

Nine places...I think I have lived in nine different places in 53 years...all of which have meant moving house either on my own, with my wife or with Ann and a varying number of children. Fitting needs to spaces was a work of art...often down to a tape measure and graph paper.

When thinking of this “space” called Leicester Cathedral and before looking at the most central theological/liturgical dimensions there are some things from the domestic scene of which we could do well with taking note.

When we moved to Leicester, the property chosen was a smallish five bedroomed, detached house which seemed to fit our needs, *our* needs at *that* time. Three teenage daughters, with a room each, a double room, plus a guest room. The space available seemed *then* to be just about enough at “a push”. How does this relate to the house of God now as opposed to 80 years ago?

Secondly, (as my daughters would say as *in the olden days*) there was always one room that was the ‘best room’ but was hardly ever used. At the precentor’s house, although never a best room, this is the dining room. Perhaps having the model railway on the table for several months didn’t help! Is there a sense of wasted space in a very small space overall within and without the Cathedral building?

Also in a fairly small house, and with 3 teenage daughters there is the reality of the edges of the spaces always being blurred. Hannah’s room can never be totally Hannah’s room; a great deal of cross-usage goes on. From the landing, a place of passage you might think... you can often hear the clack of curling tongues, and the pervasive smell of singed hair. How are our “boundaries liturgical” in the Cathedral? Can we afford to have such obvious and pronounced boundaries set, for instance, by the screen?

Again in a small house there is always the challenge of where things ‘live’. Small rooms can very easily get cluttered, making the space available for use even smaller. Do we have clutter here in Leicester Cathedral, and is there an alternative?

Also just as much in a modern house, there is at least one space, to use a good northern phrase, which is “neither use nor ornament”. A use comes to mind but when you try it out it just doesn’t seem to work.

In any house these must be spaces which are fit for purpose, which are obvious as to their use, defined by their fixtures and fittings. The little room first left in the hall, should you ever come to the Precentor's house, can only have one use!!

Of course, some spaces can be altered, or customised, in spite of the architect's original intent. In our first vicarage, a four bedroomed 60s building and before we had children, one bedroom became a snug with a tv, a bottle of gin and a few books....cosy, easy to heat, which was fine, except on the evening I was in on my own, but with a burglar who decided to raid the whole of the downstairs while I was asleep upstairs in the chair in front of the tv!

We can now focus more our attention more specifically on another sort of "house"....this Cathedral Church.

Firstly, like many houses this one has been added to, and had bits taken away, and certainly was not purpose built as a Cathedral. A parish church, and a Cathedral of 800 years of age...but in part, ancient, part medieval, part reformed, part Victorian, all in part, but still a parish church which has been overlaid with specifics which make it a Cathedral.

Leicester Cathedral, using the analogy of our house, has very few 'rooms' built for a specific purpose. Paradoxically, one of those rooms built for a specific purpose, namely the archdeacon's court, is not used for that any more and is arguably "neither use nor ornament" even for an Archdeacon!!!

In contrast the Chancel, arguably the central room of the whole building has a triple role as a chapter house, a choir, and a space in which the early morning Sunday laity or weekday laity sit...like our kitchen at home!

In a modern house, people tend to adapt to the shape and configuration of the room for sitting, socialising, eating. At Leicester Cathedral, the biggest room of all, the Nave, has to be continually adapted to the shape of the people, the event or service which takes place in it... and indeed has to because there are very few alternatives.

Liturgically, that is on the one hand an advantage... but on the other, with such a need for continual movement, it is very difficult to maintain any sense of the building identifying with the Christian journey and story. To

illustrate this, one of the main points of reference, the altar, often has to be moved up and down the nave or out of the nave altogether.

Likewise, movement itself is severely restricted because of the outer skin of the building. The only place any procession can really “form” is St Dunstan’s Chapel. The only place it can go is where it has done this morning!

Then there is ‘best room’, never being used, is in our case an oversized sanctuary, which is huge compared with the size of the rest of the building.

All that having been said, and having spent over 3 years here, as most Precentors would say, the “building always wins”!! And despite its continual frustrations, I have to say that I am very fond of it as it is!

