



## ACT Heritage Council

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION MACEDONIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH (BLOCK 11 SECTION 100, NARRABUNDAH)**

At its meeting of 17 September 2020 the ACT Heritage Council decided that the Macedonian Orthodox Church was not eligible for provisional registration.

The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for the Macedonian Orthodox Church against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Macedonian Orthodox Church St Kliment of Ohrid (the Church) is located at 313 Goyder Street, Narrabundah on Block 11, Section 100. The Church is sited at the intersection of busy streets – Hindmarsh Drive; Mugga Lane, which becomes Dalrymple Street; and Goyder Street, and it therefore it has high visibility to passing traffic. Having said this, immature trees within proximity to the Church will likely conceal it from proximate views in the coming decades. As well as currently having prominence within its immediate area, the Church is sited on the rise of the hill followed by Hindmarsh Drive. Its elevation means the church is presently visible from several key locations in the ACT.

ACT Government file (218/100/11#01) shows liaison between the Church (at that time, the ‘Macedonian Orthodox Church and Cultural and Educational Centre’) and government agencies for the acquisition of land and construction of a Church commencing in 1980. Records show Church construction started in 1983 and was completed and opened in 1988. Records demonstrate planning for the Church always included additional buildings intended to support the cultural life of the local Macedonian Community; ‘community’ in the case of this Church includes Macedonian Australians living in Canberra, as well as Queanbeyan (ACT Government 1989: folio 218/100/11#01).

Whilst the Church is presently the only building onsite and landscaping is minimal, as of 2019, development plans are proposed. Two new buildings noted as a ‘community hall’ and ‘ancillary building’ plus carparking are proposed, as is subdivision of Block 11 Section 100 Narrabundah, for the development of 56 units.

For 30 years, the Church has served the spiritual needs of the Macedonian Community and it is usual for between 20 to 50 people to attend regular Sunday services. As an important part of community life, the Church is incorporated as part of the Macedonian Community of the ACT which includes the Macedonian School, Women’s Committee and Church Choir. The incorporated body actively works to promote Macedonian culture and customs (Dimitrovska pers. comm. 2019).

As far as Church governance is concerned, its ecclesiastical affairs are overseen by the Macedonian Orthodox Diocese of Australia in Sydney and the day to day running and future planning is managed by a Board of Directors. The Priest is Rev. Radojco Mitrev.

In 2018 the Church celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, opening its doors to members of the wider ACT community as part of the ACT Heritage Festival. In its thirty years, the Church has been visited by many dignitaries, including the first Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia, following the country’s independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. The Bishop of the Macedonian Orthodox Church visits annually, and as is the custom with Macedonian Orthodox Churches, a Bishop’s Chair is in the nave for his visits (Dimitrovska pers. comm. 2019).

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### HISTORY

#### History of Macedonia and the Macedonian Orthodox Church

The name 'Macedonia' refers to a geographical region as well as a country now known, since February 2019, as North Macedonia. Macedonia the region, encompasses an area presently divided between three nations. Aegean Macedonia is in Greece, the region around the Pirin Mountains is in Bulgaria, and the area known as Vardar Macedonia is North Macedonia. The country North Macedonia is considered to occupy but two-fifths of the entire geographical region of Macedonia (Bechev 2009: xlv – xlvii).

Macedonia occupies a strategic location on the Balkan Peninsula and as a consequence its history has been one of invasion, occupation and partition. In the ancient past, Macedonia was invaded and occupied by all the great empires, including; Ancient Macedon, Rome, Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Macedonia was impacted by ongoing conflict, beginning with the Balkan Wars (1912-13) which started with collapse of the Ottoman Empire (Bechev 2009: xlv - xlvii).

When the Ottoman Empire did fall, fledgling Balkan states vied for Macedonian territory and the sympathies of its people, leading to the Balkan Wars and the subsequent partitioning of Macedonia between Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece. During World War 1 (1914-1918) Macedonia was occupied by Bulgaria. After this war, it became part of Serbia when the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was founded; this territory later become Yugoslavia in 1929. Following World War 2 (1939-45) Yugoslavia became the Yugoslav Socialist Federation, with Macedonia as one of its six Republics. When Yugoslavia collapsed, beginning in 1989, Macedonia peacefully extracted itself to become independent while other former territories of Yugoslavia fell into conflict (BBC 2019; Bechev 2009: xlv – xlvii).

At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, an uprising by ethnic Albanians (Sunni Muslims) almost led to civil war, but intervention by the UN and NATO and an agreement to afford more rights to Albanians, settled the dispute. Today, North Macedonia is a member state of the United Nations, which it joined on 8 April 1993 and is currently working with the European Union to become a member of that organisation of countries (BBC 2019; United Nations 2019; European Union 2019).

Again, from the *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Macedonia* Bechev (2009) notes the people of North Macedonia identify mostly as ethnic or Slavic Macedonians closely related to neighbouring Bulgarians and Serbs (64.2%) and Albanians (25.2%) and that most Slavic Macedonians are Orthodox while Albanians are Sunni Muslim. In addition to the main population groups Bechev notes there are tiny Albanian Catholic and Orthodox groups, with the remainder of the population being Turks, Roma, Serbs, Macedonian speaking Muslims (Torbesi) and Vlachs (Bechev 2009: xlvii).

#### The Macedonian Orthodox Church

For centuries Macedonians have met their spiritual needs through the Christian Orthodox faith, expressed through the Macedonian Orthodox Church. However, as the history of Macedonia would suggest, the ability of Macedonians to practice their faith, in their Church, has been impacted by external forces. In the Ottoman era, the Macedonian Orthodox Church was permitted to operate; after the Balkan Wars however, the Macedonian Churches were taken over by occupying nations. It was only with recognition of Macedonia as a Republic within the Yugoslav Federation, that the process of forming a national Macedonian Orthodox Church was established with the Church receiving formal status in 1967 (Ben-Moshe, Pyke, Andreevski 2012: 21).

