

# The Management of Church Halls

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## Introduction

There are basically two ways of managing a church hall.

Firstly it can be managed directly by the church. Normally through a subcommittee of the governing body in the case of moderate or heavy usage, but not necessarily.

Secondly it can be managed by a separate body. Normally this will be set up in such a way as to safeguard the continuing interest of the church in the hall.

Why people choose one option or another is a moot point. Much the same results can be achieved with either option depending on circumstances. The crucial issues would seem to be:

- How attached the church feels to its halls. Attached has both a physical and emotional sense. If church halls are contained within the body of a worshipping church they are most unlikely to be managed by a separate body. But a similar attachment can also be felt for buildings completely separate from the church. These feelings of attachment (or otherwise) are often significantly affected by theological conviction.
- The resources available to the church to maintain and develop its halls. Churches will normally directly manage their halls if they have sufficient resources (financial or otherwise) to do so. Many, however, are larger than they either need or can cope with. Thus they begin to look around for various forms of assistance in managing and using assets which are feeling like liabilities.

A key issue is always how the church continues to exercise control over its halls and maintain its sense of ownership: that is how it manages to continue to use the halls for its own purposes and how it continues to feel happy about the property and the use it is put to. 'Feel happy' may seem like a rather vague term, and it is, but it is no less important for all its lack of clarity. I will also examine how this 'control' relates to the effective development and management of the hall i.e. how the group or individuals with hands on responsibility can be given the scope to work effectively but with accountability.

A further issue is the funding implications of the way the building is managed. It is much more difficult to raise funds from outside the church if they are managed solely by the church, because funders are generally reluctant to fund what are perceived as traditional church halls. Funders are often looking for both substantial community use of buildings **and** a positive sense of partnership / participation from the wider community in the management. They like to fund initiatives which appear innovative and inclusive.

The final issue relates to the vision of the church for its halls. What are the purposes to which the church wishes to put its property? How do these purposes interact with its theology, its financial resources, its personal resources, the nature and condition of its buildings and a host of external factors such as the profile of its potential users and the attitude of English Heritage?

In this report I will examine the main two options outlined above, together with their various variations. In doing so I will draw on the example of various churches around London to illustrate what is possible. None will be offered as models to follow as it became clear in talking with people that everyone has to create their own model! Nonetheless there is much to learn from others. While the various options are being outlined I will pay particular attention to how control is maintained in each circumstance; fundraising implications and how the various options relate to different visions and purposes.

This report relates particularly to Anglican churches and uses Anglican terminology.

## Direct management

### Centre Manager

#### Outline

The building is managed by an individual. S/he is responsible to the church, either to the vicar or PCC. It is not unknown for this person to be the priest him/herself, although this is not generally thought to be good practice! They agree a basic policy and this is implemented by the hall manager. It is normally best to give the manager considerable scope for flexibility and initiative.

This option can be combined in some sense with other options, where considerable freedom and power is given to an employed worker to be the hands-on manager.

#### Strengths

- Simple and straightforward
- Probably the best way to maximize financial income

#### Weaknesses

- Poor at enabling participation or community development
- Tends towards a purely administrative approach
- Depends heavily on abilities and inclinations of manager

#### Maintaining control

Power is concentrated in the hands of the manager so everything depends on his/her attitudes and style of management. Control will probably be exercised through the vicar so his/her abilities as a line manager will be crucial. Also important will be the policy agreed by the PCC. Generally, though, any centre manager will get frustrated at too much control of his/her work.

#### Fundraising implications

This option will not have many attractions to outside funders although an capable fundraiser as centre manager might be effective. Another option could be to devolve fundraising to a separate committee of the church.

#### Implications for vision and purposes

This option is best suited to a policy of maximizing the income from the hall. It would also suit a situation where the hall is given over to a single clear purpose e.g. it is run as a full-time day care centre with church use in the evenings and weekend. Thus it is generally most suitable where there is a clear and agreed vision which needs to be achieved.

