

The Diocese of London

Church buildings at risk

The Reverend Maggie Durran *Historic Churches Project Officer, Diocese of London*

An Historic Churches Projects Officer describes the responsibilities of advising London churches with major repair needs.

After several years as a vicar in south London, I was appointed in 1999 to a part-time post as Historic Churches Project Officer in the Diocese of London, funded jointly by the Diocese and English Heritage. My job is to advise the 26 Grade I and II* churches that are either on English Heritage's Buildings At Risk register or will be soon unless someone turns the tide. I work with the various archdeacons and the property department but also with others outside the formal structure.

Each church faces daunting challenges, and nearly all lack the people and skills to face those challenges. There is, however, goodwill and commitment that can be supported by someone with experience in management, development and fundraising. I work with clergy, church councils and building committees to enable, wherever possible, local people to face those challenges. Most churches struggling with major building and financial problems are also seeking to understand their mission, the major purpose behind building projects and fundraising. In all cases, a sense of local mission and commitment is essential in securing funds and plans for the continuation of the building as a place of worship.

There is also the question of what to do with a building that has become surplus to the needs of the local mission and possibly could be heading for redundancy. In such cases, it may be in the best interest of the building to draw up a business plan, with or without the support of the clergy and church council, for alternative or additional uses in order to keep it in good repair for the interests of the local community.

Financial advice

In addition to working with Grade I and II* listed churches on or likely to be on the Buildings at Risk register, I run seminars, workshops and conferences on fundraising and

financial strategies in London, open to other dioceses.

Large sums of money can be raised only if it is clear that the building is viable, the church's future is relatively secure, and financial management is sound. I advise churches about financial accounts and encourage stewardship programmes, local community networks and audits of need, as well as an understanding of their own mission and how they intend to achieve their aims. The results have been good. One of the churches has now received (and nearly spent) £7 million on its repair and conservation project; another has received £2.5 million and at least ten others from £100,000 to £500,000.

St Martin's Church, Gospel Oak, Camden (EB Lamb, 1864–5, Grade I). After two years of monthly meetings, church sales, sponsored walks, donations, and an application to the Joint Repair Scheme, substantial funds were secured to repair the roof.



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