

## Fire!!



A fire on May 15, 2015 caused considerable damage to the church of Our Lady of the Nativity at Lawson. The pulpit was completely destroyed, the timber floor and ceiling of the sanctuary were damaged by fire and heat, also statuary, the altar, windows and other furnishings suffered damage. Some items, like the Stations of the Cross, the Baptismal Font and the Church Pews suffered damage from smoke, heat and ash but, fortunately, were able to be restored. However, this tragedy required the undertaking of major renovations to bring the church back to a useable condition including a complete re-painting of the interior, new carpet, replacement of all windows, a new staircase to the choir loft, Re-structuring of the Sanctuary platform, a new Crucifix and Statue of Our Lady and New Sanctuary Furniture.

A team of parishioners, together with Fr. Paul Slyney formed a committee to plan for these renovations and to oversee their execution.

The concept for the new furniture for the sanctuary of Our Lady of the Nativity Church at Lawson grew from two basic considerations. It was felt that the new furniture should form a set of individual pieces with a strong relationship in style to each other but have a visually light and uncluttered appearance. Hence the “see-through” character of the larger pieces, that don’t act as a barrier but rather add more dimension to the small space of the sanctuary. Function, of course, was the other consideration and this involved some lengthy discussions on where the various elements



should be placed. A couple of things influenced this. Our old pulpit was destroyed in the fire and the decision was taken to have a lectern instead and to locate this closer to the altar. This opened up a clear space to feature our new Statue of Mary and meant that the Baptismal Font could form the centre-piece of a Baptistry on the opposite side of the sanctuary.



The decision was also taken to change the sanctuary floor to one level. This meant the building of a small platform in the apse to elevate the Tabernacle on a plinth so that it was the focal-point of the church behind the altar.

The furniture itself was designed with the overriding thought that it should quietly contribute to the mystery of its purpose, of facilitating the Presence of Christ among us. Jesus was a carpenter. What better way to express this than to furnish his house with very simple, but finely crafted, timber pieces that show the beauty of natural materials transformed by skilful hands into elegant but unpretentious objects.

All the timber used is Australian hardwood. The deep red timber is Red Ironbark and the paler one is recycled Blackbutt. All the joints are handcrafted and, if you look closely, you will see that these joints are re-enforced with timber dowels and wedges made from the same timbers. All surfaces are finished with about five or six coats of Danish Oil.



Perhaps the most unusual piece on the sanctuary is the new Pascal Candle Stand. The design is a symbolic representation of Christ's Burial and Resurrection. It consists of a base that has three steps, a symbol of the three days in the tomb. The main column, made from a beautifully figured blackbutt timber, has three depressions along its length that are bound by contrasting timbers that represent the containment of the tomb and the fact that it was under guard. At the last depression, at the top of the column, the binding is releasing its grip and from the centre rises the Pascal candle through an opening bronze dish, a symbol of the Resurrection.







The completed renovation

A couple of years before the fire, the parish was donated a statue of Mary by Trish Fitzgerald, of Bullaburra. This statue has an interesting history and previously belonged to Trish Fitzgerald's late father, Dave. When it first arrived it was painted in white enamel but was in need of repair. It is a timber statue, so the decision was taken to remove the enamel paint. Some of the process of this repair is illustrated below which revealed a very fine carving.







But the biggest surprise was under the base.



Under the base, in crude lettering, is written:

**“TO DAVE FITZGERALD, AT, MARY GLEN LEURA  
WAS ST PATRICK CHURCH HILL  
CONVICT STATUE  
FROM SERVANTS OF MARY SURRY HILLS”**

It is quite possible that it was carved by a convict. Extensive research has not been able to trace its history, nor does the donor have an answer to this mystery.

