

**Éire Ecclesiastica; Notes
on religious architecture in
Ireland 1960-1980**

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Introduction

Ireland has never been a country associated with Modernist architecture. Only in the years following World War II were progressive building methods and styles adopted in the state. Even then, the only sectors to really embrace innovative approaches to construction were those relating to infrastructure- edifices built for energy provision or transport. This is exemplified by the fact that one of the few examples of Modernist architecture in Ireland is a bus depot constructed in 1953 in the international style.¹

1. Busáras was designed by Michael Scott and his team of young architects and designers between 1945 and 1953.

buildings remained conservative and reactionary. One type of architecture which did tentatively embrace progressive approaches but which is often overlooked is ecclesiastical architecture, specifically that commissioned by the Catholic Church. The focus of this dossier is a selection of particular notable examples of ecclesiastical architecture constructed between 1960 and

1980. Although only a couple of these structures possess the typically Brutalist characteristic of *béton brut* they all display the architects desire to create austere, functional and honest buildings.

The buildings included in this dossier must be viewed in the light of liturgical reforms initiated by the Second Vatican Council (convened between 1962–65, (“Vatican II”), arguably one of the most important religious events of the last century. Initially led by Pope John XXIII (1958–63) and then Pope Paul VI (1963–78), the Council aimed at *aggiornamento*; the updating of doctrines and practices implemented by the church to engage with the congregation. Rather than formulating new dogma the aim was to encourage the clergy to educate and inculcate in more transparent, accessible ways. In addition to reforming liturgical practices, the Second Vatican Council allowed for the alteration of existing church buildings and permitted churches to be constructed in a manner that reflected the architectural trends of the 1960s and 70s. In the case of Ireland this heralded

the rejection of the traditional Neo-Gothic church design in favour of new styles which could be described as tentatively modernist. The permission to accept more progressive techniques also facilitated the construction of larger buildings. The almost industrial scale on which many of these buildings were created was unprecedented in Ireland. Another of the reforms advocated by Vatican II (apparent in several of the images in this dossier) was that the altar be turned around to face the people of the congregation so that it resembled the stage of a theatre-in-the-round. These were designed to be dramatic spaces in which ritualistic displays of propagandistic power could be orchestrated.

Ultimately these developments can be viewed as an attempt to rejuvenate the authority of the Catholic Church; they represent a desire to expand and maintain the congregation and reinforce the sense of power held by the Church whilst also strengthening cultural ties with the Vatican. While these structures do symbolise the hegemony of

the Catholic Church they must also be viewed as providing the only opportunities for ambitious architects in Ireland to explore the creation of atmospheric lighting, fabrication of plastic forms and application of diverse textures and surfaces. This is particularly notable in the case of the churches of Liam McCormack which are unparalleled in Ireland and betray the strong influence of Eero Saarinen.

Éire Ecclesiastica was compiled to provide a local insight into one of the few ways that Modernist styles and approaches to construction were successfully adapted to the Irish context. As the images contained within this dossier reveal, the buildings are an amalgamation of vernacular elements and architectural styles. These buildings may not compare or compete with the high points of ecclesiastical architecture such as Le Corbusier's Notre Dame du Haut at Ronchamp (1955). Nevertheless, they are noteworthy and admirable spaces of worship conceived to feel and look sacred. Today, failing attendance and infrastructural problems combined with a widespread

rejection of organised religion means that the fate of several of the structures featured in this dossier is uncertain. Indeed, one of the edifices (Church of the Annunciation) is scheduled for imminent demolition. While the original function of these structures has become obsolete, and the organisation they represent been exposed as morally bankrupt, their unique place within the topography of Irish architecture deserves acknowledgement.

