

# THEOLOGICAL AND LITURGICAL STATEMENT

**March 2016 – v.3 updated March 2022**

*The inherited church building - a tool for mission and outreach*

Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the *Lord* is in this place - and I did not know it!' And he was afraid, and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' Genesis 28 v.16, 17

Changes from last version (21-117) highlight in yellow.

## 1. Introduction

The parish church of St Laurence, Ludlow has been a place of prayer and worship for eight centuries; and that tradition continues today. The Eucharist celebrated at the nave altar at 10.00 am Sunday by Sunday, together with the other acts of worship, feeds and equips the worshipping community to fulfil its mission throughout the remainder of each week. Daily prayers conducted mainly in the chancel, and Eucharists in St John's and Lady Chapel follow the Church's calendar and seasons. Central to the consciousness that underpins the Vision for St Laurence's is the immense importance of these sacred moments in this mediaeval church building, in which our worship of God throughout the ages has been practised and encountered. We aim to make our sacred space speak of the God whom we encounter in worship and prayer, whilst remembering we are custodians of some of the nation's most valuable heritage.

Over the years the church has had many liturgical orderings and also varied uses. It is an inherited building of which we are the custodians, but we recognise that St Laurence's has changed throughout the centuries to meet changing patterns of worship and of use. We seek in and through the Vision for St Laurence's to recognise and value the spiritual legacy which St Laurence's represents, whilst remembering that we should try to take the needs of future generations into account in the planned liturgical changes.

## 2. Historical context – A pattern of change

Throughout its long life the Church building has evolved to meet the needs of the wider parish, and not just to meet the needs of any specific congregation. Four distinct historical phases of internal ordering are recognised. For example, during the mediaeval period when a College of Priests was supported to pray for the living and the faithful departed, there were numerous Chantry chapels of which some evidence remains in situ. In the mediaeval mind-set there was no distinction between the religious and the secular; and alongside daily worship the church's large internal space would have been used for legal consultation, commerce, trading and bargaining.

Little is known of the immediate post-reformation period, although Ludlow's association with the death in 1502 of Prince Arthur, eldest son of Henry VII, whose heart is buried in the chancel, connects St Laurence's to the chain of historical events which led to the Reformation thirty years later. For reasons not fully understood, but almost certainly because St Laurence's was a collegiate church, built up by the citizens of the town and in which Ludlow's citizens took immense pride, St Laurence's

was spared the destruction which many other parish churches underwent during that period (although the Carmelite Friary established in Corve St in 1350 was dissolved in 1538). St Laurence's seems also to have been largely spared damage in the English Civil War and its aftermath, although at that stage by decree of the Commonwealth our organ was dismantled and removed. As a consequence of being spared large scale damage, St Laurence's is the repository of many wonderful surviving mediaeval artefacts: for example the carved misericords and the mediaeval glass in the Great East Window (a unique portrayal of the life of St Laurence); the glass in the Chapel of St John (unique representation of the Palmers of Ludlow and their pilgrimage to the Holy Land); and the Jesse window in the Lady Chapel (albeit with some Victorian restoration), all of which provide our visitors with reminders of early benefactors and their spirituality.

In the mid-18th century an existing picture shows the church with box pews and galleries, perhaps for the gentry and their servants to worship when Ludlow was a prosperous and elegant town. A century later there was a shortage of church space, particularly for poorer members of the growing population in the town. St John's, a Chapel of Ease, was built in a new suburb close to the new railway, together with St Leonard's Chapel on the site of the former Carmelite Friary and St Stephen's in Galdeford (both now in private hands).

In August 1858, the congregation received a letter soliciting subscriptions and referring to the 'accompanying report of Mr Gilbert Scott, on the state of the Parish church of Ludlow, ... the Report shows (sic) the dilapidated state of this noble and venerable Edifice, which after the Cathedral is generally thought to be the most magnificent Church in the Diocese'. Scott wrote in this report: 'The Interior is remarkably lofty and of very fine proportions, and if cleared of the obstructions which now so grievously disfigure it, it would rank among the finest of our Parish Churches ... the first great object is to clear it from the obstructions which now disgrace and disfigure it, and to refit the whole in a style and manner worthy of the noble character of the building ...'