## Subcommittee

### Outline

The hall would be run by a subcommittee responsible to the PCC. It will draw members from the congregation of the church and maybe draw in a few people with particular expertise by co-option

### Strengths

- Keeps control most firmly in the hands of the church
- Relatively straightforward and easy to understand
- Doesn't require doing anything new
- Can be a good option for developing new projects as it helps create a management group with the same vision.

### Weaknesses

- Not as clear cut as management by an individual
- Keeps control in the hands of the church to the exclusion of users or the community. This could create alienation.
- Might overstretch the resources of the church and create poor or inefficient management.
- Depends on relationship with PCC. If they don't share same vision it could cause problems.

### Maintaining control

Probably the most obvious way of maintaining control of the hall. Structurally it links the hall firmly to the church and practically puts church people in positions to know what is going on. It doesn't guarantee control, however. If people haven't got the time or the skills to manage well things could easily be let slip, or alternatively the committee could abdicate all responsibility to the hall workers.

### Fundraising implications

Has no fundraising benefits but would probably discourage outside funders as implying too great a control by church. This can be alleviated by creating a consultative group which includes community representatives. Even if this only has the power to make recommendations it does give a wider community input into the development of buildings so can have many benefits beyond fundraising. Composition can vary but it is generally advisable to have a consultative group who are in sympathy with the vision and purposes of the church.

### Implications for vision and purposes

This is the most church-oriented model. By placing church people on the ground in positions of power it should ensure that the hall is used for purposes most in line with the vision of the church. It does not normally help, however, any vision which seeks to work with people in the community. It tends to make the church look like either a distant body which keeps everything to itself or a bountiful provider of services in a potentially patronizing way. It can be a very useful way of getting a project off the ground, however, or retreating to when things go wrong. Many people have used this option as a starting point for a more inclusive option later.

## Subcommittee with user involvement

### Outline

This is a variation of the previous but it does indicate a substantial change of approach. The formal structure remains the same - a subcommittee responsible to the PCC but people from outside the church are included as more than merely co-opted individuals. Users and community members are given a voice, by right, in the running of the hall. Normally the church will retain a majority or a casting vote but this is not necessary.

*A terms of reference for a subcommittee with user involvement from St. Paul's, North Marylebone is available.*

### Strengths

- Modifies the problems of the previous option's exclusion of non-church people
- Enables the hall to bring in new expertise and skills
- Has scope for community development

### Weaknesses

- Can be a way of co-opting people without giving away any power and therefore lead to an even greater sense of alienation
- Can create conflict between PCC and subcommittee as the two are less likely to share the same values

### Maintaining control

By retaining a majority on the committee the church will maintain formal control. Nonetheless the presence of people from outside the church will mean that control will be less straightforward and might require greater negotiation. A lot depends on exactly how things are set up i.e. what the terms of reference are. User representatives can be got in many different ways e.g.

- Potential people are approached by the existing committee or worker
- Main user organisations appoint a representative
- An annual user meeting elects representatives
- People are asked to put their names forward and are then selected by the existing committee or PCC

The exact composition of the subcommittee can also be controlled to give power to one group or another or achieve a balance of power. The PCC can also retain various degrees of supervision over the decisions of the subcommittee, although too strict control is likely to be resented.

While control is dependent to some extent on formal means in reality things will depend on personalities, the abilities of individuals and the amount of time they can give.

### Fundraising implications

This will improve the attractiveness to outside funders, although a consultative group might still be beneficial. May also have the advantage of bringing in people with fundraising experience and abilities.

**Implications for vision and purposes**

Much depends on exactly how this option is implemented. It might mean no practical difference from the previous model but where user / community involvement is significant and meaningful it does open the doors for a real partnership with the community and opportunities for community development. The basis for a subcommittee with user involvement needs to be a combination of encouraging a positive sense of partnership with safeguards against abuse.