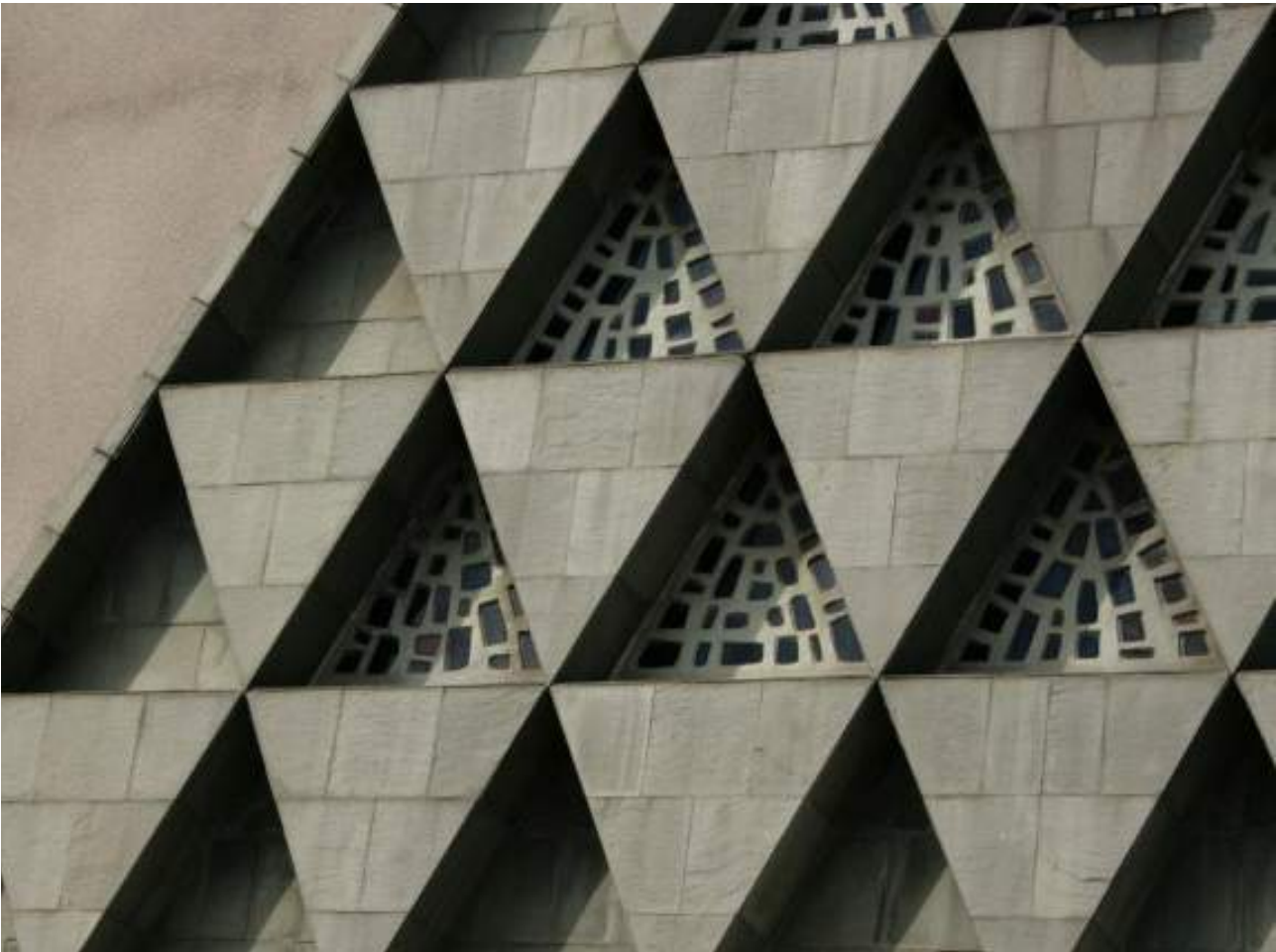
-Pádraic E. Moore

Church of our Lady Mother of Divine Grace

Peppard & Duffy

Raheny, Co. Dublin
1962







