



One church,
100 uses

**LORD ANDREW MAWSON'S SPEECH AT THE MEETING OF THE ALL PARTY
PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON CHURCHES AND CHAPELS
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The inspiration for 'One Church 100 Uses' started 25 years ago, when I was a young stipendiary Minister in the United Reformed Church. In 1984, I arrived to take responsibility for a very large Victorian Church in the East End of London surrounded by several dysfunctional housing estates. We had few members and £400 in the bank. The local residents received 95% of their income from state sources, at a time when GLC grants were beginning to dry up. This was at the time of the publication of the Anglican Report 'Faith in the City' and although I found it had a lot of theological ideas in it there was little practical advice. Churches and the voluntary sector had lots of management committees but were not producing significant change for the people in need.

To start with, the church building space was rented to whoever could make use of it but there was no real partnership working at that time. So we formed a partnership with a dance teacher, who didn't want to just run a few little classes, but was absolutely passionate about dance. Janet began to offer classes there and in 6 years, she had built up a roll of 150 children, moved in to her own premises with eight staff and even supported one young person to gain a place at the Royal Ballet.

Space was needed for a nursery, so a tent-like structure was created inside the church for worship, whilst around this was built a Day Nursery. This attracted parents from a mixture of social backgrounds, some of whom financed their own places, and others who were Government financed. The provision was at first frowned upon by Social Services who felt this idea did not fit into their book of rules. But the entrepreneurial nature of the plan won over doubters in the end and the nursery is still thriving all these years later and has a sustainable business plan. This is a good example of how imaginatively using space can also make good financial sense. It cost less than half the cost of a new building to convert the sanctuary into a high quality multi-use space.

As well as a nursery and church, the space is also an art gallery, and it can be re-arranged to become a performance or event space. As a result, it is busy from early to late seven days a week. It is very important for buildings and open spaces to be inspirational and thus to encourage people to care of them and be responsible for the plant. In 1998, after the tragic death of a 35 year old woman, Jean Vials, we set up the first integrated health centre in the United Kingdom adjoining the church building. It now has 125 activities on offer, 177 staff including a team of doctors and is part of a 3 acre park site. Sixty nine percent of the employees live locally.

About three years ago the General Secretary of the United Reformed Church recently visited me and asked for my advice on how to improve the national situation with their church buildings. We agreed that the normal planning processes impeded rather than aided delivery of solutions. 'One Church 100 Uses' was set up as a social enterprise to advise and act as a 'midwife' to churches seeking to find entrepreneurial solutions to their difficulties and to build partnerships.

We are now working on 30 different sites and have a partnership with English Heritage. One Church 100 Uses have found that many churches have buildings with great potential but they have no idea of how to find partners and have little understanding of the business disciplines involved to turn problems into opportunities. The churches need to once again embrace a more entrepreneurial culture, which looks to turn fine words into 'flesh'.

There is very little truly 'joined up' thinking around the country between Government departments and those providing services in the public and voluntary sectors. The current financial crisis is both a constraint and an opportunity. Entrepreneurs need to be found and supported – they are everywhere in every community. They are often teachers and doctors; some are clergy; some are cooks and gardeners. How do we harness all of this energy and talent and not reduce it to the lowest common denominator or drown it in the red tape of the civil service? Why do we keep dressing young men in old clothes? There is a long way to go

'One Church 100 Uses' began with the United Reformed Church, but is now a community interest company, which means that its profits can go back into the next project. It operates in a business-like way but with a social purpose. It is currently also working with Baptist and Methodist churches and an Anglican retreat centre.

See: www.onechurch100uses.org.uk for more information about One Church 100 uses.