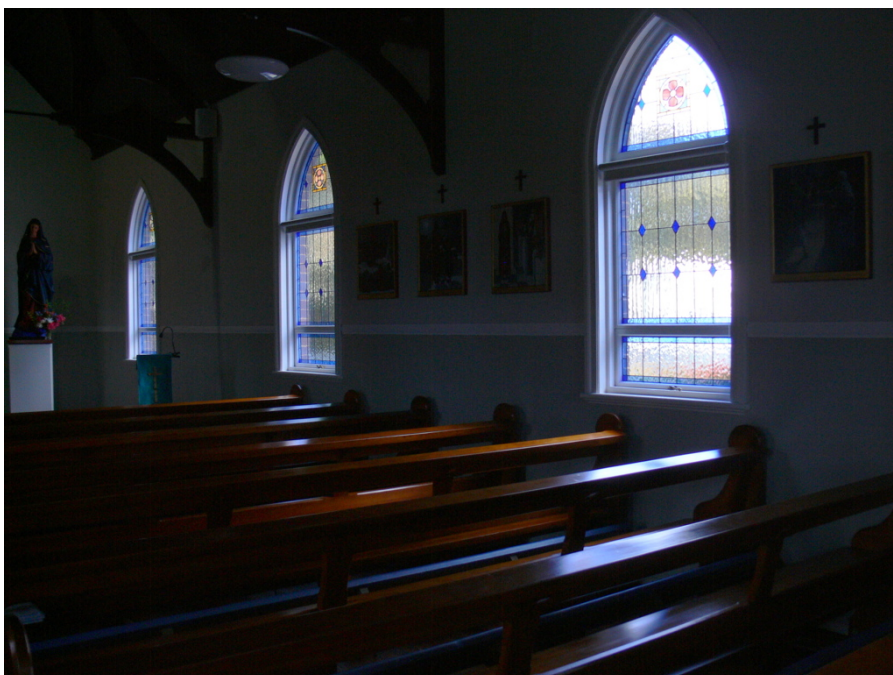
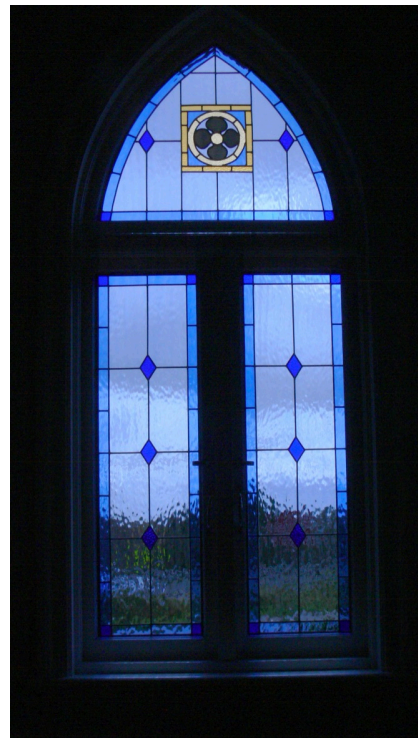




In the interior of the church, at the base of two gothic arches, one over the sanctuary and the other over the exit to the porch, are floral reliefs, in plaster of a four petalled flower. This same relief motif occurs on the exterior of the church at the base of the three front windows. No known explanation for the symbolism of this motif has been found. However, it must have been of some significance to the original designers of the church for it to have been used so prominently. Two of these plaster reliefs were missing on the arch over the altar but a cast was taken of one of those at the exit in order to complete the altar arch.



In designing new windows for the church, the decision was made to use this same floral motif at the top of each of the windows.

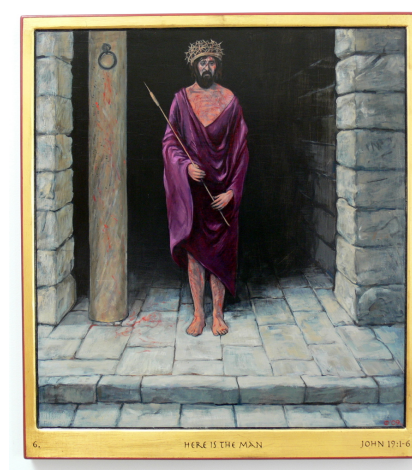




## The Stations of the Cross

The Stations of the Cross at Our Lady of the Nativity are all original oil paintings and form a *Scriptural Way of the Cross*, as all the images are derived directly from the texts of the New Testament. This is not necessarily the case with the images found in a *traditional* set of Stations of the Cross where the source of some images may not be supported by the texts of the gospels. *(under the 'Prayer' menu on this website you can see all the scriptural references and texts used for each of the images in these Stations and the prayers used when praying the Way of the Cross.)*

All of these paintings were damaged in the fire by smoke, heat and soot but were successfully restored by the artist, who made some slight adjustments to the images in the process.







*The Way (or Stations) of the Cross is a devotion to the Passion of Christ. In Catholic tradition the Way of the Cross consists of prayers and meditations on fourteen occurrences experienced by Christ on his way to the Crucifixion and burial.*

*During the time of the crusades (1095-1270) it became popular for pilgrims in the Holy Land to walk in the footsteps of Jesus to Calvary. In the later Middle Ages the Stations of the Cross became a popular substitute pilgrimage throughout Europe after the Moslems recaptured the Holy Land.*

*Devotional manuals about the Stations date from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Particularly the Franciscans, who obtained a special indulgence from Pope Innocent XI, in 1686, for those who performed the devotion, fostered the popularity of the Stations of the Cross. Originally conducted outdoors, the Stations were allowed inside churches in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. Pope Clement XII in 1731 settled the number as fourteen. Today images of the Stations are a familiar feature in Catholic churches.*

*Pope John Paul II on Good Friday in 1991, and again in 1994, officiated at a Scriptural Way of the Cross, in the Coliseum at Rome. The traditional number of Stations is retained, but the events recalled are those referred to in the Scriptures, and have the advantage of providing a Scriptural reading upon which to meditate.*



*A new timber sculpture of the Risen Christ,  
by Sydney artist, Englebert Piccoluraz*

*Was commissioned to replace the Crucifix damaged in the fire.*