Within Macedonia and the Macedonian Orthodox Church, Saint Kliment of Ohrid (ca.840 to 916), holds a very special place. In Macedonia the name Clement (Kliment) is a popular male name; the universities of Sofia (est.1888) and Bitola (est. 1888); the National and University Library in Skopje (est.1944); and the cathedral in Skopje are all named after him. Additionally, St Clements feast day, which falls on 8 December, is a national holiday. St Kliment's popularity is due to his involvement in the evolution and popularisation of the Cyrillic script (the Macedonian alphabet) and efforts to spread the Slavic language and provide education to the Slavs (Bechev 2009: 44 - 45).

#### Origins, Architecture and Iconography of the Orthodox Church

As noted previously, the Macedonian Orthodox Church follows the Christian Orthodox tradition, which along with the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions, is one of the three groups of Christianity. Today, there are an estimated 200 million adherents to the Orthodox faith. While the Orthodox Church shares much with the other Christian churches, Orthodoxy is considered to differ in the way of life and worship (BBC 2011; Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019; Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America 2019).

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The theology, architecture and art of the Orthodox Church has its origins in the Eastern Roman Empire (also known as Byzantine Empire) which was a vast and powerful civilization, centred on Constantinople from 330 AD until 1453 AD. While the Roman Empire in the west collapsed in 476 AD, the Eastern Roman Empire endured and merged with Hellenic (Greek) traditions to create a distinctive theology, literature, art and architecture (History.com 2010).

Built in 6<sup>th</sup> Century in Constantinople (now Istanbul), the Hagia Sophia remains the most impressive expression of Byzantine architecture. In this building, Byzantine progress in the use of the dome, supported over square walls, with the use of pendentives, is most famously expressed. From this time on, the dome, representing heaven, remained central to Orthodox architecture. While the Hagia Sophia is a Basilica style church, it is more usual for Orthodox churches to have a compact, often square shape, with the central dome surrounded by structures at the four points of the compass, producing a cross or cruciform shape, representing the crucifixion (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019; Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America 2019).

The architecture of the cross aligned with cardinal points, subsequently organises the internal layout of the church. At the eastern end of an Orthodox church, usually within an apse, is the 'sanctuary'. At the west is the 'narthex', which is the entry to the building. The 'nave' is the central area of the church where the laity gather during services. In traditional Orthodox churches, it is usual for there to be no seating in the nave; in the churches of the diaspora however, seats are more often the norm (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America 2019).

While the architecture of the Orthodox Church is largely organised around the cross and cardinal points, it also centres on enactment of the Divine Liturgy; the central actions of which are the consecration and distribution of the bread and wine that constitute the Lord's Body and Blood. It is in the sanctuary that the Liturgy is mostly enacted; and for this purpose, it contains a centrally located free standing altar with two chapels either side set into the walls of the apse (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America 2019).

After the sanctuary, an embellished timber partition called the 'iconostasis', which separates sanctuary from nave, is the most important element of an Orthodox church. The iconostasis is furnished with a large central doorway, with two smaller doors either side. The central doorway, usually with bi-fold doors, additionally has a curtain which is drawn at certain moments during the liturgy. Painted icon panels front of the iconostasis – facing the laity – with lanterns placed in front of each icon (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America 2019; Vikan 2012).

The iconostasis is significant for many reasons. It conceals parts of the liturgy from the laity, thus keeping the ritual very mysterious and very quiet. It also has importance as marking the border between heaven and earth, represented by the sanctuary and nave, and in this sense is analogous to the 'veil' that concealed the Holy of the Holies in the Temple of Jerusalem. It also symbolizes, by means of the subject matter of its icons, the union of the two realms (heaven and earth), accomplished in the incarnation (Vikan 2012).

Enactment of the liturgy is accompanied by choral singing, incense and candle burning, and as such it is a very sensory experience. The icons and iconography used on the iconostasis and to embellish the dome and walls of the Orthodox Church, using mosaic or fresco, add to the splendour of the liturgy and to its depth of meaning. In the Orthodox faith, icons depict an individual or scene from the Old or New Testament and they hold power as they are considered by the faithful to be an embodiment of what is depicted, and to offer a window to and from heaven (Vikan 2012).

In the Orthodox Church, icons on the dome and walls are displayed in an iconographic program or hierarchy, extending from the dome downwards, and then from east to west, and incorporating the icons of the iconostasis. Additionally, used on the dome and walls, icons will also be arranged to be in communication with each other across the open space of the church; and used in such a way they are considered to activate and therefore sanctify the space within the church. The iconographic program is also considered a recreation of the entire Christian cosmos (Vikan 2012).

Within Orthodoxy, some of the most significant icons are Christ Pantocrator, Virgin Platetera and the Mandylion. The Christ Pantocrator icon depicts a half-length Christ in a fully frontal pose with his right hand raised in blessing and his left hand holding a book (representing the Gospels); this icon is always at the top of the main dome of the church. The Virgin Platetera is the most common pose of the Virgin Mary; it shows the Christ Child superimposed over the passive body of his mother in an arrangement intended to invoke the incarnation; it is always depicted in the sanctuary apse. The Mandylion shows Christ's face impressed upon the shroud; and is always displayed above the sanctuary's Virgin Platetera (Vikan 2012).

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### History of the Macedonian Orthodox Church of St Kliment of Ohrid, Narrabundah

The first Macedonians are considered to have arrived in Australia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and many of those known to have arrived early were men from the peasant class, known as *pechalbari*, or itinerant workers. Later Macedonian migration to Australia occurred in waves. According to Najdovski (1997) in *The Macedonians in Australia*, Peter Hill relates that Macedonian immigration to Australia before World War 1 was first in response to American immigration restrictions and then due to the Greek fascist regime of Ioanis Metaxas which forced the departure of Aegean Macedonians. After World War 2, immigration increased to peak in the 1960s, much of it in response to a devastating earthquake in Skopje in 1963, and then in the 1990s due to the breakup of Yugoslavia (Najdovski 1997: 35).

