

Pius X Church

Address 98 Channel Highway, Taroona, Tasmania

Practice J.H. Esmond Dorney

Designed 1958 Completed 1959

History & Description

The church sits in a bush setting that slopes down to the Derwent River. Set below & well back from the highway the red 'barrel vaulted' corrugated-iron roof of the church is just visible through the trees. The church was placed along the contours to allow the worshippers to enter directly off the curved approach street & to create an impressive view of the north elevation back up the slope. The single door entry is off centre on the higher side & is protected & delineated by a part cantilevered flat-barrel vaulted canopy. The façade here is given a three-dimensional treatment with the upper part of the vaulted roof cantilevering out over a recessed central wall of steel framed glazing. The glazed wall is divided into five vertical & four horizontal pannels with vertically proportioned. On entering the church interior its lightweight tubular steel structure is clearly displayed. The pipe columns, ties & curved roof members are fully expressed; columns are set proud of the interior plywood lining & the roof battens exposed over the pipe 'ribs'. In contrast to the treatment of the street facade the two side 'structural' elevations are planar & exhibit a play of positive & negative 'skin' with the greater areas of glazing in the north façade set between the column & solid panel bays while the columns are placed within narrow glazed panels in the south façade. The frame is cross braced with pipe sections in each end bay. Externally the painted fibre-cement sheet cladding extends over each column with the base of each column exposed below floor level, fixed onto external engaged concrete piers. Every alternate column is 'buttressed' with a smaller pipe section supported off a 'colonnade' of isolated concrete piers.

The budget for the church was constrained with construction materials being low cost & readily available. The traditional form provides a place of worship with an inspiring & uplifting ambience.

Esmond Dorney was an innovative & influential architect in Tasmania after the WWII. Originally from Victoria he first worked for Walter Burley Griffin & Marion Mahoney in Melbourne, before expanding his interests into engineering with the firm of Johns & Waygood. After returning to Australia from RAF service in WWII he established his own practice in Tasmania. The design of the church is contemporaneous with his design of the nationally significant Young House, Sandy Bay, with its curved roof forms. His methodology & buildings were seen as individual & experimental which influenced a generation of Tasmanian architects. The steel pipe vaulted structure aesthetic of the Pius X Church predates the work of Glenn Murcutt & Richard Le Plastrier in the 1970 & 1980s in NSW.

Statement of Significance

The Pius X Church is an excellent example of a building that demonstrates a theme of modern architecture with planning of the principle mass determined by simple geometry, the juxtaposing of three-dimensional with planar facade treatment, large areas of glass & plane smooth wall surfaces, & a light steel-framed vault combined with exposed diagonal bracing. It is believed to be the earliest example of this in an ecclesiastical building in Australia & is otherwise a rare example. The massing reflects its ecclesiastical function. The church is the most important non-residential work by one of Australia's notable architects J.H. Esmond Dorney.

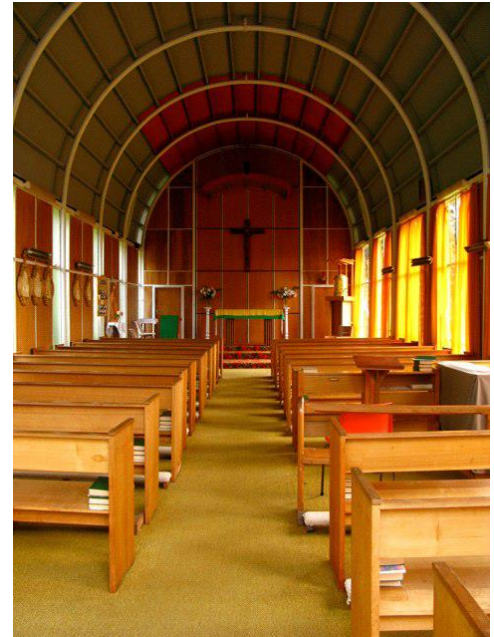
Criteria Applicable

N3 Important heritage value in establishing a high degree of creative achievement.

N5 Having a special association with the life or works of an architect of significant importance in our history.



View from street



Interior



North wall

Source: Tina Curtis