

COMPLETING THE CATHEDRAL

St Mary's ... symbol of our city's heart

This is the speech delivered by the Chief Justice of Western Australia, the Hon. WAYNE MARTIN, at the launch of the Parish Fundraising Appeal for the completion of St Mary's Cathedral, at John XXIII College on March 15.

According to the running sheet for this evening's event, I have been allowed 5 minutes in which to excite, motivate and enthuse you, and to urge your support for this historic project.

So it seems the organisers have a rather more optimistic view of my powers of persuasion than anyone who has ever heard me argue a case in Court.

When I think about the reasons why the courts and the legal profession of this State are so busy, and I look back over the 37 years since I started law school, and at the dramatic increase:

- in crime
- in the prison population
- in the number of laws passed by our parliament
- in the number of lawyers in our community
- in the number of courts, and
- in the number of disputes that are brought before our courts, it occurs to me that it is no coincidence that all this has occurred over the same period that there has been a perceptible decrease in morality, ethics and spirituality which has itself coincided with a significant decrease in active participation in religious fellowship and worship.

It seems to me to be highly improbable that these things are coincidental, and much more likely that there is a causal connection between the decline in religious participation, and the decline in spirituality and ethical conduct, and the increased need for lawyers and courts.

And not even the most ardent fan of the legal profession and the courts, if there is such a person, would argue that an increased need for courts and lawyers is a good sign for our community.

And over the same period, our city has become a series of dormitory suburbs spread over about 80 kilometres connected by freeways.

I fear we are in danger of becoming a city without a heart, both physically and metaphorically. And if our city loses its heart, what hope is there for its soul?

We need great projects like this to bring people together in the heart of our city. We must encourage people to come together as a community, to stimulate the respect and mutual obligation which goes with a sense of community. And we should

never under-estimate the importance of symbolism in influencing public attitudes.

If one thinks of iconic places of worship such as St Paul's in London, St Peter's in Rome, Notre Dame in Paris, St Stephen's in Vienna to mention just a few, we all immediately bring to mind a mental picture of those buildings which are not only symbols

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Significance: Chief Justice Wayne Martin, above, urged parish representatives to remember the importance of symbols in influencing public attitudes. PHOTO: ANDREW PROBYN

of their cities, but also symbols of their city's commitment to spirituality, ethical principles including justice, and Christian fellowship in particular.

Our colonial predecessors understood this very well when they committed large portions of the resources of a relatively poor colony to the construction of two symbolic and iconic cathedrals for our city.

Tonight we gather to follow their example, and commit a much lesser portion of our much greater resources so that St Mary's Cathedral can be refurbished and properly finished at last, so as to complete the vision of our forebears. So when we contribute the money needed to complete this inspiring project:

- we're not just enabling the completion of an iconic structure which will be a landmark for our city, although we will be doing that,

- we will not just be revitalising the eastern precinct of the city, although we will be doing that,

- we will not just be completing the largest place of worship and fellowship in the State and the premier place of worship and fellowship for the Catholic community of the State, although we will be doing that,

- but we will also be creating an enduring and prominent symbol of our community's commitment to a spiritual and religious ethos and the moral principles that go with that commitment.

That symbol will have lasting benefits that go well beyond bricks, mortar and glass and will influence principles and standards which define the essential character of our community.

This is not just a building project; it is a vital symbol of our character as a community, and there can't be anything much more important than that.

So I implore you to dig deep and to give your full support to this inspiring project.