

2016

Monsignor Hawes Heritage Centre and St Francis Xavier Cathedral Geraldton

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This article was originally published as:

McCarthy, A. (2016). Monsignor Hawes Heritage Centre and St Francis Xavier Cathedral Geraldton. *Pastoral Liturgy*, 47 (1), 7.

Original article available here:

https://www.nd.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/143929/Pastoral-Liturgy-47.1-for-Webpage.pdf

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This is the author's version of the article published as:

McCarthy, A. (2018) Monsignor Hawes Heritage Centre and St Francis Xavier Cathedral Geraldton. *Pastoral Liturgy*, 47(1), 11-12. Retrieved from https://www.nd.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/143929/Pastoral-Liturgy-47.1-for-Webpage.pdf

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Monsignor Hawes Heritage Centre and St Francis Xavier Cathedral Geraldton

Dr Angela McCarthy

As visitors drive down Cathedral Avenue into the Midwest city of Geraldton, Western Australia, the most dominant landmark is St Francis Xavier Cathedral. The history of this cathedral, its architect and builder was celebrated on 3 September 2016 when The Monsignor Hawes Heritage Centre was opened in the cathedral precinct. Funded by Royalties for Regions (WA Government), Lotterywest and the Diocese of Geraldton, the centre was opened by the Premier of Western Australia, the Honourable Colin Barnett MLA and the building was blessed by Bishop Justin Bianchini, Bishop of Geraldton and assisted by Archbishop Emeritus Barry Hickey.

The cathedral was in need of restoration and the contribution of Mons Hawes to Geraldton and other towns of the Midwest needed to be properly acknowledged with the historical material appropriately conserved and displayed. The Heritage Centre, designed by John Taylor, is the culmination of these efforts and also provides a piazza style open space with a café that will no doubt in time become 'the' place to stop on arrival in Geraldton. The exterior of the cathedral has been restored and a beautiful labyrinth added in the front open space. The restoration of the interior is waiting on Federal government funds that were promised during the last election. Below is the address given by Bishop Bianchini.

Mr Premier, Your Grace, Invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen and children
In December 1913 there was an eventful meeting between our first Bishop, William Kelly, and John Cyril Hawes.

Bishop Kelly was in Rome for his Ad Limina visit to the Pope. Looking for Priests for his Diocese he went to Beda College. The Rector there introduced him to John Hawes who was completing his studies at the time to be ordained a Catholic Priest. They went for daily walks through Rome visiting the many Churches there. The Bishop spoke of his huge, poor and wild diocese and of the Cathedral he hoped to build. The next day John Hawes produced sketches to the Bishops delight. After a few days the Bishop said to Hawes "If you want real Apostolic and Missionary work I can offer you that, not much more". "It would suit me to a T" answered Hawes. He agreed to come and the rest is history.

Was it a Fortuitous meeting? I believe it was Providential!

Monsignor Hawes has been such a gift to our Diocese.

Monsignor Hawes has been such a gift to our Region.

- As far north as Carnarvon - St Mary's Star of the Sea Church.
- As far south as Bindoon - The Brothers' House at Bindoon Catholic Agricultural School.
- As far east as Yalgoo - St Hyacinth Chapel for the Dominican Sisters and the Melangata Station Homestead.

So John Hawes has left us such a rich heritage. It has been said how this heritage both built and mobile is comparable to that of New Norcia.

How do we honour all this?

1. By maintaining and conserving the buildings for the purpose for which they were built as well as for heritage sake.
2. By conserving and displaying the plans and artefacts from which these buildings emanated.
3. By recording and promoting the history and memory of the man / architect behind the plans.
4. Being inspired by the Christian Faith which permeated the life of this extraordinary man - and was expressed through his architecture and his selfless giving.

In regard to the conservation of the buildings, we are quite aware of our need to do this, and the most recent example is the Cathedral here in view. In regard to the other ways of honouring him and all that he has given us, they are encapsulated in this most fitting Museum. I pay tribute to and sincerely thank the many people involved in planning and establishing this magnificent facility.

Detailed thanks will be offered later, however I would want to now pay tribute to and thank the Western Australian Government with its critical contribution, the local Community and Diocese, the Architect John Taylor with his contemporary and complementary design, Crothers Construction for bringing to fruition that design and the Exhibition Designer, Scott Watson.

So many of our community have been involved already in this project, and it is our wish that this Community Centre both welcome and serve our local people and all who visit our beautiful city from interstate or overseas. Further to this, it is our wish that the Heritage Centre in Geraldton generate money to conserve the Hawes' Legacy throughout the region, as well as be a launching pad for people to further visit and savour the extensive heritage Monsignor Hawes has bequeathed to us.

This heritage of ecclesial architecture and other projects of Monsignor Hawes is unique and as Bishop Bianchini said, comparable to the monastery town of New Norcia which lies between Geraldton and Perth. The Church of Western Australia is indeed proud of this heritage and all visitors are encouraged to explore the towns that hold these unique examples of Hawes' work and that of the Spanish Benedictine's in New Norcia.

This project also included contemporary religious art. A group of artists was selected by a committee from a number of artists from the region and Perth applied for the commission. The winner of the commission was Fuse Art Collective from Carnarvon. Sabrina Dowling Giudici is the leader, with Anton Blume who is a digital artist and Bonni Ingram who is a local Aboriginal artist. The combination of the three artists has produced a remarkable triptych which hangs in the foyer and was blessed at the opening. It is titled: *Dolor Spes Sanatio Redemptio*.

The wild flower season in spring is by far the best time of the year to visit as it can be extremely hot in the summer.