



OVERVIEW

RELIGION IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The world's first lighting guide for places of worship is soon to be published by the Society for Light and Lighting. Francis Pearce looks at what the SLL and lighting designers have to say about illuminating churches



Some of the most important caves adorned by Bronze Age petroglyphs at Lascaux in France are naturally illuminated at the solstices which, added to the long-held theory that the images have some spiritual significance, suggests that light, ritual and belief have a very deep-rooted association. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, God not only called natural light into being in the Book of Genesis ('And God said, let there be light, and there was light') but, in Exodus, revealed the design of the seven-lamped menorah to Moses.

And yet, after all this time, places of worship still present lighting designers with problems, some of them architectural in origin, others to do with how the buildings are used, and yet more centring on conservation, technology and cost. High ceilings, obstructions such as pillars and banners, and even reflected glare from silverware all present the lighting designer with challenges that are examined in guidelines being readied for publication by the Society of Light and Lighting. Lighting Guide 13 (LG13), Places of Worship is thought to be the first guidance of its kind and covers buildings ranging in scale from cathedrals and temples to multifaith chapels at airports.

In the UK, the stock of churches and congregations is rising even though the actual number of churchgoers has been falling for a century. Manchester University's Mark Littler reckons there are now 50,700 churches or congregations in the UK; Jewish, Muslim and Sikh places of worship number in the hundreds but are increasing in number.

LG13's author, Hilclare lighting applications manager David Holmes, says the interior lighting's main purpose in places of worship is to enable participants to see what they are doing and what is happening around them. Visual comfort and safety are also important. To that extent, churches are similar to the workplace and much of the advice in the guide is based on new thinking on issues such as lighting the horizontal plane and

regulations covering emergency lighting.

On a functional level, they share characteristics with auditoria: churches are usually oriented west to east, creating a visual hierarchy and directing the congregation's view towards the sanctuary, altar and East window, much like a conventional theatre's audience is directed to the proscenium. 'You light towards the east to minimise direct glare and use roof members to conceal the lighting behind corbels and arches as you look in that direction,' says lighting designer James Morse, responsible for the award-winning scheme for Salisbury Cathedral. 'Clergymen often complain about glare when they face the congregation but it's more important for parishioners to see them.'

Church lighting is 'staged' at different levels: low in the nave and rising at the altar to ensure that attention is drawn there during services. Historically, this has been achieved with natural light and candles. The guide points out that 'often the more successful daylighting designs are those that offer a combination of daylighting strategies. Low-rise buildings offer the greatest opportunity to realise a controlled daylight environment because the designs can, in principle, accommodate various daylighting features and devices. In addition, low-rise building designs can also feature skylights, clerestory windows, light wells, over-hangs, deep self-shading reveals and so on.'

Lighting designer Michael Grubb says that in the UK and overseas church architects and lighting designers 'celebrate daylight much more these days. It always used to be about artificial light and the building itself, but now it's back to where it began'. Nowhere more so than at the Cathedral of the Northern Lights by Schmidt Hammer Lassen architects and Link Arkitektur in Arctic Norway.

It has a spiral belfry clad in reflective titanium to catch the Northern Lights, but inside, during the white nights and days of summer, light enters through tall, slim, irregularly placed windows and a skylight

Far left, above, Cundall Light 4 relit the Mossley Hill chapel for a variety of uses. Left, above, inside the Cathedral of Northern Lights in Arctic Norway, with lighting design by Michael Grubb. Far left, below, award-winning all-LED scheme by Lunlicht at the St Stephan Church, Karlsruhe. Left, below, St Vitus Cathedral, Prague was relamped in LEDs by Panasonic