

The Spirit of St Canice

There have been three Parishes in my life. I was baptised, made my first communion and was married to Mark 25 years ago this month at Holy Rosary in suburban Perth. I watched my daughters' sacramental journeys unfold with their school at St Francis of Assisi in Paddington. But I've chosen St Canice to be my faith community for the past twenty years. Today I wanted to reflect on the spirit of the place and how this has shaped the spirit of this community.

In architecture and urban planning we talk about the genius loci of a place – which is a way of recognising how a place becomes special and distinctive and memorable. Genius loci goes beyond the physical qualities of space. It starts with this site at the foot of Kings Cross, with the theatre of the steps on the street, and with the warmth of the sandstone of this beautiful building. It's also the rich ecosystem of the different groups and communities that live and work in the parish, and all the people who have come to rely on the work of the parish to make it through their own lives. This parish is made up of many extraordinary people and we're capturing their stories of faith and grace and service on our website in 2014.

Father Steve Sinn spent many years working on the restoration of St. Canices – repairing the sandstone and the waterproofing, upgrading the lighting. When he moved the church pews he also renewed our relationships with each other. The first experiment was to turn the front section to face the back of the church with the altar in the middle. Steve eventually settled on the configuration we use now, where the liturgy is celebrated along the length of the nave in a space that we create and hold.

Winston Churchill said that we shape our buildings and then our buildings shape us. I think this setting, in this space, is one of the keys to understanding the spirit of St Canice's. This is a parish that finds God in each other as we celebrate the mass. We use the richness of these relationships to find God in all things. This is parish that weaves together the principles of Vatican II, the richness of Ignatian spirituality and the challenge of being part of the Catholic Church in Sydney in 2014.

This is a parish that is building the city of God.

Sue Wittenoom, St Canice 125th Anniversary Mass, 4 May 2014