It appears that a Macedonian community was formed in Queanbeyan before a community coalesced in the ACT. It also appears that the identity of the Macedonian Community is fluid across the two localities. Web searches show that in Queanbeyan there is a Macedonian Hall and Community Centre and a Macedonian Orthodox Church of the Prophet Elijah. There is also a Macedonian Dance Group and a Facebook group called the 'Macedonian Community of Queanbeyan and Districts'. Ben-Moshe, Pyke, & Andreevski (2009) note that there is estimated to be at least 83, 963 Macedonians in Australia, with the largest communities being in Melbourne, Geelong and Shepparton in Victoria, and in NSW the largest communities are in Sydney, Wollongong, Newcastle and Queanbeyan (Ben-Moshe, Pyke, & Andreevski 2009: 20)

As mentioned at the start of this document, ACT Government files (218/100/11#01 & #02; 061153) show liaison with government agencies for the acquisition of land for a Church commenced in 1980. A file note dated 23 June 1980 in the first of these files, captures the early intentions of the Macedonian community their Church, as follows:

'Mr Taneski opened the meeting by giving me a run down of the Church. There are 150 families in Canberra plus another 400 families in Queanbeyan. Their present Church in Queanbeyan is over 100 years old and is now inadequate. They also have a small school in Queanbeyan. This has a two-fold purpose – teach the children the Macedonian language and teach the adults English and Australian customs. At present they have 13 churches and one monastery in Australia. They wish to build a national church in Canberra plus a small school and hall. Their desired area is in ... Griffith-Narrabundah-Forrest ...' (ACT Government 1989: 01, folio page 2).

A subsequent application for the grant of a lease for the purpose of an association, dated 27 June 1980, provides further information submitted by Mr Taneski, who is President of the Macedonian Orthodox Church and Cultural and Educational Centre, as follows:

The name of the association applying for the lease is; the 'Macedonian Orthodox Church and Cultural and Educational Centre'. The names of representatives of the organisation are; 'Mr Simon Taneveski, Mr Tony Steve, Mr Vlase Nikoleski, Very Rev. Adzi Naum Despostski and Mr Sandre Stefanoff'. The reason for seeking the lease is; '[t]o build the Macedonian Orthodox Church and Educational and Cultural Centre, which will service and represent all the Macedonian people throughout Australia' and the land and building requirements for the church are; '[i]and must be centrally located for the Canberra community and for Canberra visitors. The building will also be a museum of Macedonian culture which demands a location with easy access. The building will be a landmark for Canberra and therefore requires a prominent position.' Facilities planned for inclusion are; 'Church, hall-gallery, kitchen-café-club, cultural centre, educational centre, radio and television studios, sport-administration, counselling, facilities store, flat for a caretaker, ladies and gents showers and toilets' (ACT Government 1989: 01, folio page 2).

The application continues: The applicants note their association has 1,200 members, that the cost of developing a building complex of 1960 square meters will be \$950,000, and that funding will come from the following sources; 'We will have the financial support of the 13 Macedonian Orthodox Churches in Australia and the monastery in Victoria. We will be collecting substantial donations from the 150,000 Macedonian people in Australia. We will also have the moral support and financial backing of the Orthodox Church in S.R Macedonia. We have many Macedonian skilled tradesmen who wish to contract out their skills free of charge in the construction of this centre' (ACT Government 1989: folio page 2).

At a subsequent meeting on 30 July 1980, representatives of the Church community, including Mr S Taneveski, Mr T Steve, Mr Ptovski, Rev Fr A Despostski and Mr S Stefanoff and Mr Josifovski met with representatives of the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) and Department of the Capital Territory (DCT) to further discuss a land grant and planning for the church. At this time, drawings and a photo of a Macedonian Orthodox Church in Melbourne were tabled as the model for the proposed church. This documentation however, is not included in the file. At this meeting a

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first mention was made of accessing land under the Church Land Leases Ordinance 1924, whereby land is made available for a major Church for each religious body in perpetuity (ACT Government 1989: 01, folio page 15).

On 28 October 1980, a letter from the DCT noted that suitable land had been identified at Block 6 Section 10 Narrabundah. Another letter confirmed the land would be gifted under the Church Leases Ordinance 1924. For this to happen however, the applicant needed to be an incorporated body. A lease was signed on the 8 September 1982 by the Macedonian Orthodox Church Incorporated. By the time the lease was signed Block 6 of Section 100 of Narrabundah, had become Block 9, and finally Block 11, Section 100 (ACT Government 1989: 02).

Following lease arrangements, planning quickly switched to construction. ACT Government file 61153 included original building plans and an approved building permit dated 4 January 1983. Plans show the building was designed by Queanbeyan based building design consultant, P Green and that WJ Gordon & Associates were the structural civil engineers. The building plans show the Church as being conceived as being somewhat more elaborate in its detailing, than what was built.

An owner builder permit for Mr Vlase Nikoleski is included in file 61153 with an approval date of 16 March 1983. At this time it was noted Mr Nikoleski had previous building experience and whilst it is struck through as not being relevant to the permit, Mr Nikoleski was additionally noted as being a practicing sculptor. From Google searches it is known that Mr Nikoleski is Macedonian Australian and achieved success as a sculptor; one of his artworks is in the National Gallery of Australia, and it appears he holds, or has held the position of Emeritus Professor of Fine Arts at Newcastle University. From file notes it appears Mr Nikoleski moved to Newcastle prior to completion of the Church and that Mr Tanevski took over the owner builder permit in 1985 with oversight by Mr L Bujaroski to complete of the Church.

Also in file 61153 are plans and approval documents for later modifications to the windows in the drum of the dome.

