

**Our new sanctuary furniture** is absolutely magnificent. The artists' description follows. A big thank you to all involved in the celebration last weekend. The evening was a truly Holy Spirit community effort. Visitors felt the warmth of our welcome and experienced our generous hospitality. The weather was just perfect for outdoor eating, sharing and dancing. God has been good to us – we can continue our full conscious and active participation in the celebration of liturgy in a beautiful environment.

**Artist's Statement:**

*The open arms of Christ are the primary symbol and metaphor inspiring this sanctuary furniture. One of the stories most powerful to me as a youth coming to the church was the story of the footprints in the sand. In that story you have a person who is looking back over their journey and they notice that at times on the journey there is only one set of footprints in the sand and at other times there are two sets of footprints. So the person turns to Christ and says, "Where were you at those most difficult times in my life?" and Christ says "I was carrying you."*

*So within this altar I have tried to capture that sense of the strong supporting arms of Christ that are there to carry us all through the most difficult times. Whilst making this piece I had the opportunity to reflect on my own spiritual journey and to recognize again that Christ has held me up.*

*James Krenov says "woodwork is essentially a solitary activity" and what I found during the making of this piece is that quite often my work became prayer and in those conversations with God I talked about integrity. This integrity was about how I made this furniture and gave to it my all, the integrity of a gift to the people of a parish that was dear to Father Paul Maloney and a gift that in its structure symbolizes the integrity of the parish itself.*

*I wanted the piece to reflect the love and compassion of Christ and this is articulated in gently curving lines. The solid strength of God is present in the table top but the way in which the top floats gently above creates a lightness and softness which is then accentuated by the fluidity as the pedestals slope downwards creating a sense of tenderness in the arms that open outwards to embrace. I have always imagined Christ as a very gentle and compassionate man who would reach down to those who are small, broken or wounded.*

*True symbolism must operate at many levels. The expectation of this furniture is that it is "capable of bearing the weight of mystery, awe, reverence, and wonder which the liturgical action expresses." Within the altar itself we have Christ's arms rooted to the earth as Christ was through his humanity. Within the glass is the invisibility of the Holy Spirit who is an essential part of the Trinity, and in a similar way the glass forms an essential function within the altar to support and raise up the table top, God the Father. The pure proportions of the top and its inherent simplicity of line float miraculously above the pedestals calling to mind the infinite nature of God. So within the three elements of the altar we have the symbolism of the trinity, the open arms of Christ, the Holy Spirit invisible but essential and the table; the meeting point at which we meet God in the presence of the Eucharist.*

*The arms of Christ reach outwards to welcome everyone to the table and yet at the same time they circumscribe the place of Christ, who is present in the people gathered for communion. Looking through the altar we see the waters of the baptismal font that flow uninterrupted towards the people. The chair is supporting the priest who sits enclosed by the arms of Christ. Within the lectern, the hands of Christ are turned to embrace the reader who literally holds up the word of God.*

*The Paschal Candle holder was commissioned after I had started on the sanctuary furniture and so I designed it in collaboration with the sculptor to continue the theme*



*of the open arms of Christ which hold up the light. Steel was chosen for its functionality as well as its reflective quality that illuminates the light of Christ.*

*The best thing as an artist in designing a piece is that it will live a life of its own and it will speak to many people in ways I will never imagine. Elements of the Parish's Mission statement are articulated within this furniture. "That we may be of service to others" is captured in the open arms of Christ reaching out to all to welcome and embrace. The arms encircle the church community to make them "one mind and one heart on the way to God." It is at the table of the Lord at the centre of the Church where the parishioners become one with Christ in the Eucharist. This is what nourishes and sustains the Parish Community.*

*If this sanctuary furniture is to witness to the sacraments of many generations within this Parish then it must speak symbolically at a deep level, it must be functional and it must be a work of aesthetic beauty that inspires reverence. St Thomas Aquinas argues that the truly aesthetic object renders three moments: *integras*, "wholeness", *consonantia*, "harmony" and *claritas*, "radiance".*

*Greg St. John ~ February 2004*