

Studio B Architects

When church leaders or a community body decide that they need more or better space, how do they go about managing the process?

Below is an interview with Doug Mitchell, congregation member and project leader for St Alfred's Church complex, North Blackburn with whom Studio B (formerly BHY Architects) worked over a period of several years to bring this project to completion.

The Project Team

Fred Batterton: *What advice would you give a church leader wishing to undertake a project?*

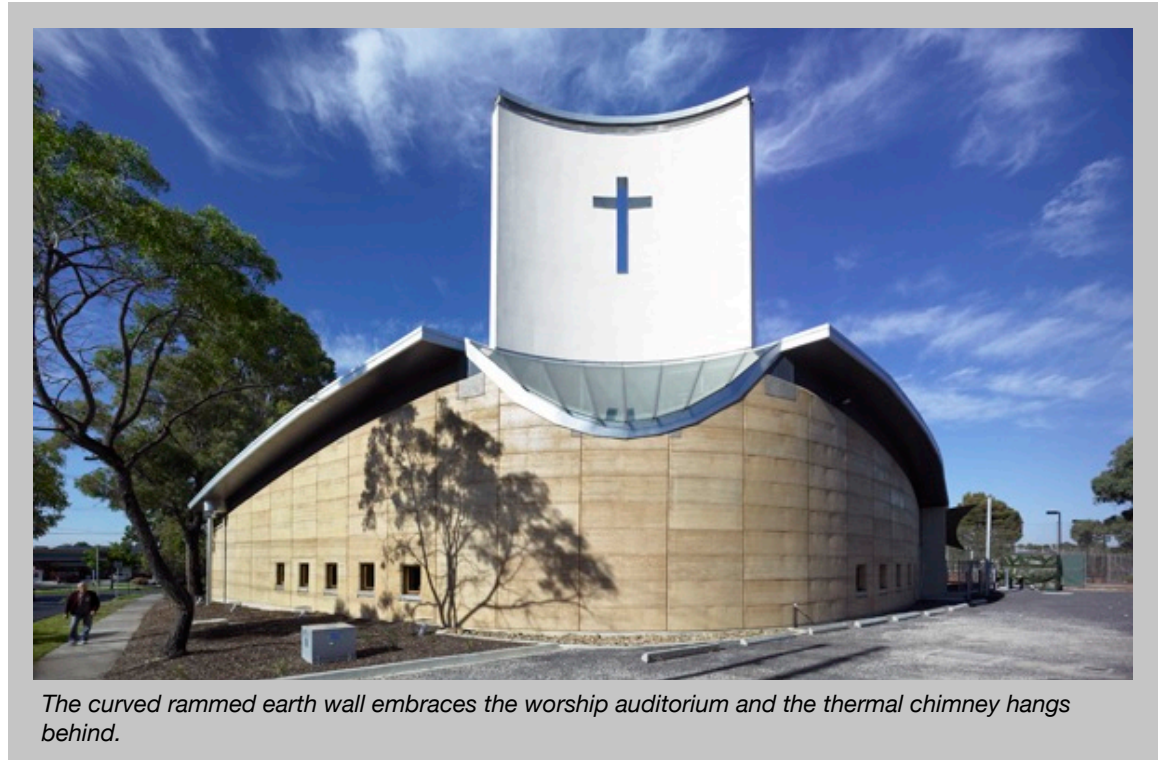
Doug Mitchell: I would encourage them to have a vision for the future growth path of their church and to see buildings as an integral tool for mission and that good design is paramount. The building should cater for all ages, zero – 100 and it therefore needs to be flexible.

Don't try to run the project yourself. There are too many other things for a pastoral leader to do. Set up the team with vision and good accountability including job descriptions, reporting and authority lines. Then be supportive and encouraging of the team as the project progresses.

Fred: *If you are asked to set up a committee of church members to represent the church, what skills would you look for?*

Doug: The team needs to comprise people who are trusted by the congregation and have a range of skills. Our team included business, finance, engineering, architecture, communication and had good relationships with the rest of the congregation. They proved themselves to be practical and tenacious with a sound faith that was stretched and grew.

Together with an ability to lead, there's also need to build good relationships with the governing body of the church, the denomination, and to liaise with the municipal



The curved rammed earth wall embraces the worship auditorium and the thermal chimney hangs behind.

council, architect and other professionals as well as the builder. This leadership should be inclusive but decisive.

Fred: *How many team members is ideal?*

Doug: We had seven members on our team, with all of the skills mentioned above, which worked well. We also had a specialist "tech team" who were responsible for audiovisual and data briefing. They enthusiastically continue with this area of interest now that the project is complete. A good sound system is paramount so people can hear clearly without it being too loud. Other "briefing teams" considered matters including children's needs and catering so that we could be forward thinking about what we needed.

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Fred: *What sort of time commitment was required?*

Doug: We met fortnightly for about an hour and a half, particularly at the planning stage. Team members often had things to do between each meeting and, depending upon the stage of the project, this might be major time commitment for a short period. Personally I probably spent at least six hours a week including the team meeting, preparing reports, attending church board meetings and communicating with the congregation.

The team leader is also likely to need to be able to attend meetings during business hours; for example meetings with the local council, regarding legal matters, meeting with consultants, attending VCAT if necessary and attending site meetings during construction from time to time.

Fred: *Can you say that you learned from or enjoyed the experience?*



The base of the north blade hangs over the platform. Air is drawn around and below the blade and into the thermal chimney flues on the back. The reflected light source creates a focus for the auditorium.

Doug: A resounding yes to both! I learnt a number of things including that prayer-backed action can bring astonishing results. I learned how to bring people together and focus on the task. By asking people to help with a specific task and being there to support them when it gets a difficult, they will respond with great

enthusiasm and do a great job. I also discovered that there is an enormous amount of goodwill towards the church in the community.

I enjoyed meeting many great people both within and without the church. It was good to see other people using their skills to make a contribution to the life of the church through the project when at other times they be less involved or even disengaged.

I enjoyed facing the many challenges and working through them, eventually seeing all of our wish list included in the final product. It was great to see the project completed and the church filled up to overflowing, the design working as it was planned, and I have enjoyed being able to share the story of our journey with people who have been both interested and supportive.



St Alfred's entry faces the street corner and a short-cut footpath between pedestrian lights and bus stop brings people close to the fully glazed front entry.

Fred: *Finally, has the outcome been worth the commitment?*

Doug: Again, a resounding yes! Every church and every project will be unique, part of the excitement is to start on the journey having in mind what the end result will look like and then seeing those plans develop and adapt as challenges come up along the way.

Many thanks to Doug and his team who continue to respond to the growth needs of St Alfred's

Next month: What Feeds Design?

Studio B Architects tel 03 9486 4425
www.studiob.net.au