

THE DESIGN OF ST JOSEPH'S, BRACKEN RIDGE CHURCH

ARCHITECT'S STATEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

Eight alternative layouts for a 400 seat Church building were presented to an open meeting of the parish on the 30th of July 1997. To our surprise and delight, the meeting overwhelmingly selected scheme 8, the most challenging design but the one that most directly responds to this site. Scheme 8 has become the building that stands ready to be dedicated by Archbishop John Bathersby today (22.10.2000).

2. SITING

In accordance with the Parish's brief, our aim was to site the Church building to form a gateway to the Church/School Campus. From the carpark, the Church is approached by a north-south path which leads not only to the Church, but also on to the school. The Church, its entry canopy and the original Church (to become the Parish Centre and School Hall) form the gateway. The school is reached by passing under the projecting roof of the Church where glazed doors provide a glimpse across the baptistery to the altar.

3. DESIGN CONCEPT

We aimed to make this Church of St Joseph a direct response to:

- . The requirements of the liturgy
- . The particular needs of this Bracken Ridge/Bald Hills parish; and
- . This unique hill top site with its splendid outlook to mount Sampson and the D' Aguilar Range.

The liturgy requires a beautiful, hospitable space where the entire congregation can join in active celebration, where all can see and hear clearly and can participate fully in the liturgy, as an assembly of believers .

The brief from the parish emphasised that the appearance of the building should be recognisable as the centre for the Bracken Ridge/Bald Hills Catholic Community, entrance to the school should be through the Church area, and that the project should be capable of being built in stages.

The particular challenge of scheme 8 was to bring the western mountains and sky quietly into the assembly, while maintaining the focus of the space on the communal ritual action, the priest and the people.

This gave rise to the need to control light, avoid glare, solar heat loads and the distractions of a suburban foreground. With a glass wall behind the altar, measures had to be taken to avoid extreme contrast between the light behind the Presider which would produce an unfortunate silhouette and direct light in front of the altar which would contribute to the clarity of the action. A large clearstory has been erected over the sanctuary to scoop eastern light down in front of the altar. This is the main task of the steeple (or light tower) which also exhaust air from the western part of the Church and serves as a symbol of this Catholic parish in the broader community. At the same time, blinds have been positioned across the western elevation to control the amount of light and heat accepted by the western facing windows. These blinds and the sun louvres in the steeple are to be automatically controlled to help ensure that the action is well lit but not over powered by glare, while allowing the distant background of mountains and sky to be part of the assembly when ever conditions permit.

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4. SPACES WITHIN THE BUILDING

Generally

The building has a clearly defined triangular plan with the Baptistry and entry at one corner and the Reconciliation and Blessed Sacrament Chapels is at the other corners. The Sanctuary is set centrally into the long side of the triangle projecting into the assembly.

Entry/Gathering Place

A high canopy protects the gathering place immediately outside the Church entry doors. In the longer term it is planned that the entry path and this space will be covered by a lower, part glazed roof which will provide sheltered access to the Church from the carpark and from the Parish Centre which will also open onto this space.

Baptistry (from Fr Bernie's notes)

On entering the Church one encounters the "Pools of Baptism", a reminder of one's entry into the life of the Church. They recall the Jordan River in which Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist. The River Jordan rises and bubbles to life in springs at the foot of the snow-capped Mount Herman in the northern Israel. Here, the waters of baptism bubble to life in the infant Pool of Baptism.

The River Jordan flows down in a gushing and tumbling stream to enter the Sea of Galilee. Here, the waters of baptism flow out of the infant pool to tumble over stones brought by Father Bernie from the Sea of Galilee.

From the Sea of Galilee, the River Jordan meanders through barren country to empty into the Dead Sea. Here, the waters of baptism end in the tomb-like adult Pool of Baptism.

The Baptismal Area has been constructed around the words and ideas of St Paul:

Romans 6: 3 - 5 You have been taught that when we were baptised in Jesus Christ we were baptised into his death; in other words when we were baptised we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life. If in union with Christ we have imitated his death, we shall also imitate him in his Resurrection.

This Baptismal Area seeks to capture these words and insights of St Paul. Candidates for baptism will descend into the waters (buried with Christ) and rises with him to "new life" and "imitate him in his Resurrection".

Beyond the pools of baptism is the Pillar of Faith, topped with the Paschal Candle symbolising the Risen Christ. Candidates will be clothed in white, anointed with the Oil of Chrism, and presented with a candle lit from the Paschal Candle which stands on the Pillar of Faith where it is visible throughout the assembly. The Pillar of Faith echoes the four columns that support the Church's central trusts. The Oil of Chrism, representing Confirmation, is displayed on the pillar.

Father Bernie reminds us that each time we enter the Church to celebrate faith in God and Jesus Christ, we bless ourselves from the Pool of Baptism and walk through the waters of baptism symbolised by the blue tiled border on the floor.

Assembly

This is a space for active participation where the whole assembly can be part of the celebration. The alter is raised two steps above the main floor to help ensure that the priest, the alter and the ambo are clearly visible. Seating is arranged so that people can focus on the centre of the liturgical action

and also be powerfully present to each other. It is hoped that this arrangement will promote a sense of unity and an appreciation of the liturgy as a personal-communal experience.

