



The Church of Scotland
Mission and Discipleship Council



Architectural Notes

*For congregations to guide
discussion with architects*

An information leaflet from the
Committee on Church Art and Architecture (CARTA) of the Church of Scotland

May 2014

This is a revised draft of some notes which may be of assistance to congregations which are engaging the services of an architect for an alteration project. It is hoped that reflection and discussion of these issues will enable congregations to bring forward applications to the Committee which will be clear and helpful and may be more readily engaged with and approved.

1. The purpose of the building is worship, and must be the key feature of the design.
2. Worship involves the congregation and all designs should allow those attending worship to participate.
3. Participation is based on hearing and seeing, and there ought to be nothing to exclude those in attendance from being able to hear all that is being said and done.
4. There is no sacrosanct design of any building which is to be used for worship.
5. Presbyterian worship is based on the concept that all are part of the gathering of God's people, so all areas should, as far as possible, be accessible by all.
6. Ease of entry and accessibility are important Gospel principles that any design should reflect.
7. Large stages and platforms are not part of the Reformed tradition. If a dais is planned it should not be dominant, or suggestive of a stage for performances. While worship is a form of drama, your building should not be turned into a theatre. Careful and sympathetic design and the consideration of moveable and flexible additions to the chancel area may assist congregations which wish to use the building for musical and other performances as a source of income and community engagement.
8. Areas for choirs, bands and musicians do not require being at the front, but often may be placed more discretely and effectively at the back or side to contribute to the congregational praise and participation.
9. The building should not be utilitarian in appearance. While a variety of functions may be required to enable a congregation to engage in outreach to the community, the values of the building and its purpose – the worship of God and witness to the Gospel – should be obvious in the design. The building itself is an agent of mission and should proclaim in its outside appearance the values of the Gospel, which are inclusive, welcoming, truthful and promoting peace and contemplation.
10. The best quality materials possible should be used to ensure that the worship space reflects the response of the congregation to the grace of God. Any addition requires being sympathetic to the building while recognising budget constraints.
11. Stained glass impacts on the lighting of the space and must be considered carefully. The colours from stained glass may influence the colour scheme chosen. Stained glass is not the only medium that might be considered as engraved or etched glass may be effective and less costly. Such alternatives may provide a more subtle lighting effect.

12. Alterations to a traditional building must be considered carefully. While flexibility and versatility are important, the atmosphere of the building and its qualities should be respected. Unnecessary alterations to fine listed buildings should be avoided where there is a complete furniture plan through the building and the rearrangement of existing pews and some sensitive alteration may be more appropriate and less destructive and intrusive.
13. The place where preaching takes place, baptism is administered, and the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, is celebrated must be obvious and be readily accessible. These are key considerations in any alteration or design.
14. Art can be an effective way of expressing meaning through symbols, but it is important that the art work is well designed and assists worship rather than distracting worshippers from attention to the Word and Sacrament.
15. Worship should include an opportunity for worshippers to be at peace and to pay attention to the music, the words and, even, moments of silence. This may influence the choice of colour and visual images.
16. Colour is important: the space should not appear sterile and clinical, and the quality of light needs to be considered in the choice of an ambient colour scheme.
17. Despite Victorian tradition, blue is not the colour of Presbyterianism but of Lutheranism, and is often cold. The use of dominant red for warmth and comfort, while attractive, is associated with Methodism. Depending on the building's situation, of course, colours that reflect the local environment may be a better choice, such as heather or pastoral tones, and create a sense of welcome.
18. The different styles of building we have inherited have had an impact on the townscape and landscape of Scotland. Any alteration should take this into account, while at the same time reflecting the best principles of present day design.
19. The General Assembly has legislated that any building constructed before 1840 cannot be altered without CARTA and the General Trustees being asked for comment and approval. Any alterations to such buildings must be very carefully considered, particularly proposals for radical change. The traditions of the building should be respected at all times. All proposed alterations of the interior buildings built after 1840 should be presented to the Committee for comment and approval as this will ensure that the best advice and guidance are made available.
20. Audio Visual systems should be installed in appropriate places, using retractable or "intelligent glass" screens, or walls painted with appropriate paint for projection purposes. Projectors should be discreetly located. As modern technology has changed and will continue to change quickly, it is important that any installation does not do unnecessary damage to the building. Wiring and equipment for all electrical installation and audio visual equipment should be designed to be as unobtrusive as possible and capable of alteration and removal without disfiguring the structure. Care must be taken to ensure that no damage or tripping or interference with electrical wiring can take place. The design and location of sound desks should be integrated with the general layout and should not appear as an afterthought or 'add on'. Health and safety issues should be considered to protect anyone from interfering with the controls.