Despite this apparently strong statement, Scott saw himself as a conservationist, and in 1848 in a paper read before the first annual meeting of the Architectural and Archaeological Society for the County of Bucks he observed:

'It would be idle to say, that if we are to preserve the fabric unaltered we must use none of its parts differently from their first intention: this would compel us to leave unused all chancel aisles, chantry chapels, and often even transepts and portions of nave aisles, merely because in old times they had contained separate altars. It is obvious that in refitting our churches we must have our own ritual and our own necessities in view, and while we make correct ecclesiastical arrangement our leading object, we must not be prevented by a morbid feeling for antiquity from applying to existing uses those parts whose original intention has become obsolete.'

Archival evidence shows that the proposed Gilbert Scott restoration (1858-60) with the removal of galleries and installation of new pews, tiled floor and Victorian glass to the majority of the nave windows, met with some opposition, even though in his 1848 paper Scott himself had pleaded for 'the faithful restoration of our ancient churches'.

Further changes took place after the Victorian period; though individually many of these were minor changes, cumulatively it led to a more useable Nave, albeit without eliminating all the unsightly clutter.. Henry Chapell, past Rector, writing in the 1960s said:

'The change of social pattern since the major alterations of the last century requires that some modification be made to encourage the evolving social pattern to find the worship of

the Parish sympathetic to its form. It is unlikely that by 1980 the form of social outlook will have returned to that of the late 19th or early 20th century. For the PCC to refrain from action in the hope that the social pattern will revert back would, I believe, be disastrous for any Christian Witness.'

Chapell's prediction was correct. Patterns of worship have changed, our use of the building has changed and this will only continue; in his words, to refrain from action would be disastrous.

Other subsequent changes have included, notably and somewhat controversially, the installation in the 1980s of a nave altar, removal of all the pews from the nave, and the Lady Chapel, , changes to lighting and heating systems and, in the 2000s, provision of a kitchen, toilet and removable staging for concerts.

Given all of this, it can be confidently asserted that the Church building has changed continuously over time. The Vision for St Laurence's continues that natural process of growth and change.

### 3. Barriers to mission and outreach in the 21st century

St Laurence's Church today is a living organism in which all those who regularly worship with us and all those who live in our parish, of faith or no faith, have a part. The conservation of St Laurence's is not, though, just a matter for those who worship within its walls and those who live within its parish boundaries. Greater churches such as St Laurence's, like the cathedrals of these isles, attract ever larger numbers of pilgrims and visitors, in our case nearly 100,000 per year. People bring their children to draw and colour in our Children's Area; others visit the Shop at St Laurence or attend the wide variety of concerts and exhibitions, as well as those who come to the civic and special services throughout the year. They come not only to gaze in wonder at the architectural and artistic achievements of our forebears, but to light candles, pray and enjoy them as spaces for reflection and refreshment. For many, if not most, they are 'thin places' evoking the sort of awe and wonder which Jacob expressed in Genesis 20, when he had a vision of angels ascending and descending.

We want the nave with its communal focus to be a meeting place so that people who gather there can feel that it is theirs, as it always was historically, with baptisms, weddings, funerals, civic and school services important to the lives of many who may not use the church at other times, a place in which, as in mediaeval times, people can encounter God and encounter each other. Up until very recently the fixed seating with banks of pews filling the nave, the south and part of the north aisle restricted this sense of community and participation. The traditional configuration, facing east, suggested an audience observing worship led by others, rather than the gathering of all God's people around His altar.