The general trend of theological thinking concerning mission from across the doctrinal spectrum has been moving towards this kind of partnership approach, although it is probably true to say that it has often proved more difficult to implement in practice than in theory.

## Separate management

### Independent church body

#### Outline

The hall is managed by a separate body. Church interests are maintained by the terms on which control of the building is passed over to the new managers. This body could be an entirely new organisation solely associated with the hall (probably a charity). In this option the body would remain a church body but not be under the PCC. That is it would be so constituted such that it was controlled by people from within the church.

*A license from St. Faith's PCC and St. Faith's Community and Youth Association is available as an example of how such a structure is set up*

#### Strengths

- Reduces the workload of the PCC but retains control of the hall by church people
- Brings in new resources for the management of the hall
- Streamlines management, making decision making easier
- Probably makes fundraising easier

#### Weaknesses

- Could create conflict between church and the hall management if visions diverge
- Decrease ownership of the hall by church members

#### Maintaining control

Things will depend on the actual working relationship between the independent body and the church. These will be defined by the document governing the transfer of the building from the church. This could stipulate anything from 100% usage by the church to none! Provisions could be made, for instance, for exclusive church use on Sundays. It could also control the use made of the building by non-church groups. Control will also be helped by the presence of church people in the new managing body. This will make it unlikely that the building will drift off in a direction at odds with the church. Provision could also be made for the hall reverting to direct church management in case of deviation from the agreed terms.

#### Fundraising implications

This will probably make fundraising easier as it will create a sense of distance between the church and the halls, making it appear that they are a general community provision. How much this is actually the case will depend on the way the independent body is managed.

#### Implications for vision and purposes

This structure makes it easier to develop a partnership with the local community as the church presence is less dominating. Things will, however, depend on how the new body operates. It also makes the management of the hall a more straightforward process, encouraging a dynamic and flexible approach to new

circumstances. The option enables the church to hand over the managing of the hall to a group of its own and gives them the freedom to develop it energetically. It might, however, create a vision for the hall which is different from that of the church.

It is probably in line with contemporary management thinking which encourages organisations to concentrate on core concerns rather than have large, diverse empires.

# Partnership

## Outline

This option enables the church to work with another body, either because that is thought to be a good thing in itself or because the hall is proving too much for the church to handle by itself. It thus has the potential to bring in significant new resources but does require the church to relinquish sole control. This relinquishing of control is not necessarily a matter of formally handing over control to a new body. There are instances where the church remains the landlord and part-leases to the partner. What is necessary is an attitude which treats the partner as an equal. If decisions made by the group negotiating with the partner are overturned by the church then any sense of real partnership will be lost.

Partnership can thus mean formal control of the building remaining with the church but the partnership being cemented by a lease or license<sup>1</sup> giving security and control to the partner. It can also mean the creation of a new body of which the church and partner(s) are both members.

## Strengths

- Brings in new resources to manage and use building
- Creates a very real and concrete link with the community
- Most probably beneficial in fundraising

## Weaknesses

- Means the church giving over some control on a fairly permanent basis
- Depends on finding a good partner to work with
- Increases complications, making straightforward development less easy

## Maintaining control

Control will depend on the exact terms of the partnership. Again there is no theoretical limit to these terms but they will have to be acceptable to the partner. At least as important will be the quality of the relationship between the church and the partner. This will be affected by how straightforward and transparent the church's relationship with the partner is. If the church's decision-making is changeable and slow then it will be difficult to keep control of the situation as resentments and misunderstandings will be fostered.

## Fundraising implications

This option often has considerable fundraising benefits. It gives a clear indication that the halls are not simply being used for the benefit of the church. Also, partnership, is something of a buzz word and creates the sense of something innovative and progressive - this is all good news for fundraising.

