



The Church of St John the Evangelist  
**Architectural Renewal Committee  
(ARC) Report**

## **Background**

1. Since 2002 St John's has been trying to find a way to have the clergy and choir worship with the congregation in the same space. Celebrating at the chancel altar, the clergy felt too distant and not connected to the worshipping community and a number of people in the congregation wished to have the clergy, congregation and choir together in one space. Being together in the worship space is important because as the gathered community we are the Body of Christ. We are connected spiritually in order to be a force for love and change in God's world. It is like being family gathered around the Thanksgiving table.
2. Furthermore, although the chancel is a beautiful space, it is challenging for the choir to lead congregational singing from there. This is because of acoustical difficulties that make it harder for the choir to hear the organ and the vocal sounds are not as direct as when the choir is in the nave.
3. To address these wishes, at a Special Vestry held on Dec 6, 2009, the congregation agreed to move forward on a trial basis with changes to the worship space.
4. The changes approved were:
  - a. Removal of the red-carpeted platform exposing the beautiful woodwork of the pulpit and chancel steps.
  - b. Removal of the front rows of pews (which were put in storage) and installation of one row of pews at the back of the church.
  - c. Tiling the newly exposed floor area and painting under the pews.
  - d. Construction of a temporary altar. (A new altar cloth to cover the altar was donated.)
  - e. Construction of a temporary platform for the altar and two sets of kneelers, one on each side of the altar.
5. Subsequently, the following additional changes have been made in response to comments:
  - a. The altar has been raised an additional 6 inches for greater visibility.
  - b. Choir risers have been constructed providing greater visibility of the choir.
6. To further enhance our worship, Gordon Johnston designed and built a new organ console, which is situated on the nave floor.
7. Because changes were undertaken on a trial basis, all of the structures were temporary, using construction-grade materials, in order to spend the least amount of money to assess the trial worship space.

8. **The time has come to make a decision on the trial. A decision is required as to whether or not the pews that have been removed will be re-installed in their prior location.**

9. Columbarium

Some parishioners may recall that, at the December 2009 Special Vestry, ARC received approval in principle to examine the possibility of building a columbarium at St John's. Early in 2010, ARC determined that it was important to come to a decision regarding the worship space before considering the feasibility of a columbarium. Therefore, aside from some research, no action has been taken.

## Expenditures

10. The cost of the changes, as described in paragraph 4, was covered by the Gurney estate. A total of \$ 21,734 has been spent on the changes approved at the December 6, 2009 Vestry. There is still \$6,759 remaining from the estate.

## Feedback

11. Congregation and Choir

- a. There have been many expressions of support for the new arrangement.
- b. Some parishioners expressed their preference to remain with the traditional arrangement. Of this group, some have indicated that they can live with the present arrangement even though it is not their preference. However, they want the chancel altar used on occasion.
- c. Comments and suggestions have been offered related to the choir seating and congregational chair seating, including ideas for the type of chairs required, visibility of clergy and choir, traffic flow, and height and placement of the altar.
- d. Based on these comments a number of adjustments have been made. Traffic flow to and from communion is now quite smooth. Communicants have the option of standing or kneeling for communion. To give more space to Communion administrators, the platform has been widened by two feet.
- e. To improve the visibility of the presider, the altar was raised an additional six inches in early October. To improve the visibility of the choir, removable risers have been built. **There is no consensus on the use of risers - there have been a number of comments both for and against by both the congregation and the choir. A specific comment has been the lack of accessibility from the nave to the chancel and the lack of visibility of the chancel altar. Both accessibility and visibility are being examined.**

## 12. Weddings and Funerals

- a. The new space has worked very well for weddings and funerals. The nave altar can be used if requested (which it has been for both weddings and funerals). Alternatively, the nave altar can be removed and be replaced by chairs to allow for a traditional service with the priests in the chancel and the chancel altar used for communion. This has also been done successfully.

## 13. Concerts and Music Festivals

- a. The choir's concert in the spring was very successful, with much better sound from both the choir and orchestra, and the choir visible on risers.
- b. St John's has been the venue for the Ottawa International Chamber Music Festival since its start in 1994. The response from the festival organizers to the new space was overwhelmingly positive. Musicians sat directly on the floor (no platform was used) and the audience was seated on all sides, as well as in the chancel.
- c. St John's was also the scene of a new festival, Music and Beyond. We received a similar positive response from the organizers.

## 14. Organ

- a. The removal of the pews on the north side has allowed the installation of a new organ console which has greatly enhanced the music during worship.

## **Recommendations**

15. **Key recommendation: The Rector and Wardens, based on the report and recommendations of the Architectural Renewal Committee, are recommending that the present open and flexible space be retained.**

A number of specific recommendations follow from this key recommendation:

16. Chancel altar: The present open and flexible space means that the chancel altar can still be used if desired for regular services and special occasions such as major festivals, weddings and funerals. The Sunday 8 o'clock service uses the chancel and the altar. **As recommended by the Worship Committee, the chancel altar will be used on Christmas Eve, with the choir seated in the chancel and chairs will be placed in the open space where the present moveable altar is located.** Other services will be considered throughout the year.
17. Nave Altar: The present temporary nave altar will be replaced with a new, beautiful wood moveable altar. Additional altar coverings will be needed. **A new altar will be the first priority.**
18. Platform: The present temporary platform with kneelers will need to be replaced with more attractive but also moveable structures. These will be built as funds become available.

19. Pews: The pews in storage will no longer be required. All the pews in the church will be carefully examined and the damaged ones will be replaced with good ones from storage. Once this is complete, the surplus pews will be sold. Pews will be offered for sale to parishioners first.
20. Risers: When more experimentation has taken place with the choir risers (height, number, etc.), as money permits, better grade and flexible risers will need to be built.
21. Chairs: Chairs with a book rack for hymn books, service books, etc. must be purchased. Investigation is ongoing. New chairs will be purchased as funds become available.
22. Sound System: The sound system is a concern no matter what the worship arrangement. **The building committee has set an improved sound system as a priority in its 2011 budget.**

## **Financial Considerations/Donor Opportunities**

23. Opportunities will be given to people to contribute to or to sponsor elements of the new worship space, including as memorials.

### **Motion**

Moved by Ann Chaplin, seconded by Ian Culbert

**That this Vestry approve the continued use of the Nave for worship by the clergy, choir and congregation in the current open and flexible arrangement, and that further improvements to the altar and worship space proceed in accordance with the recommendations included in the Architectural Renewal Committee (ARC) Report dated November 7, 2010.**

November 7, 2010