## **DESCRIPTION**

### **Built Form and Exterior**

The Macedonian Orthodox Church is based on the design of the Church of St Kliment of Ohrid in Skopje. Completed in 1990 the Skopje Church is built in the modern tradition of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century which aimed to evolve an architectural aesthetic 'founded on the materials and forms of a perceived industrial age' (McNamara 2011: 52). For churches, the use of modernist architecture enabled them to project the relevance of Christianity into the modern age. The modernist architectural features used to do this included; use of exposed steel and concrete; use of sculptural forms and the absence of specific historical references. While the Narrabundah Church is on a smaller scale than the Skopje Church and is further simplified in its design, it appears in the modernist style and draws on the modernist cues previously mentioned (McNamara 2011: 52).

As can be seen in Image 2, in its general form, the roof of the Narrabundah Church has a central dome on a drum surrounded by four large apses forming a cross, aligned to the cardinal points. Each apse is covered with a large hood extending from the ground in a wide arc over and beyond each apse, creating a large external eave as well as the internal domed ceiling of each apse. The exterior walls of the Church are composed entirely of the four apses in a cross and are made from buff coloured brick. The apses on the north and south each have two windows, the eastern apse has no apertures, the west is the entrance into the church. In the western apse is the arched doorway entry into the building. The current domestic scale double doors are inset, creating a small foyer. Flush with the external walls are a two leaved metal security gate. Above the foyer is a rectangular glass panel and then a stepped, rectangular bulk head. Above the bulkhead is an inset with the name of the Church in Cyrillic script.

The dome on drum is fibreglass, the drum has six arched windows, the red brown roofing of the dome arches downwards over each window to create a series of arches around the windows. A crucifix is located at the base of each arch between each window, and a white crucifix adorns the apex of the dome. The hoods are steel framed and are clad in fibreglass. The overall effect of the building design is of sculptural simplicity. The red brown hoods and dome contrast effectively with the buff coloured brick work and white of the drum.

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### Inside the Church

Inside, the Church is voluminous and open. Only the timber iconostasis fronting the Sanctuary and the timber foyer, mezzanine and balcony structure in the narthex, divide the interior space. Images 5 to 9 show the interior of the church – including its slate floor, timber wall panelling and north and south alcoves for candles – plus notable features, the sanctuary and narthex. Image 4 is an architectural plan view of the building held in ACT Government file (61153).

#### Narthex

Image 8 shows the narthex. It shows a timber clad foyer and mezzanine structure with inbuilt reception area to the north; and north and south stairs to the mezzanine, which includes a central curved platform with balustrade. The mezzanine is used by the choir during the liturgy and is additionally utilised for storage. Image 6 shows architectural plans for this area, with spaces identified as 'vestibule', 'nave', 'office' and 'baptistry'. Clearly absent from the architectural plan is the northern reception area, which can be seen in Image 8.

#### Sanctuary and iconostasis

Image 5 shows the current, soon to be replaced, iconostasis fronting the sanctuary. The iconostasis has a main central doorway with bifold doors and a curtain, and two smaller doorways are located either side of the central doorway. The iconostasis is embellished with icons and lanterns. A new carved walnut iconostasis, with painted icons on gilded backgrounds, is currently being shipped from Macedonia. It is anticipated the new iconostasis will have the same main features as the one it is replacing, but will be more elaborately decorated. As can be seen in image 9, the entirety of the sanctuary is raised above ground level on a large concrete podium three steps high. The plan in image 4 shows alcoves in the wall of the sanctuary apse dedicated from north to south to St Iliya, St Climent and St Blagovesh. The plans also show a doorway from the south wall of the apse to the outside of the church.

#### Fresco and iconographic program

In the case of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the iconographic program is expressed in fresco, which is a technique of painting pigment and water over fresh plaster, with a resultant robust and enduring finish as the pigment bonds with the plaster. The iconographic fresco in the Church was completed in 2017 and was undertaken over the course of two years by Macedonian iconographers Vaska and Tony Churkovski with assistance from the Macedonian community. A second and final stage of the fresco will be completed when funds become available. The iconographic fresco in the Church accords with the hierarchy previously described; in that it extends downwards from the dome, and then from east to west and onto the iconostasis. The highly significant Orthodox icons - Christ Pantocrator, Virgin Platetera and Mandylion – are included, as are words in the Cyrillic script.

#### Furnishings

Generally, the Church is sparsely furnished. The seats of the laity in the nave are arranged along the northern and southern sides of the Church and are free standing. A hall runner extends from the narthex into the sanctuary and two podiums are located either side of this. A Bishop's chair is located to the south of the iconostasis and there are two alcoves into which candles are placed either side of the sanctuary, within these is stainless steel furniture for the safe burning of the candles. A large chandelier and smaller chandeliers are suspended from the ceiling.

### PHYSICAL CONDITION AND INTEGRITY

In its current form, the Macedonian Orthodox Church presents from the outside as a form-based building without embellishment. It is known however, that the Macedonian Community plans to add important embellishments as funds become available. Notably, on the outside this includes new copper cladding to the dome and hoods and the addition of a carved walnut door from Macedonia to the entry area. Plans for the building interior include a new carved walnut iconostasis with icons imported from Macedonia, a second stage of the iconographic fresco and possibly a new floor to replace existing slate flooring.