Attendance at regular services holds up well, averaging around 150 per week. For civic and special services the church is often full to capacity. However, in early 21st century Britain we can make no assumptions about the level of familiarity which people have with what goes on inside church buildings. The Rector, Kelvin Price, likened the experience of those who are unused to the life of the Church to his first encounter with a modern gym, 'full of people, doing strange things, in unfathomable ways!' We must not fail these newcomers, who long to be a part and understand the love of God. As Julia Woodhead says (*Measuring the Church's social footprint* (Church Times, 14.02 .14)), 'once the church starts to exist for the benefit of the activists alone, it ceases to be a Church, and becomes a sect'.

We recognise in our liturgical re-ordering that we do not always tell our story in a liturgical way, and we must act to change that perception. Alison Milbank of Southwell Minster has reflected: 'There is a theology that comes out of awareness that sometimes the place draws people to Christ and only we get in the way'. Furthermore the poet/priest David Scott says in a poem about the surplice: 'We have put on these garments for centuries; they persist, we wither and crease within them. Only God could put on a body in time and space and not wither and crease inside them, but make limitation large and spacious.'

If we look back far enough into the past we find the 'Tent of Meeting' where the faith community met to share common joys and sorrows, and instruction, a place which spoke of a people in transition, in pilgrimage. In contemporary language, we might call it a 'street corner with a roof' where people gather to share precisely the same things as our forebears. This social use has a long history, the church being the natural gathering place for the community. What better setting for telling the story through music, drama and the visual arts than the sacred space in which daily is re-enacted the drama of God's continuing love for us in the Eucharist?

In working on a Mission Action Plan for developing our mission at St Laurence's, many influences have been taken into account, not least: changing social and economic circumstances; attitudes to church-going; St Laurence's diverse congregations and flows of visitors; above all what the Church of England is itself saying in relation to the goals to which we should aspire in the Church's mission to both the people of Ludlow, and to members of the wider national and international communities who regularly enter this ancient parish church. In a word, we aim that St Laurence's should be truly inclusive of all that enter its doors.

#### 4. Vision of St Laurence's - The continuing journey of faith

We take as our starting point a definition of liturgy as the work of the people of God to bring all who enter St Laurence's into a conscious and active recognition of its centrality to the worship to God. As currently ordered, the Church's layout reflects the design and theological narratives of previous centuries, particularly the 19th. As a growing and active community we long for the flexibility and participation that is needed for us to fulfil our open and inclusive mission to all who enter this building in the 21st century and beyond, so that it may speak of a God who is welcoming and inviting.

Along with other major churches St Laurence's has cleared the nave of fixed seating and other 'clutter' to make the congregations' worshipping life more flexible, and participative while returning the nave to its mediaeval roots. The rigid fixed seating in the nave was preventing the possibility of active participation in a variety of forms of worship, and other communal activities. We believed that the mid-19th century legacy was inappropriate for St Laurence's inclusive vision of outward reaching mission in a time of transition that characterises the 21st century. As Christopher Dalliston describes in the liturgical re-ordering of Newcastle Cathedral:

'The rediscovery of early Christian praxis is enlivening our liturgical sense, and empowering the whole people of God to claim their inheritance as the holy, priestly, community of faith. Integral to this new understanding is a strong sense of community, the desire for full participation, and awareness that in worship we are engaged in a journey.'

It is this sense of continued journey that underpins all that we are doing at St Laurence's, which has demanded considerable thought and consultation over the last thirteen years as to physical liturgical changes.

## 5. Existing patterns of worship

### 5.1 Sundays

8.30am Holy Communion BCP - a congregation of 8-15 people. Historically celebrated at the high altar, since 2011 this service has been celebrated in the St John Chapel.

10.00am Parish Eucharist Common Worship – a congregation of 90-120 people depending on the time of year. The congregation sits mainly in the central nave, with some 20 or so people in the west section. **When the order of service includes a Gradual hymn the Gospel is often read at the crossing;** officiants use either the pulpit or ligilium to preach. The choir is seated under the tower lantern, in the usually Decani and Cantoris arrangement.

