

Statement of Cultural Significance for Our Lady of Mercy Church, Mount Barker

UNDERSTAND SIGNIFICANCE

1 UNDERSTAND THE PLACE

Define the place and its extent

Investigate the place: its history, use, associations, fabric

Articles 5-7, 12, 26

ADDRESS: 5 Mann Street, Mount Barker

EXTENT: CT 871-109; Church, foyer, toilet block and rear garden.

HISTORY: On December 28, 1851 the foundation stone was laid by Bishop Murphy, for the original Saint Francis de Sales church which was officially opened by him on December 29, 1852. However, it was eventually considered that the location of the church was not convenient to the town's growing Catholic community; it was built over the other side of the railway, and away from the township's main area of later development.

A generous non-Catholic donor (Mrs Joanna Barr Smith) eventually presented a new site near the town in the vicinity of the Mount Barker Courier office and the Church of England, and it was apparently decided to erect a new church on this site. The foundation stone was laid by Father Roney S.J. on November 12, 1911.

Archbishop John O'Reilly wrote to Father Landy on 22 January 1911, consenting "to the erection of a building necessitating an expenditure, at the very highest of £1,500". The new building (of 1911) actually cost £2,300 to build. The land was presented as a gift to the church. In a private letter to Father Landy, Mrs Joanna Barr Smith wrote "I enclose my cheque. I very much object to seeing my name in public... so I hope you will be kind and accept my gift as a personal...". In his opening address to the congregation at the opening of the new church, the Archbishop commented "One lady, a non-Catholic, who bears an honoured name in South Australia, but who wishes that name untold, bought out of her own purse and presented as a gift to the local congregation the very splendid site..."

The current church "Our Lady of Mercy" was opened by Father Landy on August 4, 1912. The old church was thereafter used as a school and hall with Father Landy residing at the old presbytery adjoining.

Additions to Our Lady of Mercy were made in 1928 and more extensive additions, including the St Francis de Sales foyer, kitchenette and storage room, were added in 1982 at a cost of \$62,000. The foyer is used for meetings and social gatherings, as an extension for the Church and for a cuppa after Sunday Mass. The Confessional was removed from the rear southern alcove of the Church when the St Francis De Sales foyer was added.

The Priest's Vestry was moved in 2003 from the northern side of the altar and the area opened up to become the Blessed Sacrament chapel. The Priest's vestry was moved to the Bell Tower, along with storage of vestments and the sacred objects.

EXTENT OF HERITAGE LISTING: Listed as a Local Heritage Place in the Mount Barker District Council Development Plan 2020, "Catholic Church; All facades, roof and walls supporting the roof", Heritage NR 16140, p430.

DESCRIPTION AND FABRIC: The foundation stone of this church building is dated 12 November 1911. The form and detailing is typical of the period, with asymmetrical composition, battered walling, and abstracted Gothic derived detail. Constructed of random coursed, stone, ruled and lined, with buttresses and surrounds to windows of brick and render, with stucco enrichments to parapets, hoods and moulds. The interior is dominated by heavy timberwork. The original form and dignity of the church is confused by several later additions.

INTERIOR: High raked ceiling in the main church with dark stained timbers. Floors were carpeted throughout in approximately 2010 ([please check date](#)). Walls painted in corn silk yellow. There is an assortment of stained glass windows from different eras and styles – these may be described more fully by

our local stained glass founder, Erni Tinesz. Small heritage Stations of the Cross wood plaques are mounted on the interior walls; these were retouched in 2019 by a South Australian artist. Pine pews are stained in clear varnish and require repair due to their age (one completed in 2020). All pews were cleaned and oiled in 2020 by a volunteer. The minimal storage available is managed very tightly.

USE: Our Lady of Mercy church is the sole Catholic church in Mount Barker. Masses continue to be held weekly throughout the year, attended by up to 20 people on weekdays and 160 on Sundays. Weddings, baptisms and funerals are held in the church. The Church is also accessible to parishioners for private prayer.

ASSOCIATIONS: (connections that exist between people and a place, including social and spiritual values and cultural responsibilities)

2 ASSESS CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Assess all values using relevant criteria

Develop a statement of significance

Article 26

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE VALUE: A large church, a late addition to the lexicon of churches and public buildings in Mount Barker, example of the growing importance of Catholicism in the community in the late 19th/early 20th century.

RELEVANT CRITERIA: (Under Section 23(4) of the Development Act 1993):

- (a) Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church displays historical, economic and social themes that are of importance to the local area.
- (b) it represents ways of life that are characteristic of the local area.
- (c) it has played an important part in the lives of local residents.
- (d) it displays design characteristics and construction techniques of significance to the local area.
- (e) it is associated with a notable local personality.
- (f) it is a notable landmark in the area.

STATEMENT OF CULTURAL VALUE: The church continues to provide an appropriate setting for the spiritual support and development of the Catholic community of Mount Barker and the surrounding area.

RELEVANT CRITERIA: (Under Section 23(4) of the Development Act 1993):

- (c) The Roman Catholic Church has played an important part in the lives of local residents who have worshipped and undertaken social activities with and through the Church.

STATEMENT OF SOCIAL VALUE: provide an assessment of this value.

RELEVANT CRITERIA: name the criteria used to develop this statement of value

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Describe the significance of this site.

