

In Acknowledgement of Mr John Hogan's 40-year contribution to the Diocese of Sandhurst

Mrs Wilma McCormak's Speech

My Lord, Most Rev. Shane Mackinlay, Very Rev. Dr. Brian Boyle, Mr John Hogan, Dr Paul Taylor, Choir Members, Sacred Heart Parishioners and friends.

We pay tribute to John today for his dedicated service for 40 years Ministry as Cathedral Organist, composer and Director of Music at the Sacred Heart Cathedral, Bendigo.

You may wonder why I have undertaken this role. I've been fortunate to be part of the choir for more than 34 years and have been privileged to participate and appreciated the great contribution John has made over the major part of those 40 years. These 40 years have been very eventful and busy years for John and the choir.

Paul mentioned that the choir had sung at a Papal Mass and as I was present at that Mass and have been a member of the choir from 1987 onwards, I thought it important to refer to the Mass and subsequent years. I contacted a choir member who had been with the choir since John Hogan began in 1980 and might be a good person to talk about the Papal Mass preparation and the early years of the choir with John. He was unavailable as he had booked a 2-week holiday at this time.

I happened to be at the Papal Mass because my husband, along with others, had been invited by John to be part of the choir on this occasion. The Sacred Heart Choir was one of the choirs at the Mass for the visit of Pope John Paul II to Melbourne as part of his 1986 visit to Australia. The Mass was rather spectacular and took place at Flemington Racecourse.

John then prepared us for the combined choirs Faure Mass performance at Kyneton in 1987. A wonderful challenge.

Another memorable performance was the singing of Allegri's Miserere at the Cathedral during Easter, which has only been sung once in the last 34 years by the choir.

The recording of the CD with a repertoire of sacred music was also exciting. Recording in the Cathedral was a new experience for the choir.

The ordinations of several priests, consecration of new Bishops, interring deceased Bishops, installing of the 5 French Bells and the visit of St Therese's relics have all been very special choral events for John and the choir.

Our Melbourne bus trip organised by John to St Francis in the city, concluding at Our Lady of Victories, Camberwell, where John had originally played the organ, was a memorable and very pleasurable excursion.

Group photographs of the entire choir and luncheons organised by John were times to celebrate and relax with the choir family.

The Marist Band Christmas Concert with the Sacred Heart Choir, the Easter Triduum and Midnight Mass were highlights for the choir each year.

While this snapshot of the last 40 years is by no means complete, it is very impressive that these and many other events were all organised by John.

His attention to every detail in conducting was amazing. The timing, dynamics, capturing the period of the music, the wishes of the composer, and his own wishes and interpretation were a lot to juggle whilst playing the organ and directing at the same time. As well, he has a great ear: anyone who made a mistake during rehearsal could quickly be detected and the music was repeated until all was well.

Occasionally, in the early days, we tried his patience too far, and he told the sopranos they may as well go gardening if that was the best they could produce. Then the basses would receive a serve when they did not perform up to expectations and were told that their efforts were “mud.”

However, John kept on composing and steering us through the Liturgical Year with an ever-increasing challenge of magnificent sacred choral works from the various musical periods, including singing in Russian and Greek, as well as the frequent Latin.

Visitors to the Cathedral were always complimentary on the quality of the music chosen and the singing of the choir. They were amazed that a regional cathedral could have such a wonderful sung Mass every Sunday.

A couple of behind-the-scenes humorous moments:

At the Easter vigil on Holy Saturday, with candles in hand all the choir were about to process into the Cathedral when it was noticed that Ethel looked all steamed up. Ethel’s ponytail was belching plumes of smoke after a careless choir member had held a candle too close to Ethel’s extraordinarily long and voluminous locks. Quickly, Stan with his large Catholic Worship Book banged her on the top of the head to extinguish the flame and all processed as normal. Not a note was missed in the procession, but some of the congregation may have mistaken any remnants of smoke for a second thurible in operation.

On a particularly hot morning during Mass, a resounding thud was heard on the choir loft floor. The Great West Window was either so hot, or our singing was so off-key, that a large black crow fell unconscious from the top of the window ledge.

Jack, a courageous choirboy, quickly picked up the bird, raced downstairs and set it free. Unperturbed, the choir in true professional spirit, continued unruffled.

We have had fire, heat and floods to contend with on the way from the choir room to assembling for Mass. On two occasions hail and water flooding from the roof had made a waterfall for us to walk through while ascending the stairwell to the landing. Some choir members resorted to carrying umbrellas in order to keep both themselves and their music dry. We had been tutored by John to cope with all predicaments. After every Sunday rehearsal, regardless of what challenges were thrown our way, John told us to go and enjoy the Mass.

John, for your contribution as organist, conductor and composer, we thank and honour your tireless work with the Sacred Heart Choir. All the while you taught at Catholic College and never missed a practice or Mass except for one brief week when you went overseas for a Conductors’ Conference. In addition to your choir work, you conducted school Masses and graduations for Catholic Colleges, played for weddings, funerals, festivals and other special occasions for Bendigonians.

We are not forgetting that you regularly had to race off from Sunday Mass to travel to Shepparton for Diocesan Meetings, a little extra commitment after two Masses.

Your teaching extended to training students on the Cathedral Organ over many years and we are now the grateful recipients of one of these very talented students in Dr Paul Taylor, who is most capably following in your footsteps.

The choir has had several very good cantors and soloists trained by you over the 40 years and Sarah Gould, one of your very accomplished students, is now our official choir cantor at 11:00 a.m. Mass. John, you have given 40 years of ministry and service to the Sacred Heart Cathedral as organist, conductor and composer of a large number of works, and we honour and admire your creativity and service.

As a member of the choir, and on behalf of the choir I would like to thank you, John and may God bless you with a wonderful retirement, good health and some relaxation from a lifetime of duty and dedication.

Wilma McCormack
2 May 2021



At the Luncheon to acknowledge Mr John Hogan's contribution to the Diocese on 2 May 2021.

L-R: Mrs Liesbeth Van Emmerik, Mr Leo Overberg, Mrs Denise Overberg, Mrs Wilma McCormack and Mr John McCormack.