11.30am and 3.30pm Choral offices – a congregation of 10-15 people gather in the chancel. The 19<sup>th</sup> century lectern is used during these services. The choir sits at the west end of the chancel stalls. Many visitors continue to come into the nave during these services and are able to see something of the worship that lies at the heart of St Laurence's community.

6pm monthly (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday) Contemplation Service – a congregation of 20-30 people; usually held around the font at the west end of the nave.

### 5.2 Weekday worship

Morning prayer: 9.30am Monday, Tuesday and Thursday - a congregations of around 4-5 people; said in the Lady Chapel; (said at St John's Church on Wednesday and Friday)

Mid-week Holy Communion: Wednesday 12.30pm and 6pm – congregations of 5-10 people; held in St John's chapel.

Friday compline – a congregation of 6-10 people; held in the chancel. Visiting choirs usually sing from the nave stalls.

### 5.3 Occasional offices

*Baptisms* - The ancient font, its origin controversially either a Roman pillar or an 11th century carved block, was moved in early 2020 from its former position where there was little room for baptismal parties to gather around the font and feel welcome.

Moved to the central axis of the nave at the west end, in the cleared open space, the font is now the focal starting point at the ceremonial west entrance to the church, the start of the journey through Christian life. The Easter Vigil begins outside the west door with the lighting of the fire, the paschal candle then entering the church and passing the font.

The font, re-sited for the fourth time in its known history, has returned to its 18th century position, Scott in 1860 having placed the ancient font in the Lady Chapel.

*Weddings* – Can be both great and small; the chancel is now as frequently used for ceremonies of up to 120 people as the nave, which can hold 600. Additionally private ceremonies with immediate family are held in either of the chapels.

*Funerals* – Again, large funerals in the nave can host 600, smaller services now often taking place in either of the chapels or the chancel. The ligilium is extremely useful in the delivery of these liturgies, less imposing and providing better sight lines to readers and clergy.

*5.4 Major services* – During the course of the liturgical year the parish church hosts a number of major services. These non-Eucharistic services are celebrated in the nave, with people seated throughout the building, including the chancel. Attendance can be as many as 900. During these services the nave altar is stored in one of the transepts, the high altar and chancel forming the liturgical back drop.

## *5.5 Music in the liturgy*

### *5.5.1. History, current context*

The living tradition of music for the liturgy was first established by the Palmers' Guild in 1492; after rebuilding the church they endowed the first choir, organ and an organist. Broadly speaking, Ludlow has followed the fashions of each period. From the late 15th century to the reformation this took the form of a choir of boys and men; musical partbooks survive from this period. In the 18th century the musical life was focussed simply around the organ which sat on a gallery at the front of the nave. In the 19th century the choir was re-established, again as boys and men; this continued until the mid-late 20th century. In the late 1970s a separate girls' choir was established. By 2007 the treble line of both boys and girls had long since ceased to exist; a mixed choir of adults performed week by week.

In 2008 a decision by the PCC to rekindle the musical life of St Laurence's led to the formation of a new treble line, with recruitment of additional adult choristers; in recent years this has also included the formation of a 4-8 years old training choir. The full choir of trebles and adults sings regularly at the weekly Parish Eucharist and also on feast days and special services. The adults also sing choral matins and evensong, once a month each.

The musical life of St Laurence's is led by a part-time Director of Music who also directs the Academy of St Laurence, a string ensemble giving concerts across the year, in addition to organising a summer season of informal lunchtime concerts. We are committed to excellence in worship and music, serving the rich pattern of liturgy during the seasons, and being a beacon of the Gospel in the region.

### *5.5.2 Bells and chimes*

#### *Bells and bell ringing*

The bells are a vital part of the worshipping life of St Laurence church. Their sound has rung out to farm, land and mill for hundreds of years. The history of bell ringing at Ludlow is equally as old; in the 19th century there were two bands, one which rang rounds and call changes and a second which rang methods.