DEVELOP POLICY

3 IDENTIFY ALL FACTORS AND ISSUES

Identify obligations arising from significance
Identify future needs, resources, opportunities and constraints, and condition
Articles 6,12

FUTURE NEEDS: In recent years the Mount Barker township has expanded from a rural town with a focus on dairying and related agricultural enterprises, with a population of some five thousand people, to an Adelaide dormitory town of some fifteen thousand people. With current rezoning it is expected to increase rapidly to thirty-five thousand people.

During this time the Catholic primary school of some two hundred and twenty student in 1990 has expanded to the Reception to Year 12 Saint Francis de Sales College with over seven hundred students. Sunday Mass attendances have remained static or have decreased over that time, despite the substantial increase in population throughout all urban centres in the extended parish.

Youth attendance at Sunday Mass and other services has decreased despite some 300% increase in children attending the Catholic School in Mount Barker since 1990. It is likely that up to 50% of students at the College are not Catholic, because many people see the Catholic School system as the 'cheap' form of private education. The Parish is currently active with the youth who attend Sunday Masses, but the Parish has a responsibility to appeal to and engage with the students of the College and to get them involved in the sacramental life of the Parish. After all we have a responsibility to bring all souls to God and this requires both faith (belief in Jesus Christ) and good works.

Mount Barker has a significant number of new families with young children moving into Mount Barker every week as manifested by the number of new houses being constructed and the number of new children coming to the College.

It is imperative that the Parish be equipped to reach out to and engage with these new Catholic arrivals. Having the appropriate infrastructure at Our Lady of Mercy Church is part of that challenge. The parish had cash resources at the end of December 2019 of \$322,974. However, the needs of the whole parish need to be considered when planning for infrastructure needs.

CONDITION: The Church is structurally sound and therefore not in need of replacement. However, a need for an increase in 'pew' space is required, particularly since COVID restrictions came into effect.

Ongoing maintenance is required to identify and address roof leaks and keep the roof in sound repair.

Appropriate heating and cooling is needed to ensure the reasonable comfort of those inside the church, including the parish priest, for a period of approximately 1-2 hours, 6 days per week.

4 DEVELOP POLICY

Articles 6-13, 26

5 PREPARE A MANAGEMENT PLAN

Define priorities, resources, responsibilities and timing
Develop implementation actions
Articles 14-28

CAPACITY: The Church is structurally sound and therefore not in need of replacement. However, a need for an increase in 'pew' space is required. This could be achieved by an additional Mass each Sunday, but priest availability is an issue. Mount Barker, with a population forecast to top thirty seven thousand people this year and reach fifty six thousand by 2036 (The Advertiser, 6th march 2020), could justify a redrawing of the parish boundary, but that possibility is too far in the future. Alternatively, incorporate the St Francis de Sales Foyer into the Church proper and relocate the kitchenette and all other activities elsewhere.

CAPACITY: The Church's confessional arrangements (i.e. the bell-tower, which is also the vestry) does not comply with current Church standards. A dual-room confessional could be located either back into the rear southern alcove, where it was initially located, or where the kitchenette is currently located.

VESTRY: The bell-tower is inadequate to be used as a store-room for the vestments and sacred vessels and vestry for both the priest and altar servers. Separate vestries should be made available for the priest and the altar servers and should also be located where the kitchenette and store-room are currently located.

TOILET BLOCK: The toilet block should be demolished and incorporated into a parish complex / youth centre. This is more so, because of the emphasis on making the site youth safe and friendly and prevent its use by the general community.

VINNIES COMPLEX: The current position could be retained or more likely it may need to be relocated further down the block, being at the eastern end of the car-park. On-site car-parking would need to be more extensive to accommodate an increased congregation and the after-hours use of a Youth Centre and/or hall.

ONSITE CAR PARK: Additional on-site car-parking sites must be planned and provided for once the location of other infrastructure is identified.

FENCING: Ageing asbestos fences require removal. Rear fencing is in a state of disrepair, and in some places has been removed altogether.

GARDEN: Mount Barker parishioners gathered in 2017 for a BBQ lunch and meeting outside the Parish House to discuss ideas for the land at the rear of the block. At this meeting many ideas were put forward, such as creating a quiet prayer garden and a visually inviting space, planting herbs and flowers of spiritual significance, and creating a picking garden for use in church.

Later suggestions include building a hall on the site (this is by far the most popular and recurring request) relocating the front car park to the rear of the block so that a front garden that is visually inviting can be designed and planted, adding disability parking on Kia Ora Street, changing the front vehicle entry to Kia Ora Street, and hedging the front perimeter and adding a heritage gate on Mann Street.

In 2020 St Francis de Sales College gained permission to develop the land at the rear of the Church as part of a year 8 religious instruction project. The garden project was designed by students and includes a labyrinth, frog pond, play area and native plants.

This project will be as constructed and given the stated objective of community access, would be located at the eastern end of the block. Community access would necessitate adequate lighting for 24 hour access; or rigid fencing if after-hours access is to be denied (for safety and/or security reasons).

The land is inspected on a quarterly basis for signs of vagrancy, with Vinnies alerted if necessary to ensure adequate help is provided to those in need.

MANAGE IN ACCORDANCE WITH POLICY

6 IMPLEMENT THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Articles 26-34

7 MONITOR THE RESULTS AND REVIEW THE PLAN

Article 26