

Wesley Uniting Church, Forrest, ACT

Property Development 1999 – 2002

Overview

The original Church on the site in National Circuit, Forrest was opened in 1930 in the building that is now known as Wesley Hall. The current Church was opened on the site in 1955.

Major extensions to the Wesley Uniting Church property were opened on 8 September 2002. The key elements of the project were:

- a balcony within the church providing an additional 120 seats;
- a new main entrance at the northern end of the church;
- glass cladding to the sides of the church to improve heating and cooling and ducted gas heating to replace the old radiators under the pews;
- an administrative wing to accommodate ministers and provide a meeting room, front office and reception area;
- a large multi-use foyer with kitchenette;
- a Music Centre with a high quality auditorium and meeting and administrative facilities;
- a semi-circular entry hall linking the foyer, church and music centre;
- new and extended car parking arrangements.

The total project cost was just over \$2.5m, over 90% of which was contributed or committed by the congregation prior to the completion of the project. The Architect was Mr Ric Butt of Strine Architects and the Project Manager, Mr Sam de Lorenzo of Integrated Construction Management Services.

The Process

Over many years in the 1990's the Church Council had discussed ways of addressing shortcomings in the facilities at Wesley which were having a negative affect on the activities and plans for growth in the mission of the church. It was also becoming clear that with the start of government development of open spaces across National Circuit, the Wesley congregation could be put under pressure to justify what could be seen as an underutilised property.

Possibilities for the development of new ventures at Wesley such as child care or aged care were investigated but rejected. It was agreed that priority should be given to addressing the needs of current activities - the need to increase the capacity of and enhance the entry to the church, the need for a gathering space, particularly for mingling after services of worship, the need for adequate office accommodation, the poor connection between the church and the other facilities, the inadequate parking arrangements and the urgent need for appropriate accommodation for the growing music ministry.

Early in 1999 the Church Council asked its Property Development Committee, then chaired by John Sanderson, to consult with the congregation and come up with a plan. In 2000 John Sanderson moved to Western Australia and John Grant was appointed as chair. The committee members were:

John Grant (Chair)

Jos Webber (Deputy Chair)

Elizabeth Richardson (Secretary)
Jim Cox
Chris Emery
Glenda McDowall
Garth Mansfield
Harold Small
Rev. Chris Udy

Over an 18 month period input on needs and aspirations was obtained from all groups within the Wesley congregation. A project brief was then drawn up and Mr Ric Butt of Strine Design was appointed as architect with the initial task of preparing sketch plans for further consultation and for costing by a quantity surveyor.

Plans to conduct a fundraising campaign were also prepared with specialist input from Jim Cox and liaison with the Wesley Music Foundation. The campaign was launched in May 2001 at a very well-attended whole-of-congregation meeting in conjunction with the presentation of final sketch plans for the project.

The early results of the fundraising campaign were extremely encouraging, both in terms of major donors and the high percentage of church members who committed themselves to up-front or continuing donations. This enabled the Property Development Committee to recommend to the Church Council a total project cost of some \$2m. After fine-tuning, a final project cost of just over \$2.2m. was approved.

Following a further whole-of congregation meeting and subsequent approval by the Church Council the project brief was presented to Presbytery which also gave its endorsement. A Development Application was then processed through the ACT Government.

With the project now having the green light, an early decision of the Committee was to appoint a project management company, Integrated Construction Management Services (ICMS) to oversee the project.

The Property Development Committee then worked intensely with the architect and project manager to finalise the detailed plans and get the construction under way. During this period of nearly two years, the committee met fortnightly, with all members giving additional time on particular aspects – fundraising, liaison with Presbytery and Synod, consultations with the congregation, budgeting, liaison with the project manager and architect, site inspections, etc.

Construction went smoothly save for one relatively minor incident when part of the external wall near the new entry to the church collapsed in a severe storm. Fortunately this occurred out of hours and no-one was injured.

Along the way a Landscaping Sub-Committee was formed with Jack Morschel, Margaret Mansfield, Elizabeth Richardson and others who planned and executed new garden beds, with the help of many volunteers. The Memorial Garden which had been temporarily moved to the manse grounds was reestablished.

The final project cost reached \$2.5m as a result of two major factors – a higher standard of fit-out,

especially acoustically in the Music Centre, and a larger footprint for the main church entry foyer than originally planned.

The Opening

The opening and dedication of the new facilities took place on 8 September 2002, commencing with a smoking ceremony conducted by Ngunnawal Elder Matilda House and a welcome by Elder Agnes Shea. The dedication service was led by Rev Chris Udy and Rev Peter Walker. The Moderator of the NSW Synod, Margaret Reeson, re-dedicated the Church. The key to the new facilities was presented to John Grant by Sam DeLorenzo.

The Result

All the additional facilities have been put to good use, significantly enhancing the ongoing activities at Wesley and generating many new activities. The performance and educational programs of the Music Centre have grown to new levels, the new church foyer is constantly used for a wide range of activities and the new administrative wing provides good accommodation for Ministers, staff and volunteers.

The indigenous symbolism provides a permanent acknowledgement of Australia's heritage. The new church entry and corridor provides a link to all the facilities regardless of weather. The new parking arrangements accommodate many more cars and provide a significant source of income.

Dr John Grant
June, 2017

[Attachments:](#)

Canberra Times article of 9 September, 2002

Photograph of the Project Manager, Sam De Lorenzo, presenting the key to John Grant during the dedication service.