times; my sincere thanks are gratefully offered here.

Sincerely in Christ,