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SITE PLAN

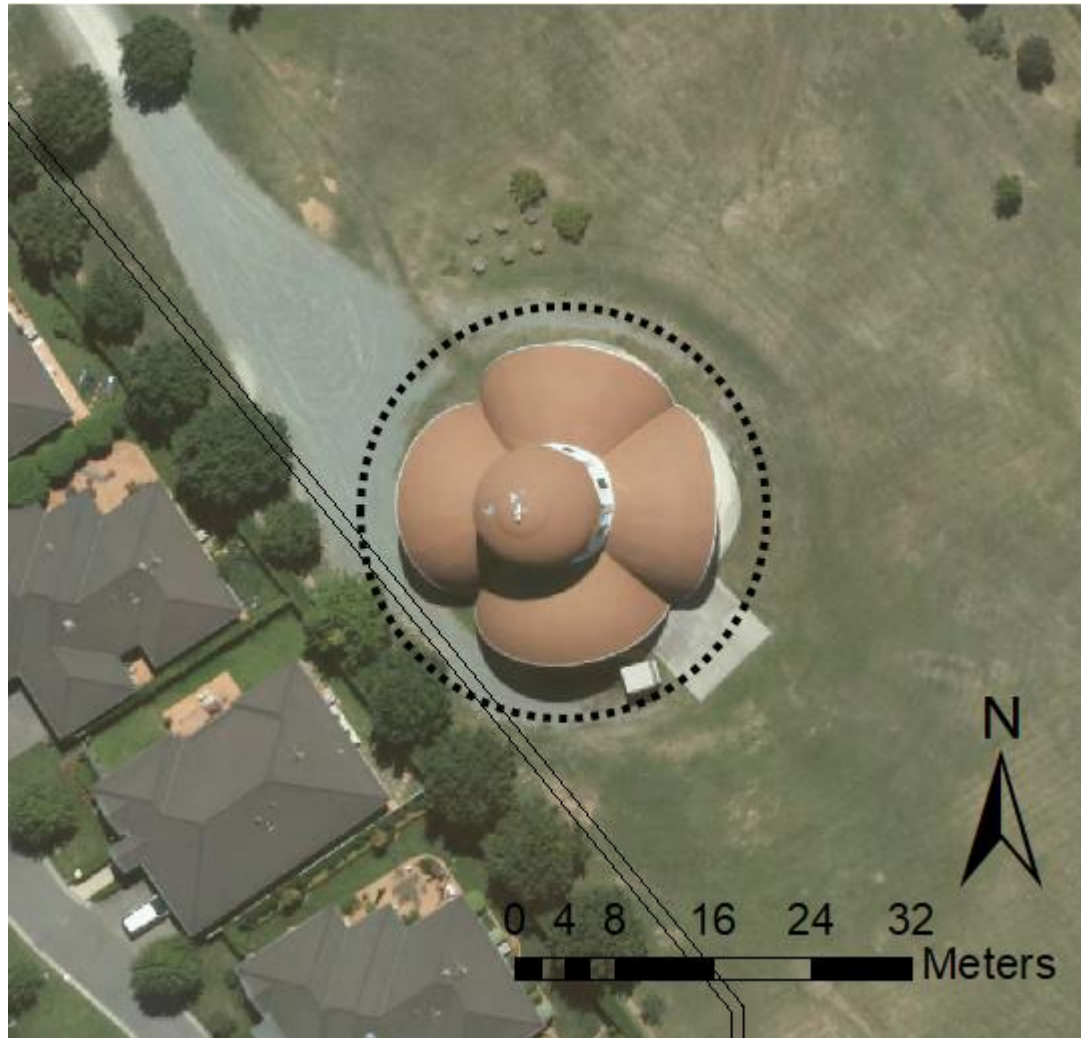


Image 1: Macedonian Orthodox Church site boundary.

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**Image 2:** This photo shows the exterior of the Church from the front access road off Goyder Street (ACT Heritage 2019)



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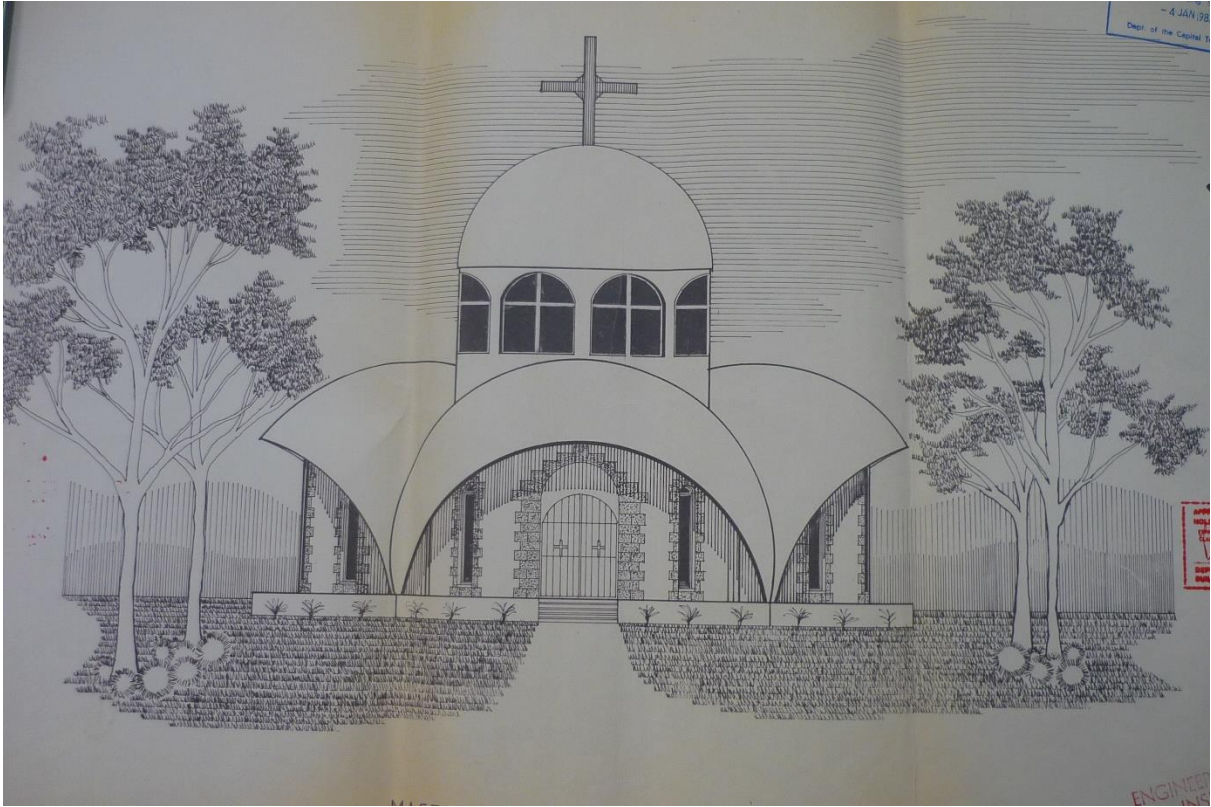


Image 3: Design drawing by P Green of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (ACT Government File 061153).