Prior to the 2008 restoration and augmentation, the bells were unsatisfactory to ring and the local band had begun to struggle. The aim of the 2008 scheme was to improve both the going of the bells and the musical sound. A poor-quality tenor bell dating from 1998 was scrapped with the previous 7th becoming the new tenor. Three new bells were cast, two additional second-hand bells purchased and a further stock bell added to the carillon.

In discussion with the Director of Music and the head bellfounder it was agreed that the bells should be tuned to an unequal temperament as they can only be played in one key. The result is a very musical sound. Improvements to the fittings meant that the going is now second to none. The bells have subsequently gained a reputation as a fine ring of 10. Further work in 2015 by Whitechapel Foundry has sought to fine tune the fixtures and fittings. There is now an active and vibrant local band; ringing nights host ringers from across the region. We welcome many visiting bands during the course of the year.

The ringing of the bells plays a significant role in the church and civic life of the town. Full peals (3 hours) are rung at major festivals including: May Fair, Summer Food? Festival and Mediaeval Fayre. Quarter peals are rung on a monthly basis before evensong. Sunday morning ringing takes place at 9.15-10am, before the Parish Eucharist. On Remembrance Sunday the bells are rung half-muffled in the Dorian mode by omitting the tenor and treble bell.

The PCC funds the regular maintenance of the bells. This involves a professional service visit at a minimum of biennial intervals.

### *Carillon*

There has been a carillon at Ludlow since the late 1400s. In 2008, the mechanism was completely replaced with a new digital controller and electric hammers. The historic tunes ring at 8am, 12noon, 4pm and 8pm and punctuate the day. In recent years these have been joined by tunes reflecting liturgical seasons: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, and Easter at 10am, 2pm and 6pm. ~~One of the stationary bells is used as the service bell ringing before morning and evening prayer and the daily Eucharists.~~ The tenor bell rings before and after funerals. The carillon can ring automated peals for weddings and services.

### *5.5.3 Organ, use, maintenance*

The history of the organs at Ludlow is well documented. The most recent instrument dates primarily from 1764, though extensively enlarged in the 19th and 20th centuries. In 2008 the organ was restored; it is used extensively for recitals, and is one of the finest organs in a parish church in the country. The organ plays a key role in the principal liturgies of St Laurence's including accompaniment of hymns, the choir, improvisation and playing of repertoire.

The organ is played by a team of skilled organists, including the Director of Music.

The organ is regular maintained. This includes three to four whole-day visits by the organ tuner, as well as annual servicing of the organ blowing plant.

## 6. 2016 proposals for liturgical re-ordering (updated March 2022)

### *6.1 Nave*

*Liturgy affected: Principally Parish Eucharist, major services*

*Proposals: Altar, altar rail, flooring, seating*

The main body of the nave is the largest space in the church, used to capacity on approximately five

occasions in the year. We see it as a place of 'gathering' liturgy where the parish week by week gathers around God's altar to celebrate the Eucharist.

The removal of pews and use of Theo M chairs is enabling more flexible use for both services and concerts/events. The layout is adjustable for major services so that, for instance, the side aisles can be angled to improve sight lines. Spaces can be left in the middle of the nave for wheelchair users, rather than seating them to the sides.

The parish had lived with the 1980s re-ordering for some 30 years. The 'temporary' altar and flooring were an eyesore and detracted from the majesty of the surrounding architecture. The altar rail and credence table are good examples of well-designed and manufactured ecclesiastical furniture.

We carried forward immediate improvement to this nave dais ahead of the replacement of the nave floor. This work involved modification to the altar to complement the existing communion rail and credence table which we believe were designed by Michael Reardon/ Tim Furby. The proposed accompanying ambo has been deferred given that a ligilium (to receive an appropriate frontal) serves the purpose. The ligilium replaces the former nave eagle lectern as the liturgical focus for the reading of the scriptures and the proclamation of the gospel through preaching. New floor covering has improved the aesthetic of this area. We have reduced the scale and scope of the existing communion rail, ensuring that there is a reduced barrier between the nave and the altar. Communicants are able to receive communion whilst standing (at the front) or kneeling (to the north and south sides) as they choose.