21. The best of local materials and designs is to be encouraged. Furniture in church catalogues is often based on traditional Anglican designs. The font, table and preaching desk should, reflect the particularities of the building, its setting and its people. Where appropriate, the use (rather than mere display) of furniture from a former church can create a sense of continuity. Suitable items can sometimes be found in 'Exchange and Transfer'. Re-use of original high quality materials ought also to be considered.
22. Wall hangings introduce colour and can be easily changed to reflect the liturgical seasons or the theme of a particular service. They can also lend warmth or softness to a building that is otherwise forbidding, chilly or stark.
23. Storage must be carefully planned, so that the worship space never resembles a 'furniture store'. Moveable partitions or accessible cupboards should be provided.
24. Carpets and other floor coverings can affect the acoustics and atmosphere. Unlike pews, seats can create a disturbance when moved. Ease of cleaning is also an important factor. A distinct contrast between floor and seating colours is important for visual and cognitive recognition.
25. Creating a gathering, greeting and meeting space allows members of the congregation to interact before and after the service, thus helping to build up a sense of community. This is a principle inherited from the early church, when Christians met in private homes, and promotes the idea of worship as a corporate event involving the body of Christ, rather than an individual act of devotion.
26. 'Future proofing' a proposal for alterations is a challenge, but should be considered. What extra provision would it be prudent to make for electrical installations, audio-visual systems, and activities that might be required in future but are not envisaged at present?
27. Environmental issues are important. Many old buildings are a challenge to heat effectively. The General Assembly requires congregations to reduce their carbon footprints year on year. What alternative sources of energy should be considered? Are they cost effective? How can roofs and walls be better insulated to minimise heat loss?
28. Care should be taken to employ experts in stained glass installation and conservation, who can advise on the use of grills and secondary glazing, which allow proper air circulation to prevent damage to the stained glass.
29. Lighting is vital – and not just to ensure that everyone can see those leading worship. Read the words of the hymns and scripture lessons and see the images projected on to the screen. The atmosphere of worship can be influenced by the appropriate - or otherwise – use of lighting. Consideration should be given to installing lighting that is versatile, flexible in levels, easy to maintain and congruent with the character of the building. Industrial light fittings should be avoided at all times, as well as the use of large shades similar to those used in railway stations or food stores.
30. There should be enough space at the front of the church for the conduct of wedding and funeral services. There should also be enough space for wedding parties to exit and, at funeral services, for the coffin to be removed and the family to thank mourners.

31. At no time ought the liturgical furniture to be seen as 'optional': the font, table and reading desk/pulpit must be visible in Reformed worship as aids to devotion and prompts to the memory of what is important. These items, however, can be moveable to allow flexibility and alternative arrangement for different forms of services.
32. Clearly marked fire exits are important and all safety regulations must be observed, but the appearance of the building should not be dominated by the signage, Sight lines should always be clear.
33. The edges of all steps to any raised areas must be clearly indicated (the use of a hard wood 'nose' is recommended).
34. The needs of those who use wheelchairs must be considered. Spaces should be provided in the "body of the kirk", not in any separated area or at the back.
35. Access ramps should be designed to match the building and the use of tubular steel avoided. The hand rail must be 'comfortably shaped and of a suitable material such as timber to avoid injury.
36. CARTA exists to help congregations to conserve the best of the past for the benefit of the present and future worship and mission of the Church. The Committee is not there to insist on preservation of the past, nor to promote radical change for change sake, but to encourage and enable a congregation to think about what it is trying to achieve in the light of the theological principles of Reformed and Presbyterian worship. While the Committee is not a substitute for good professional advice from an architect, it can offer objective comment based on the experience and insight of its members.

The Committee on Church Art and Architecture has its office within the Church Offices in Edinburgh. The address and telephone number are: The Church of Scotland, 121 George Street, Edinburgh, EH2 4YN, tel 0131 225 5722, email: gentrustees@churchofscotland.org.uk.