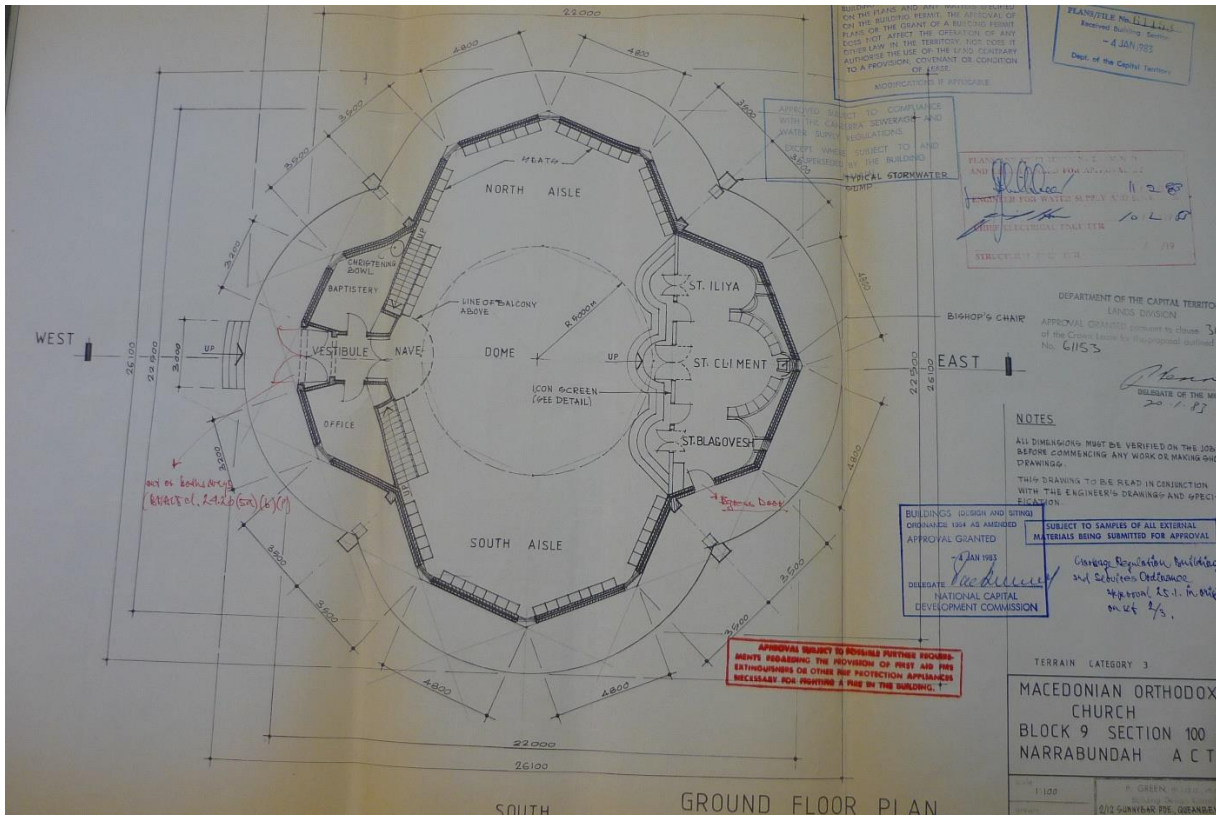


Image 4: Plan drawing by P Green of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (ACT Government File 061153).



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Image 5: This photo shows the current, soon to be replaced iconostasis with icons fronting the Sanctuary.