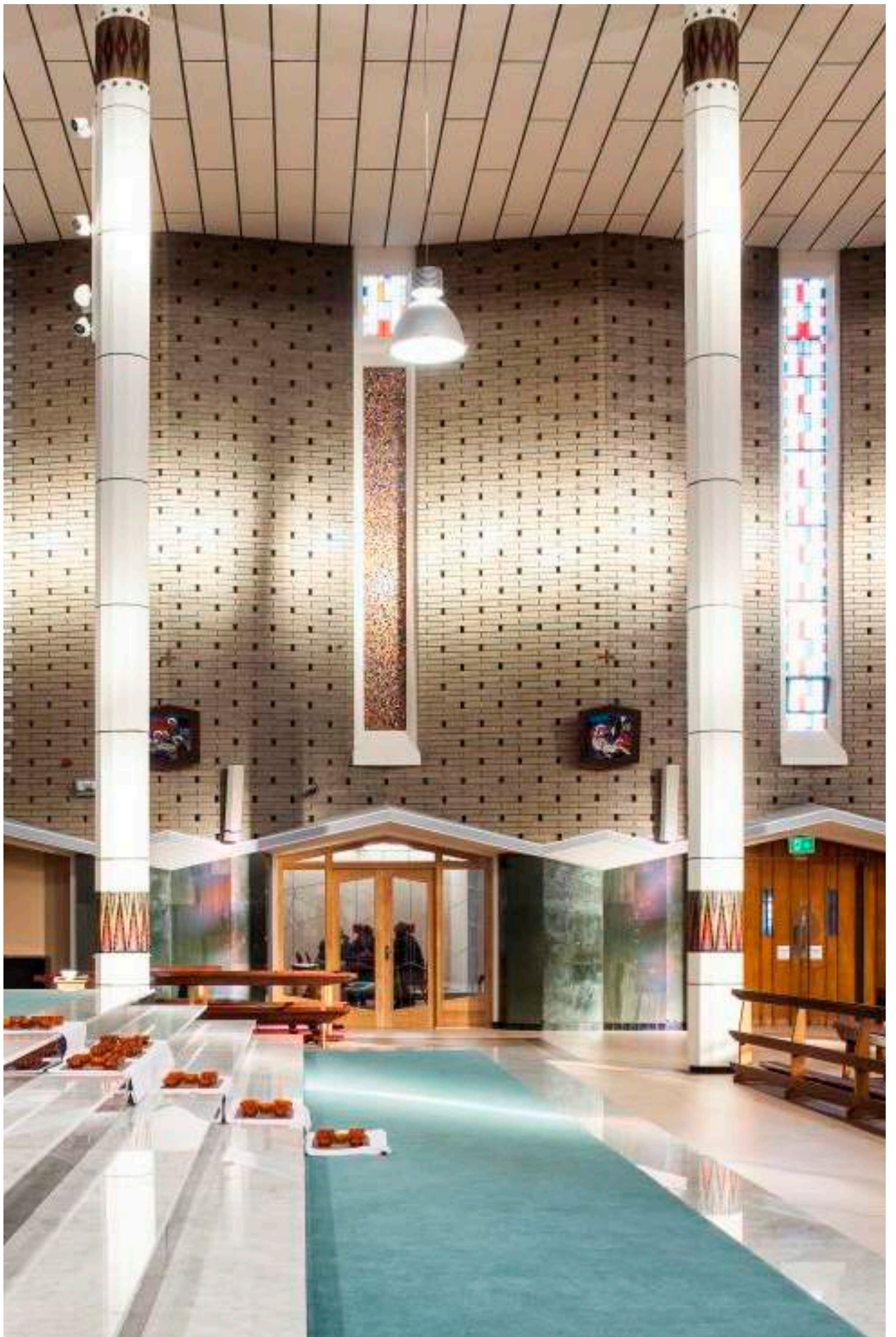












The Church of the Annunciation

One of the largest suburban churches.
Due for demolition in 2018 (parochial
downsizing).

