

# St Francis Xavier Cathedral

Address Cathedral Avenue, Geraldton, WA, 6530

Practice Monsignor John Hawes

Designed 1913-1936 Completed 1938

History & Description Architect-priest Fr John Hawes prepared plans for the cathedral in 1913, although work did not commence until 1916. The first portion built was the western half of the church, the nave with its twin tower facade facing the Indian Ocean. An eclectic design, the intent was 'to avoid any slavish imitation of past styles: to give character and expression to the building by austere simplicity of design and by harmonious proportions of the several parts. All useless ornamentation and elaboration that would lead to extra expense have been rigidly avoided. There are no traceried windows, pinnacles or carved decorations. Solidity and massiveness have been chosen rather than prettiness and elegance'.

The first portion of the cathedral was opened in August 1918. Of stylistic influences, the cathedral was initially designed in Romanesque style, with the facade being reminiscent of the Franciscan Missions of California. In 1926, the crypt was extended eastwards and the sanctuary was completed above it, with this portion opened in 1928.

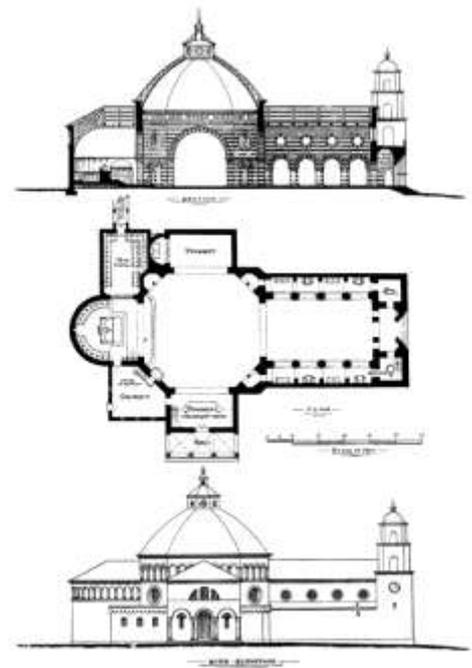
Hawes' ideas for the cathedral in the 1930s were different to those of the preceding two decades. He had made a transition in style that can be observed by examining the final stage, commenced in 1937 and completed in August 1938 when the finished cathedral was opened. When compared with medieval cathedrals, often built over centuries and including several different architectural styles, the Geraldton cathedral construction period of twenty-five years is short. However Geraldton reveals similar evolutionary factors, and its conception and realisation illustrates the pace of change in the early Twentieth Century.

Statement of Significance *St Francis Xavier Cathedral* has inherent aesthetic value to the Australian community, evidenced by being a much visited place commonly regarded as beautiful and engaging; *The Cathedral* demonstrates its aesthetic and historic value to the community through its propensity to contribute to appreciation of and to teach of John Cyril Hawes' life, and his international architectural and liturgical works; and *The Cathedral* illustrates the historic theme of development of architecture and liturgical arts, and engineering in Australia.

Criteria Applicable N1, N2, N3, N4, N5



Aerial photo from north c.1940 (*Between Devotion and Design* p.190)



Hawes' first design for St Francis Xavier Cathedral was produced at Rome, Italy in December 1913. The section, plan, and north-east elevation were published in *The British Architect* of 27 November 1914, p.297 (*Between Devotion and Design* p.51)



John Hawes with his beloved *Dominie* in 1933 (*Between Devotion and Design* p.119)



View of entry from north-west (John Taylor, 2004)