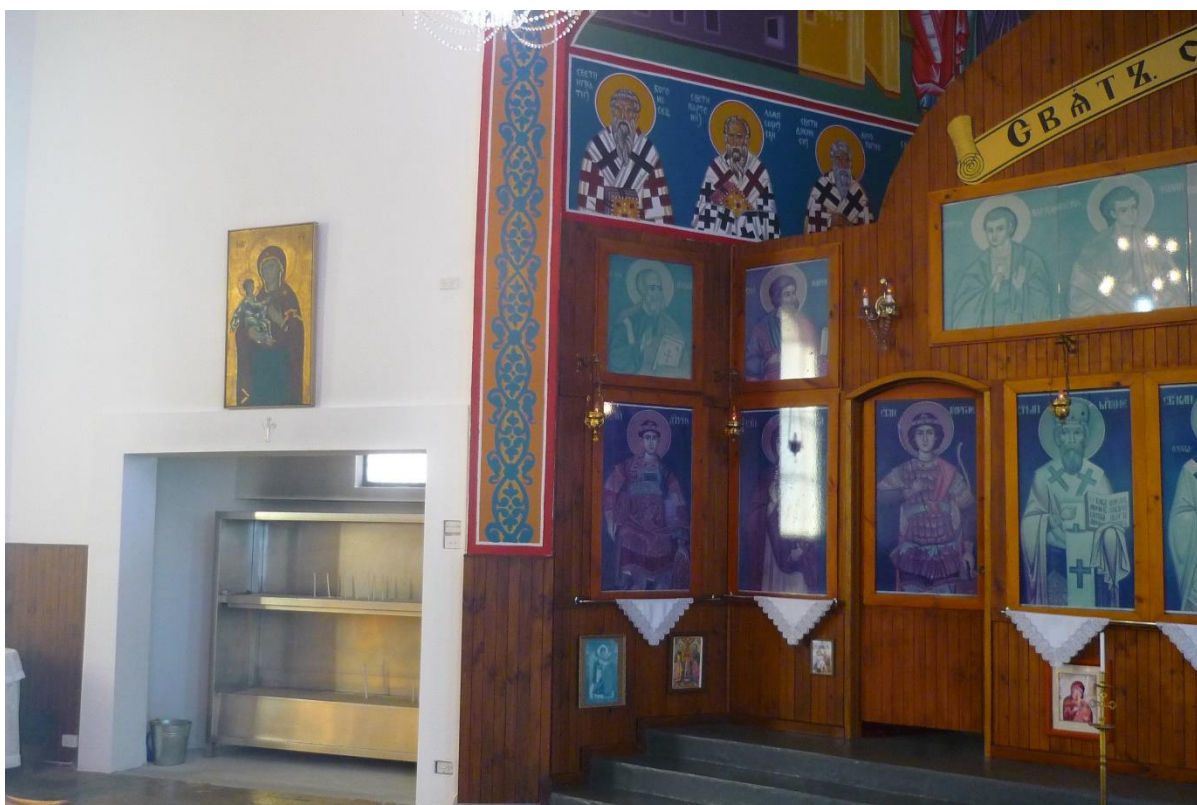
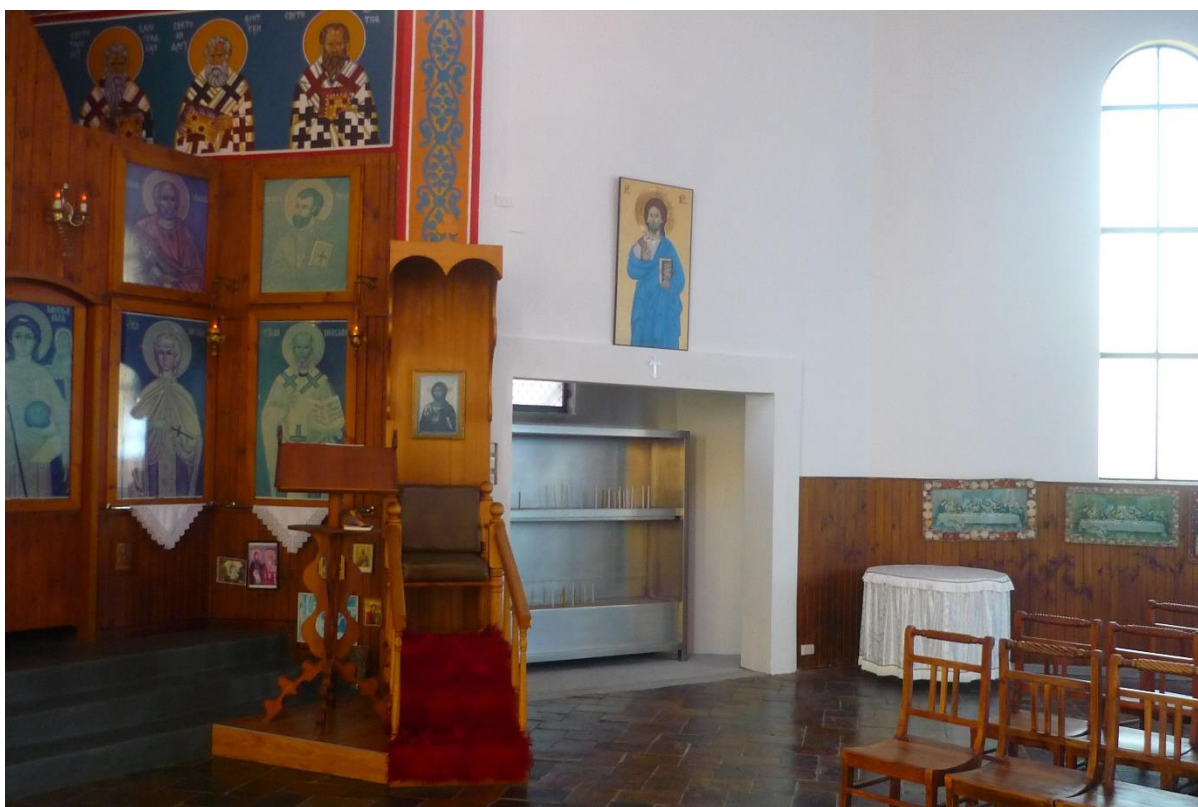


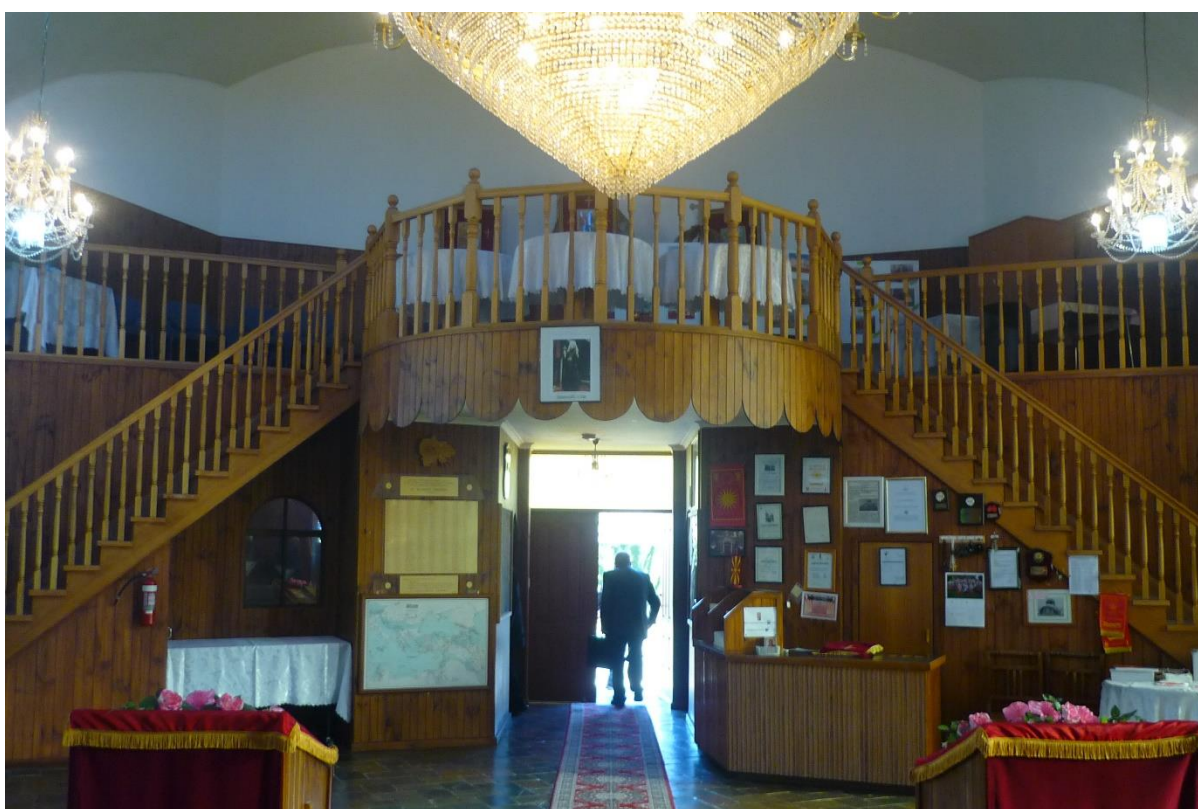
Image 6: This photo shows the northern alcove with stainless steel furniture in which candles are lit.



