

THE CHURCH IN THE BUSH

NATURALLY INSPIRED GRANTS RECIPIENT



Naturally Inspired Grant recipient, the PIUS X Church team, undertaking works.



One of the first things to strike you about St Pius X Catholic Church in Taroom is its surroundings.

Set in coastal bushland, parishioners must find it difficult to keep their eyes on the pulpit when the church offers beautiful views of surrounding eucalypt trees and the broad River Derwent.

“Esmond Dorney didn’t want curtains used in the church,” says Paul Picone, who has been helping St Pius X restore the celebrated architect’s original vision of the church and the way it interacts with its surroundings, by creating several native garden beds.

“His vision was for the eucalypts outside to provide a natural bush curtain, letting in dappled sunlight.”

Built in 1957 the church’s modernist design (using lightweight steel pipe) has been listed on the register of the National Estate and is now recognised as the first modernist church in Australia.

Instead of using traditional stained glass windows, its eastern, southern and northern facades are made of clear glass window panes, which flood the interior with natural light.

Unfortunately disease and safety precautions have taken a toll on the eucalypts that once shaded the church, but with the help of NRM South’s Naturally Inspired Grants, the parishioners are slowly bringing Dorney’s original vision back to life by surrounding the church with native trees and shrubs.

The native garden was first started with the help of the Country Women’s Association, and the church has also had help from Paddy Dorney, Esmond Dorney’s son and himself an architect by profession, who explained his father’s original vision of a church at one with its natural surroundings.

Local botanist Kris Schaffer has provided valuable expertise, along with the dedicated volunteers of the Taroom Environment Network, in identifying and removing invasive weeds such as blackberry, cape weed and boneseed, and also in providing advice on suitable native species to plant.

“NRM South has been critical to the success of this project by providing funds on two occasions. We’ve been delighted by how supportive they have been. Without their support this project would not have happened,” says Paul.

Strolling through the church grounds it’s obvious that Paul is impressed by just how quickly the native gardens have established and by the beautiful reflections they are already creating in the huge windows so integral to Esmond Dorney’s original vision.

“From every angle you get a different reflected view of the bushland,” he says.

“But my favourite view is from directly outside the front of the church. From here you can look in through the window and see the altar and church pews framed by a reflected image of the outside eucalypts. It’s just beautiful.”