The assembly will accommodate 400 people comfortably with just nine rows of seating, and a further hundred on verandah for special occasions.

Sanctuary

Just as the baptistery projects into the eastern side of the assembly, the sanctuary is set forward into the western side of the space, bringing it into the midst of the people.

The sanctuary is flanked by two sturdy columns supporting a central truss which carries the roof from the sanctuary out to the entry where matching columns link the sanctuary to the outside world.

A single external cross is set into the foundations of the building on the axis of the sanctuary and rises from a shallow pool to embrace the mountains and sky and draw them into the worship space.

Blessed Sacrament Chapel

This small chapel is designed for the reservation of the Eucharist and for private devotion. It is a special place, separate from the assembly, but linked to it visually and physically. It may be accessed from the assembly area or from outside. A code lock provides the faithful with 24-hour access to the chapel. This chapel will not be complete until screen planting is established to its north.

The Blessed Sacrament chapel is dedicated in honour of St Anthony. St Anthony's Church was the centre of Catholic worship at Bald Hills from 1927 to 1998. The Parish celebrates and commemorates the vital role St Anthony's Church and the parishioners of Bald Hills have played in the life of the parish. To remember the special role, memorabilia from the original St Anthony's Church has been placed in the new Chapel of St Anthony:

- . The plaque commemorating the Blessing and opening of the 27th of February 1927 by Archbishop Duhig.
- . A plaque acknowledging parishioners who have worshiped at Bald Hills over the 72 years.
- . The statue of St Anthony from the original Church.
- . The stained glass window which was presented by Mrs McMullen to Kedron Catholic Church in honour of her sister Miss Cook. When Kedron Church was demolished the window was presented to Bald Hills Church, which was then under construction.

Reconciliation Chapel

Although it is visually linked to the assembly this austere chapel's location, high above the ground, gives it a feeling of detachment from the everyday world. Simple furnishings, a kneeler and chairs are arranged to give penitents a choice of face-to-face or anonymous confession.

Sacristy

The Sacristy is located near the entry convenient for the priest to welcome the assembly prior to the liturgy. The sacristy is accessible from within the Church and also from the garden courtyard allowing access without entering the main assembly.

Working Sacristy

On the south side of the entry at the rear of the assembly, the working sacristy is to be fitted with cupboards and benches for storage and for work associated with the day-to-day care of the building. It is close to the baptistery and convenient for changing after baptism.

5. MATERIALS

In choosing the materials used for constructing this building we have sought to follow the advice of the publication "Environment and Art in Catholic Worship". Which tells us to avoid *"anything trivial and self centred, anything fake, cheap, or shoddy, anything pretentious or superficial."* for this Church of St Joseph we've tried to use basic, contemporary materials and to have them express their own true nature without adornment. Concrete is expressed as concrete and shows the marks of the forms in which it has been placed. Concrete floors have been ground to expose the stones within. Steel is expressed as steel, galvanised for durability or simply painted white. Organic materials, wood and coir you have been used without disguise to contrast with the elemental materials of the structure.

6. FURNITURE

The all-important alter, ambo and presider's chair are of the utmost simplicity in design and are made from steel and solid silky oak salvaged from the pews at St Anthony's Church, Bald Hills. The traditional style Tabernacle has been brought from the original Bracken Ridge St Joseph's Church. It rests, by contrast, on a contemporary stand specially crafted from toughened glass. Simplicity of design and use of metal and organic materials is a theme, common to the secondary elements of the building and its furnishings including the kneelers which combine folded aluminium and polished silky oak to provide comfortable, flexible support and warmth of touch.

7. GARDEN COURTYARD

The garden courtyard (with future perimeter wall) is designed to be a quiet, cloister-like space for contemplation and to provide the assembly with a visual and acoustic buffer from the carpark and neighbouring properties. The wall is to support Stations of the Cross around the edge of courtyard.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A building such as this requires extraordinary efforts by all involved in its design and construction. I would particularly like to thank Fr Bernie Costigan for firm guidance when we needed it and the Parish Building Committee--Sister Lynn Eastmure, Corry van der Maat; Fr Bernie and Danny Higgins, Chairman who have been towers of strength and good judgment throughout. The Parish community have made crucial contributions by the keen interest, active attendance at early design meetings, by providing the gardens that surround the Church and, of course, by funding its construction. We are also grateful to the Rev Dr Tom Elich and the Parish Priests at Birkdale and Albany Creek who have contributed to our education in church design and have shared their wonderful insights into the liturgy and its relationship to build form. Buildings like this one do not happen without determined and able building contractors. Col Palmer has not only employed his considerable managerial and technical skills but has engaged his heart of soul in bringing this building to fruition. Guy Bleney, of this office, has lived and breathed this building for a considerable time. His skill and sheer hard work, beyond the call of duty, have been critical to the success of this project. It has ALMOST been his soul concern for three years, but not quite. When Guy started work of St Joseph's he was a carefree bachelor. Now he and Brigid are the proud parents of Hannah and Joseph.

Roger Heathwood

Heathwood Cardillo Wilson Pty Ltd, Wynnum, Brisbane 22.10.2000