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**Image 7:** This photo shows the southern alcove with stainless steel furniture in which candles are lit. The Bishop's Chair and lectern is also visible.



**Image 8:** This image shows the entranceway at the narthex with the mezzanine and two sets of stairs. The Church choir sings from the mezzanine during the Liturgy.





Image 9: Looking down from the mezzanine to the iconostasis.



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**Image 10:** This photo shows the current, soon to be replaced iconostasis with icons fronting the Sanctuary. The large central chandelier is evident.

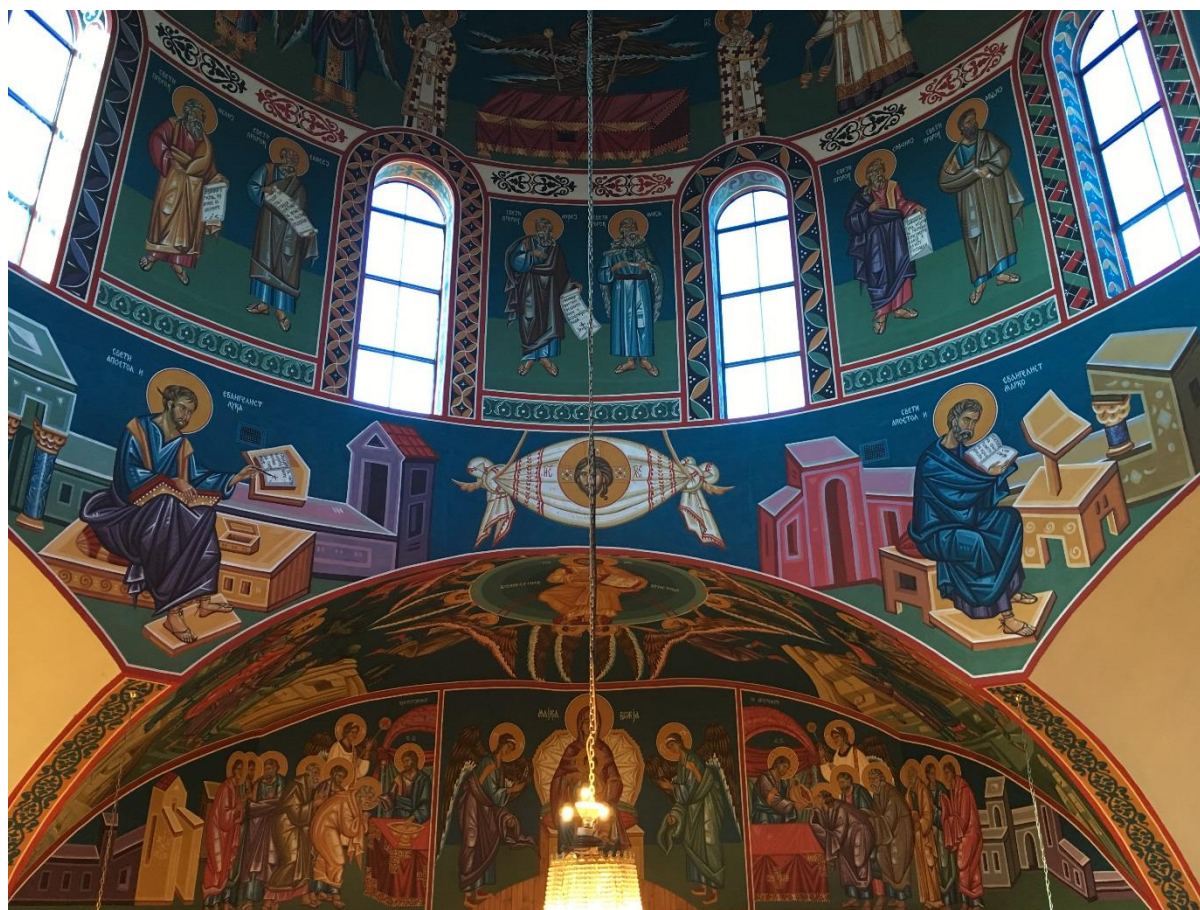




**Image 11:** This photo shows the iconographic fresco in the dome of the Church, at the top of the dome is the Christ Pantocrator icon.



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**Image 12:** This photo shows the iconographic fresco in and above the Sanctuary apse. In the centre of the image above the apse is the Mandylion icon.

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