



Open Day and Presentation of Plans for St. Mel's Cathedral

■ BISHOP COLM O'REILLY

The response to our invitation to come and see the interior of St. Mel's Cathedral greatly exceeded our expectations. We knew, of course, that there is great interest in this great treasure of the Diocese and of the country which we lost in an accidental burning on Christmas Day 2009. However, we needed to see that the concern of people in Longford and well beyond Longford has not diminished. The priests of Templemichael Parish and I are deeply grateful to all who made the effort to come and see the shell of our burned-out Cathedral for themselves. We have every reason to believe from the reaction that we got that all were appreciative of the effort made to accommodate this experience.

I personally did not hear anyone express surprise that this opportunity was not offered sooner. However, I was at pains to say to a lot of people that we could not have done so safely until now. We also feel that the time was right because of some signs of real progress. In particular we wanted people to see the restored plasterwork. This is indeed a sign of hope for the future.

We were pleased too that a model of how the interior of the Cathedral is likely to look was available for viewing. Many comments were made on this. All those who made comments did so with sincerity and with a wish to seek clarification on aspects of the proposed design on which they were unclear or about which they had reservations. In order to be helpful I would like to mention some of these comments, just some which stand out in my own mind.

The proposed location of the altar

I heard several people ask why it is proposed to bring the altar farther down the Cathedral than the altar which was installed in the 1970's.

The altar's location in a central place is intended to be a sign that during the celebration of Mass all the people truly participate. None are mere onlookers. The location of the altar will be a constant reminder to us of this fact.

Seating

Some concern was voiced about the loss of seating resulting from the new location of the altar. It is regrettable that we have to admit that we do not have the need for as much seating as we had in times past; so the loss of some seating will be less problematic, for that reason.

Whenever major celebrations call for additional seating there will be generous open space to take added temporary seating or afford standing room. I believe there will be no major problem encountered in this regard.

Location of Cathedral Organ and Choir

After much consultation with expert advisers, as well as the Cathedral Choir and Organist, it was agreed that the location proposed is the best possible. The advice we received was provided by Professor Gerard Gillen and Dr. John O'Keeffe who



An early image of how Sanctuary Area might look after restoration.

served as organist in St. Mel's Cathedral for two years and currently holds the position of Director of Music at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.

Some concern was expressed about how well the sound of an organ in this location would be able to reach the entire Cathedral. Since this is a highly technical matter which requires specific advice from experts in sound transmission further investigation will be carried out to ensure that the opinions we have received stand up.

Benches or Chairs

Some drawings which were on display showed the Cathedral with suitably designed chairs rather than benches for seating. These drawings do not indicate that any decision on this matter has been taken.

The Cathedral Project Committee has no position on this and, while the Design Team expressed a preference for the use of chairs, the Committee will want to take into account what the views of the people are in this matter.

Tabernacle

Locating the tabernacle in a central position in the apse of the Cathedral seems to have been met with no objection. In fact it seems to have been warmly welcomed.

Some wondered why it should be necessary to use screens which are now redundant in the North transept and are to be relocated in that area.

The use of the screens in this place indicates that the Place of Reservation is not just part of the sanctuary but a sacred space with its own special dignity and atmosphere.

Baptismal Font

When a new Baptismal Font is introduced at the entrance to the Cathedral, some asked, would the old font which is located in the South porch still remain there? The answer is most certainly in the affirmative. This font is a part of the Cathedral's heritage and of special significance because it was used for many hundreds of christenings over the years.

Sanctuary Lamp

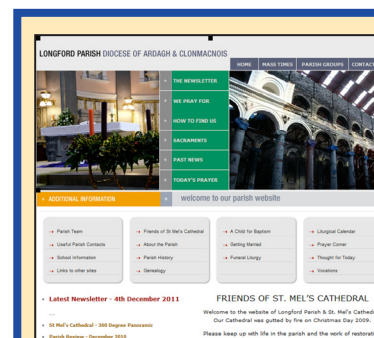
Will the Sanctuary Lamp which was used in the Cathedral for years be re-installed? At the time of writing I do not know if a lamp which was recovered after the fire is capable of being reused or not. One way or another, there certainly will be a red light calling attention to the tabernacle and the place of reservation.

Communicating The Message

St. Mel's Cathedral Project Committee express their thanks to Fr. Padraig Kelliher and Tiernan Dolan for all their work in updating the public on the Restoration Project through the Parish website www.longfordparish.com. The website is regularly updated with news on the various stages of the Restoration Project. Log on to see a wonderful trove of photographs of the various developments throughout the past year.

We also say a sincere thanks to the Parish Review Committee for their commitment in publishing this supplement of the Parish Review for the Diocese. They are also maintaining great archives of all the material associated with the Restoration Project for the years ahead.

"Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart, and wait for the LORD" (Psalm 27:14)



For further information on the Cathedral restoration and updates on progress go to www.longfordparish.com