

Holy Family Catholic Church - a Different Perspective – Maintenance Issues Dominate

Colin Apelt; 26-06-2026

The first Mass was celebrated in the new Holy Family Church in Indooroopilly by Archbishop James Duhig on November 10, 1963.

The architecture of the church is not the subject of this article. Much has been published on that topic. An easily accessible article on this subject is; *“Divine inspiration: Holy Family Catholic Church, Indooroopilly”* by Lisa Marie Daunt in Architecture Australia in 2019 (1).

In her article Lisa Marie Daunt includes the comments:

“Nonetheless, Holy Family is arguably one of the most expressive and memorable modern churches in Australia. It should enjoy greater national recognition, and certainly deserves better protection and care.”

“Today, more than fifty years later, the current congregation (very commendably) has taken on the responsibility of repairing and conserving its landmark church. This significant, challenging and costly task should, however, not fall only on a small group of people, but should be carried by the architectural community of Queensland, and the state’s heritage department. Holy Family Catholic Church is a community asset, embodying many memories of a time when religion was held in greater respect by Australian society, and when church design, “modern” religious art and experimental “modern” architecture were all at their peak.”

Antecedents - Redevelopment of Holy Family Primary School and addition of Parish Learning Centre

When Fr Howe was appointed Parish Priest in January 1974, the relatively new church building did not require further maintenance. There was some discussion about air-conditioning but the clear consensus was that the very large cost could not be justified since the church was occupied by large congregations for only a few hours each week.

The priority issue at that time was the need to build two new classrooms (to replace sub-standard temporary rooms), a Library, Staff-room, Principal’s office, and toilet facilities, all for the Parish Primary School; and a Learning Centre primarily for Adult Education and available for use by the Primary School. The Parish had accumulated reserves of approximately \$100,000 and it was estimated that up to a further \$180,000 would be needed for the project. The Parish Pastoral Council approved this proposal in October 1975 and a professionally managed Planned Giving Program was commissioned to raise the funds for this work. The cost of the Parish Learning Centre part of the project was estimated at approximately \$180,000 in 1975. The completed new buildings were commissioned during 1977.

The Learning Centre became a vital part of Adult Education and Social Justice Studies for the Archdiocese for many years until these responsibilities were taken on by the Archdiocese. Fr Howe was appointed first Chair of the Brisbane Archdiocese Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, established by the late Archbishop Francis Rush in 1985, when it held its first meeting in what was then the Indooroopilly Parish Learning Centre.

Prep Classes were introduced by Brisbane Catholic Education in 2007. To accommodate this expansion of the Primary School, the Parish agreed to hand over the Parish Learning Centre to be modified to provide the necessary spaces. In return, BCE contributed a sum of money to Parish Funds. The writer has no record of the amount involved but recalls that it was of order \$100,000.

Whatever the amount, those funds were sufficient to pay for all the cost of building the Parish Office and meeting rooms and facilities in the undercroft of the church building, except for Installation of windows and glass panels in the external walls.

Maintenance of Holy Family Church

When the church was being designed the Parish Priest, Fr Roberts, was confident that the reinforced concrete roof did not require water proofing – despite expert Engineering advice to the contrary. But the roof leaked badly during heavy rainfall and a water proofing membrane was attached to the roof. This was a bituminous membrane, reinforced with fibres, with the trade name Nuralite. (Tests on a sample from the roof completed in July 2002 reported “Chrysotile Asbestos Detected”.)

Little maintenance was done to the Church until problems resulting from the lack of it became obvious in the years after 2000.

Maintenance Stage 1: The membrane covering the roof had deteriorated badly (See Fig 1). During rain, water leaked from many cracks in the roof and the Perlite coating on the ceiling fell on to the pews and floor. Then cockatoos began to strip parts of the membrane from the edges of the roof.



Fig 1 Deteriorated Roof Membrane in 2012

The chief matter before the Parish Council was the repair of the church building with focus on the exterior of the roof and sides and the repair/replacement of the windows. Reports had been obtained from an architect, Catherine Baudet, and an Options Report had been commissioned from Arup Facades. Estimates of cost had been obtained and contact with Archdiocesan authorities had been initiated by Fr Pat Richards PP of St Thomas Aquinas Parish St Lucia who had been appointed Administrator of Holy Family Parish when the parishes had been combined in 2001. In May 2002 Fr Bill McCarthy was appointed as co-Pastor of Holy Family Parish. The two parishes were separated again in May 2006 and Fr McCarthy was made Parish Priest of Holy Family Parish. He arranged for election of new members to an enlarged Parish Pastoral Council after asking the five current members to continue, with the writer as Chair. The understanding was that an election for half the Council would be held every year from 2007.