But of course, fondness, however deep or sentimentally driven, is simply not good enough. In the development of the Cathedral as a building we need to do our best to design an internal and external space which is both fit for purpose, in some sense tells the Christian story, and is based on a recognisable theology appropriate to, and speaking of, the diocese, the city and the county.

There are various theological pegs on which to hang our thinking. In many cathedrals, using a far larger space, there is the sense of a journey of Christian life or pilgrimage from west to east, beginning , as here with the font, through the other sacraments of the church, until the Resurrection is seen at the East End, with the blessed sacrament hanging as a focus, or with the relics of some saint, “risen”, in a shrine. Chester Cathedral has St Werburgh, Durham Cathedral has St Cuthbert.

It can be argued that simply because of restriction of space the theology of journey is quite difficult to see or express in a cathedral as small as ours. For example, at the ordinations, I am very keen on those being made Deacon moving from the laity seats to another place, and a year later, that is the place from which they start on their journey to priesthood. The distances here are just too small to make that obvious to the observer. A similar comment can be made about confirmation services, where those who have been baptised move all of 5 metres to the place of confirmation! When such theological/liturgical concepts are explained at a rehearsal, those to whom it is happening seem quite taken by the idea; their liturgical lamps are lit” and other questions liturgical are then asked... but to the congregation, because of the sheer lack of scale,

such liturgical reasoning good as it is, is totally lost. Therefore to pin a theology of journey on Leicester Cathedral as its prime mover in re-ordering, although still attractive to me, is probably unworkable.

So we move onto the Cathedral as a “place of calling”. The Dean has written a paper on the Cathedral as a place of calling, which, when I had read it a few times, got me quite fired up! The piece of furniture which makes a cathedral a cathedral is the Cathedra – the Bishop’s throne, which unfortunately, if you see the cathedral as a place of calling, it is in completely the wrong place now on the northern wall of the sanctuary. In the Acts of the Apostles it is very plain to see that those who are “called” and then “sent” also “return” to the centre, as part of a series of comings and goings; returning to the Apostles’ feet for teaching and fellowship. We are beginning to do this more and more at the Cathedral with Bishop Tim being at the centre of this theology and therefore needing to be at the centre of the building. The final service of Celebrate 80, the CoMISSIONing Service more recently, and in a fortnight’s time the lay ministry celebration service, all major on this theology of liturgical practice, based on the theology of call and its working out.

The famous liturgist, Richard Giles, now Dean of Philadelphia, has for some time asked the question whether a church, as a building, is like a tent or a temple. The tent in the Old Testament, was the place where people went to meet God, but with a sense that the tent moved from place to place as part of the pilgrimage journey of the people of Israel.

The temple, however, first built by Solomon, was a fixed point of reference, where God was seen to make his permanent home in the Holy of Holies, and where, from Josiah’s time, all of Israel’s worship was centralised. There is a sense, (and we sometimes call the Cathedral the Mother Church of the diocese) a fixed point of reference for those who come from the parishes of the diocese, the city and the county, and even from the multi-faith cultures of our communities, to engage with each other on simply “common ground” and in “a place where God may be found”.

It can be argued very strongly that the temple in Jerusalem, in many periods of its history, was a place where different cultures gathered, and not always from what one might call ‘pure Judaism’. A Cathedral is a tent, because, though not moving physically, it is a place where development and learning take place, never static, a resource which in its people with gifts moves out into communities as a real part of its ministry. We are doing this more and more these days from the Cathedral into parishes, ‘pitching up’ in different places.

Finally, any “image description” can only be a means to an end. But if I was to put my money where my mouth is, and formulate a theology on which the structure of this building be formed, it might go something like this:

A gathering place for all; a place of common ground, with specific “rooms” for specific things. A place where the calling of all people is encouraged, identified and nurtured, with the Bishop at the centre; a place which is architecturally fit for that purpose, where people feel welcome and comfortable in their “temple”, and yet where the community itself is sent out to glorify God and to enliven, encourage and serve the diocese, city and county in which it is set.

A theology is evolving now. A building needs to emerge!