With the removal of the nave pews, the floor level has dropped by approximately 50mm. It is the intention that the nave dais will be raised by an additional step. The re-ordering of the front of the nave was therefore an essential in the continued development and growth of worship at St Laurence's. Major improvements were made in terms of sight lines, sense of participation and involvement in the liturgy, by gathering the congregation closer around the nave altar.

## *6.2 Chancel*

*Liturgy affected: Choral offices matins and evensong*

*Proposals: Lectern, chancel choir stalls*

*Chancel* - Apart from improved disabled access by attention to the various levels of the approaches, the chancel and the sanctuary are unchanged in both layout and liturgical use. The misericords (supplemented by moveable pews/seats as needed) are regularly used for Choral Matins and Evensong, daily said services and special services such as Ash Wednesday, the Easter Vigil and Holy Days, all of which respect the formality and beauty of the setting.

*Nave Lectern* - The fine 19<sup>th</sup>-century lectern has been positioned in the chancel for the last 4 years, complementing the existing historic features and adding to the collegiate feel of this space as used during choral offices.

*Reserved sacrament* – It has been suggested that at some time in the future the reserved sacrament should be moved from its current position in St John's Chapel to the pre-prepared space in the reredos to the north of the High Altar. Here the pilgrim's journey would follow through the nave, font, altar, reserved sacrament, emphasising the journey as a Christian.



*Chancel choir stalls* – the choir sing choral offices of matins and evensong in the chancel, at present from the west end of the historic stalls in a single line. This is very challenging acoustically, but enables the congregation to enjoy the benefit of a collegiate style chapel, whilst enabling the nave to remain open to visitors and encourage them to hear and witness our worship. If the choir were to sit in the centre of the rear stalls, it would be possible to shorten two existing pew fronts and use them as free-standing front stalls. This would mark a return to a layout used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the former stalls having been disposed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### 6.3 Lady Chapel

The Lady Chapel is currently used for daily Eucharist services, and very occasionally for wedding/funerals. The fixed pews, installed from the south transept at some point during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, were removed in autumn 2018. The two small historic (pre-19<sup>th</sup> century) pews were retained. People greatly value the quality of this space, the aesthetic being increased by the remarkable Jesse window and the large expanse of perpendicular clear glazing to the south.

There is a suggestion that, in time, this would make a beautiful area for the focus of pilgrim prayers, an opportunity to create a new bespoke votive stand, freeing up the entrance of the chapel, as well as creating areas for memorial books and the other pieces of historic furniture ie free-standing pews. The two small existing historic pews have been placed at the west end of the chapel; the large freestanding pew currently in the north transept could sit against the south wall with a votive stand on the central axis, memorial books along the north wall and a small set of Theo chairs to enable prayer groups/daily Eucharistic services to make better use of this space. The floor is already paved with historic tomb stones and the entrance could be better adapted with the addition of a handrail to aid entrance across the steps and threshold. By moving the votive, prayer and memorial book stands into the natural envelope of this chapel, it would free up valuable space in the south transept for community use.

#### 1.1 General items

*Improved access* - Entry into St Laurence's has for many years been predominantly through the octagonal south porch, architecturally significant in its own right, with the Parvis Room above. However, the encroachment of commercial buildings into the Ludlow 'narrows' that surround the south side of the church has resulted in cramped environs and a narrow passageway up to the church door. As a result, visitors entering by the South door who are unfamiliar with the church building are often overwhelmed by the size of the building which they find upon entry.

In recent years immediate improvements have been made by opening all three of the main doors (North, South and West) so that pilgrims and visitors can freely wander into the church at their leisure. Further improvements have included provision of a welcome video, which sets the scene for those entering the south porch, in terms of the Christian context of the building and its many historic treasures. The video helps to melt the barriers of the imposing architecture. Internal glass doors are still considered desirable as part of the longer-term plans.