The new PPC resumed the planning for repairs to the church and Arup Facades were commissioned to prepare contract documents suitable for the calling of tenders. After revisions, these documents were ready for submission to Archdiocesan authorities at the time the writer went overseas in June 2007 for a son's wedding. He had ensured that work would proceed by insisting that Fr McCarthy appoint a deputy Chair (Rick Scott) before he departed.

When the writer returned from overseas in August 2007, he went to Holy Family church for Mass on the first Sunday, expecting to see some scaffolding in place and action started, only to discover that there would be no Mass because Fr McCarthy was in hospital. In fact, nothing had been done to progress matters relating to the church building since June 2007.

Repair of the roof to eliminate the leakages had the highest priority. Fr Bill Mc Carthy decided to have a steel roof added after rejecting options for replacing the water-proofing membrane. The work for the steel roof was done between late 2013 to early 2014 and was managed by Stuart Lumis, Director of Planning & Building Archdiocese Services (See Figs 2 and 3).

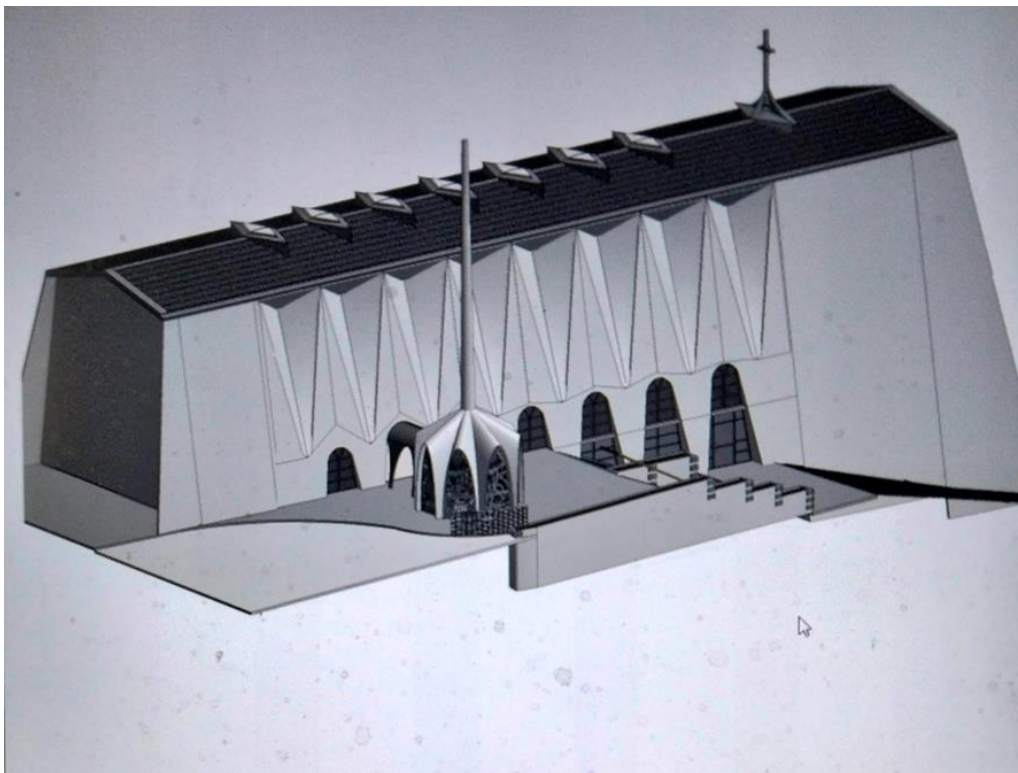


Fig 2 Sketch showing proposed Steel Roof

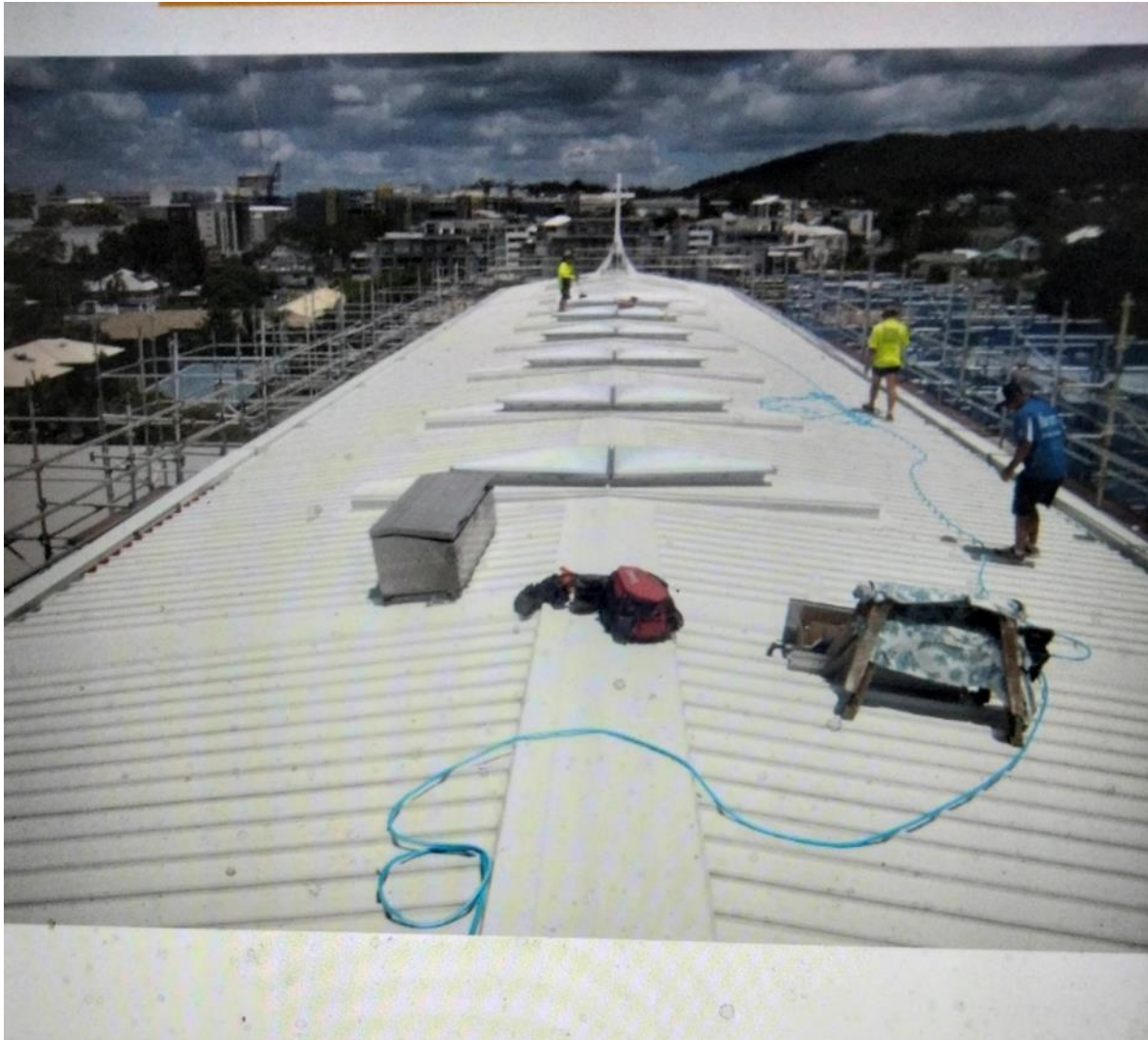


Fig 3 Completed Steel Roof – view towards Central Avenue

Maintenance Stage 2: After Fr Bill McCarthy died on July 18 2014, Fr Nev Yun was appointed to lead Holy Family Parish. The Parish Pastoral Council set up a committee – the Building Assets Task Group (BATG) - to plan and guide the maintenance required. The task group was led by a parishioner, Georges Lefevre. The maintenance works planned by this Task Group were managed by David Friend from Archdiocesan Property & Building Services.

Testing of concrete quality in walls – Some parishioners had raised concerns about possible danger from spalling of lumps of concrete from the outside of church walls.

The external walls were washed down and a thorough engineering analysis of the concrete quality was done in Jan-Feb 2017, prior to painting. Though the quality of the concrete varied considerably, no evidence of spalling was detected.

Painting of exterior walls – There was widespread surface cracking of the external walls. These cracks were sealed before the walls were painted in the period Dec 2017 – Feb 2018.