## Implications for vision and purposes

This option requires a certain modification of the church's purposes in order to fit in with the vision and purposes of its partner. This might be easy if there is a shared sense of purpose and vision - the partner might, for instance, be a

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<sup>1</sup> A lease means the partner is given exclusive use of parts of the building. A license operates when the usage is not exclusive.

Christian organisation. Nonetheless a certain amount of discussion and negotiation will inevitably be necessary in order to develop a shared sense of purpose for the hall. This will enable things to develop more easily and help avoid clashes later on.

The option does fit well with a community orientation which seeks to work with the whole community, although it depends on who the partner is.

## Separate body

### **Outline**

The building is leased to an entirely separate organisation. The church's continuing use of the hall is ensured by the terms of the lease and, possibly, involvement in some kind of user group. Again, the hall could revert to the church in specified circumstances.

### **Strengths**

- Removes responsibility for the hall from the church, leaving it free to concentrate on other things
- Ensures the continuing availability of the space in the hall for the work of the church

### **Weaknesses**

- The church loses strategic control of the hall
- It is a largely irrevocable step which will limit the future possibilities for the church

### **Maintaining control**

The terms of the lease will be completely crucial. Without personal, informal control of the management of the hall everything will fall back on this, along with the relationship established with the new managers. Whilst this might seem like a rather strange situation there is no absolute reason why the church shouldn't continue to find the arrangement perfectly suitable for its own direct needs.

### **Fundraising implications**

This removes fundraising concerns from the church. Part of the condition of lease is often to refurbish the building, thus addressing the need for fundraising.

### **Implications for vision and purposes**

This option essentially removes the hall from the direct strategic vision and purposes of the church, turning it into a resource for the church. The church is thus freed to develop other work without the concern of looking after any property other than the church itself. Thus it would also seem to fit in with contemporary management thinking.

## Appendix: some other discretionary options

### User groups

A user group is designed to enable users of the building to feedback comments about the use of the building. Normally this is matters of a practical nature, like security and tidiness. They tend to remain at this level and not contribute much to the strategic development of the building. Some people find they simply give people the opportunity to grumble and so create only conflict between users and managers and no sense of partnership or participation. They are thus not a panacea for all issues concerning community involvement. If partnership is wanted there needs to be input about practical issues but there also needs to be user and community input at a strategic management level. Nonetheless user groups can be a useful part of a management package. Including the election of some of the basis on the Management Committee (see third option) can help strengthen its sense of purpose. If these electees report back to the user group this can help widen its vision.

### Consultative groups

Increasingly churches have been creating consultative groups which sit alongside the management of buildings. These can have various roles. They might be concerned for 'holding the vision' of a building development. Removed from day-to-day management but aware of it, they keep a wider brief. Others might have a specific community consultative group concerned to input community concerns into the management and development of the building.

The important thing is that they can only make recommendations and have no controlling role. They are not practically-oriented like user groups but address the issue of vision, purpose and community involvement. As mentioned previously they have a particular use in fundraising. Consultative groups are always problematic, however, as they have no real power and can be seen as manipulating if used without genuine desire to take on board other people's views. The composition of such groups is, as always, important. Generally a majority of church people is maintained - or at least a majority who will be sympathetic to the theology and/or vision of the church. This helps prevent conflict and the drifting of consultative groups into a purely nominal position. Yet it does raise questions about whether the voice of the community is genuinely being heard (though it should be remembered that a community's voice is notoriously difficult to ascertain - even if it ever truly exists!).

*Terms of reference for the St. John's Centre for Stratford Community Consultative Group are available as an example.*

## Further reading

Derek Akker and Michael Passmore **Opening Our Doors** - *a practical guide to the wider use of church buildings*. The Children's Society 1996

Peter Hudson **Managing your Community Building** - *a practical handbook for people running buildings in local communities*. Community Matters 1993 (now updated)

Maggie Durran **Making Church Buildings Work** 2005 and **Regenerating Churches** 2006 and **The UK Church Fundraising Handbook : a practical manual and directory of sources** 2003

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