The North door opens to a wonderful view of the South Shropshire Hills beloved by A E Housman and his memorial is situated just outside on the north wall of the church, a focus for many visitors to the Church. It is hoped that further glass doors here might draw people out onto the green and also from the green into the church:

*Seating* - Provision of Theo M chairs in the nave contributes greatly to a much more flexible use of

the space in the nave, and the north and south aisles.

*Children's area* - much used by both pilgrims and visitors, it has for two years been temporarily housed in the north west corner of the church, enabling discreet use during services and increased use of space. When the proposed coffee shop is built in the north west corner the children's area will be returned to the north aisle.

*Staging* – Future construction of the raised nave dais will reduce, if not remove, the need for additional staging. In the meantime some staging is stored offsite.

*Shop* - A new enclosed Church Shop has been created in the south west corner, replacing the former chair and staging store. This has helped relieve the sense of clutter and invasion of sacred space during services.

*Chapels* - St John's Chapel and the Lady Chapel are used for daily Eucharist services and other occasional services/offices. The modern altar in St Catherine's Chapel has been removed, providing much needed discreet space for small groups such as: prayer, meetings, exhibition space and educational area.

## 2. Conclusions:

It is clear that there is an increasing need to move forward with liturgical re-ordering of the church.

In 2010, after a lengthy competition we appointed a new architect; in the last few years we have developed an excellent working relationship with the practice. Furthermore we have engaged in one of the most extensive consultations, including congregations, wider community and all interested parties. The summary of all of this work is a masterplan, agreed 'in principle' in January 2015.

Since 2015 use of the building by the wider community has increased, examples being weekly toddler groups, singing groups, three annual art exhibitions, silent movies, pop up restaurants, Knit and Natter, community tea and cake, U3A piano classes, Read Easy reading sessions, Ludlow Fringe Festival (art trail and events), local business drinks, beer festival, expanded Mediaeval Bazaar, Gala Dinners. The Arts@Laurence programme has been expanded and typically extends to some 30 events each year.

The PCC is committed to the principle of releasing space for community use, understanding that to give is to receive. By relaxing our idea of what is possible, we engage with a much wider community, who help us to maintain the building but also help our community of faith grow.

In 2008 it was clear that without capital investment the parish would enter a crisis in terms of both repair of the building and the ability to maintain a balance budget. In 2015, as predicted, this led to a failure to pay parish share but, with much work, in 2016 we returned to a balanced budget including paying parish share (now termed parish offer). In common with many, if not most, churches St Laurence's was hit badly by the loss of income due to prolonged closure during the Covid-19 pandemic. By December 2021 payment of parish offer had resumed and the budget was again balanced but the experience underlined the vital importance of increasing income by greater community use. There is therefore a pressing need to move forward. In short, the 'promised land' has been well visualised, explored and broadly agreed. There is no simple way of making this happen overnight; as throughout history, our journey must be achieved by individual steps.

We therefore decided to adopt a phased approach. This is prudent in terms of financial sustainability, human resources and physical ability to deliver whilst we maintain an open and operational building. Capital investment for growth is essential if we are to continue to survive and grow in an ever-challenging future.

Phase 1 – originally scheduled for 2016/17

- Removal of pews and pew platforms in the south aisle and north aisle – **completed.**
- Potential removal of pews and pew platforms in the central nave – **completed.**
- Nave dais: new flooring, altar, adapted communion rail – **completed.**
- Potential removal of pews in the Lady Chapel, provision of new seating, votive stands etc – **pew removal completed.**
- Potential provision of Chancel choir stall fronts from former pew fronts in the nave – **deferred to Phase 2.**

Phase 2 2022+

- Nave dais raised, and replaced by permanent re-ordering
- New Nave floor
- Moving ancient font and provision of sacrament house at High Altar – **completed.**
- Completion of Nave pew/seating – **completed.**
- Provision of new coffee shop, shop, kitchen and toilets – **shop completed, coffee shop imminent**

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