Repair of retaining wall – The retaining wall fronting Ward Street had developed a dangerous lean towards the footpath. The wall was replaced and associated work was done in the stairway, including stepping down of the planting box on the stairway, improved lighting and replacement of the asphalt

at the entrance to the Church with concrete. Extra blockwork was added to the top of the wall to satisfy safety requirements (See Fig 4). This work was done from late 2019 to early 2020.



Fig 4 New Retaining Wall, Central Garden and Lighting

Socketing of internal drains – The external roof drains eventually feed into drains inside the lower section of the walls of the church near the top of the windows. During rainfall, water was leaking into the church through the construction joint near the bottom of the arch in the window openings. Inspection with a CCTV inserted into the drains showed that the drains had been formed around tubing that had deteriorated completely and that the rainwater had direct contact with the concrete. The remedy was to line the drains with sleeving soaked with water-proof resin that hardened in place.

Maintenance completed and approximate dates

- Steel Roof construction \$305,535 (late 2013 to early 2014)
- Concrete quality test \$11,072 (Jan-Feb 2017)
- Painting including preparations \$106,589 (Dec 2017 – Feb 2018)
- Retaining Wall etc \$150,365 (late 2019 – early 2020)
- Socketing of internal drains \$78,149 (early 2020)
- **Total** **\$651,710**

The BATG also arranged purchase of two large fans to improve the ventilation inside the church.

The Future

The BATG was considering options for repair of the window opening mechanisms. They are complicated and the details vary. Many no longer work and all need replacement with modern systems. Some window glass is cracked and needs replacement. But the COVID-19 lock-downs put an end to all such work. Fr Nev Yun was transferred at short notice during this time and the BATG went out of existence.

Unfortunately, maintenance of the windows remains to be done.

Most of the major maintenance items described above should not require any further substantial work for many years.

However, it was recommended by the contractors that the painting of the external walls be redone at 10-year intervals; due next in 2029/30.

Notes concerning Finance

The Parish Finance Committee was responsible for oversight of the expenditure on the listed maintenance works. The parish had accumulated sufficient equity to fund the projects completed prior to 2019. The Finance Committee Meeting Minutes for 16/10/19 recorded that "Work has been completed in preparing submissions for (1) the replacement of the Front wall, and associated infrastructure (\$140K) and (2) Church drainage (socking) (\$70K). Both of these projects were considered to be priorities by the BATG. It was confirmed that HF Parish had sufficient funds to fund these projects although this would reduce the contingency from the desired \$100K to \$40K."

So, the Parish had sufficient financial resources to fund all of the maintenance works detailed above, leaving a contingency of "40K". At that time the number of worshippers was much greater than it is in 2026 and the financial resources were greater. For example, the "net profit" in the year ending 31/12/2017 was \$49,373.25.

Circumstances have changed very much since then. According to the Holy Family Parish 2024 Financial Report, the total income was \$144,136.

Collections totalled \$90,122 and most of other income came from hire of hall, \$19,709, and OSHC, \$25,787. The Surplus was \$15,274.

If this level of funding continues it will be a challenge to finance repainting of the exterior walls at 10-year intervals, likely to cost approximately \$100,000.

Funding the on-going maintenance of the Church building

In her evaluation of Holy Family Church, Architect Lisa Marie Daunt stated her opinion about maintenance of the building -

"Nonetheless, Holy Family is arguably one of the most expressive and memorable modern churches in Australia. It should enjoy greater national recognition, and certainly deserves better protection and care."

"Today, more than fifty years later, the current congregation (very commendably) has taken on the responsibility of repairing and conserving its landmark church. This significant, challenging and costly task should, however, not fall only on a small group of people, but should be carried by the architectural community of Queensland, and the state's heritage department. Holy Family Catholic Church is a community asset, embodying many memories of a time when religion was held in greater

respect by Australian society, and when church design, “modern” religious art and experimental “modern” architecture were all at their peak.” (1)

The question remains – how can the named organisations be persuaded to provide financial support for the on-going maintenance of the Church?

If application for State Heritage is considered the advice of Archdiocesan Services must be obtained before any action is taken because serious constraints can apply once a building is listed for State Heritage. In particular, the window mechanisms should be fixed with modern technology beforehand.

References

1. Lisa Marie Daunt; “Divine inspiration: Holy Family Catholic Church, Indooroopilly” Architecture Australia, May 2019.