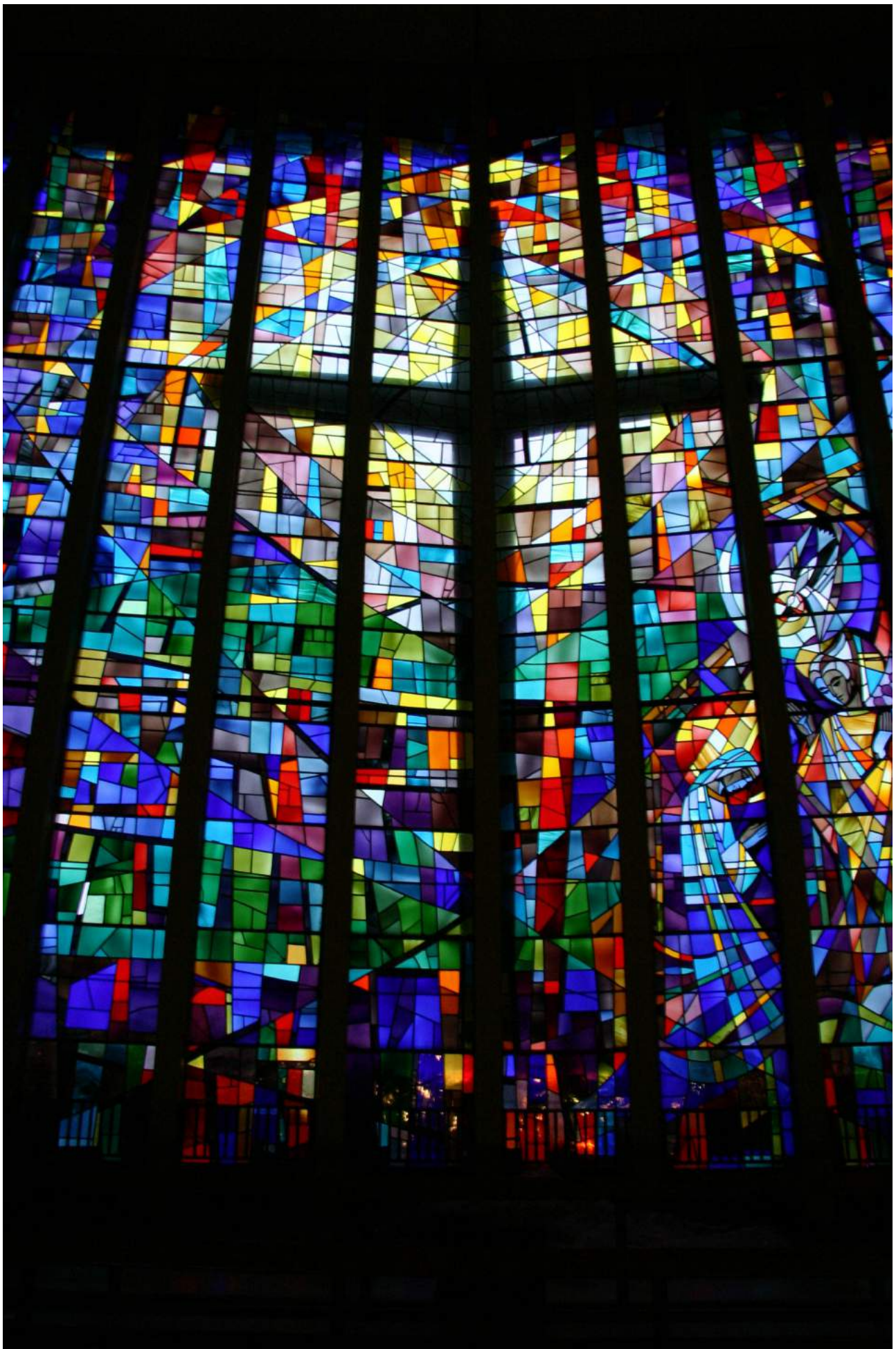
David Keane & Partners

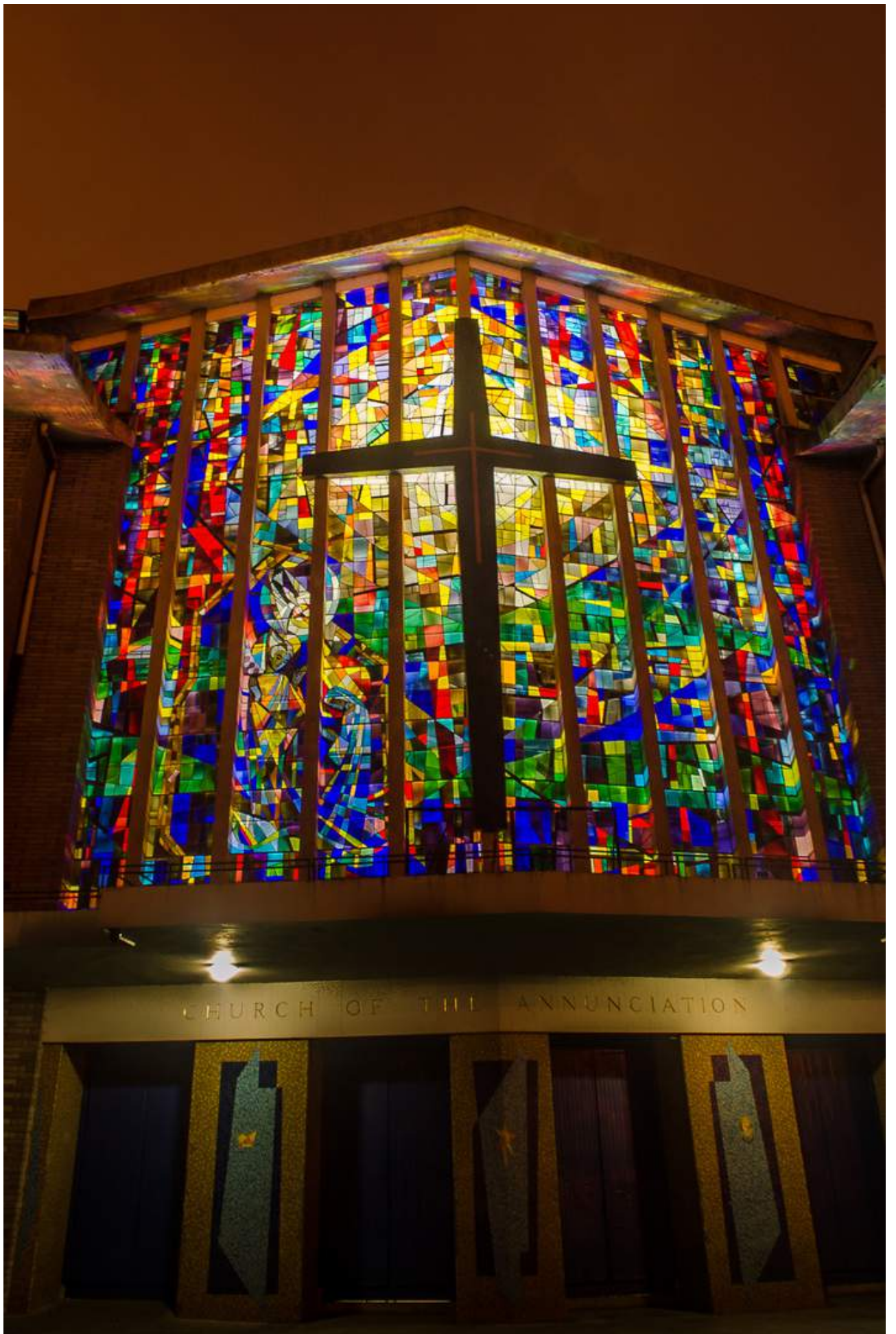
Finglas West, Dublin
1964-1967















Our Lady Queen of Heaven

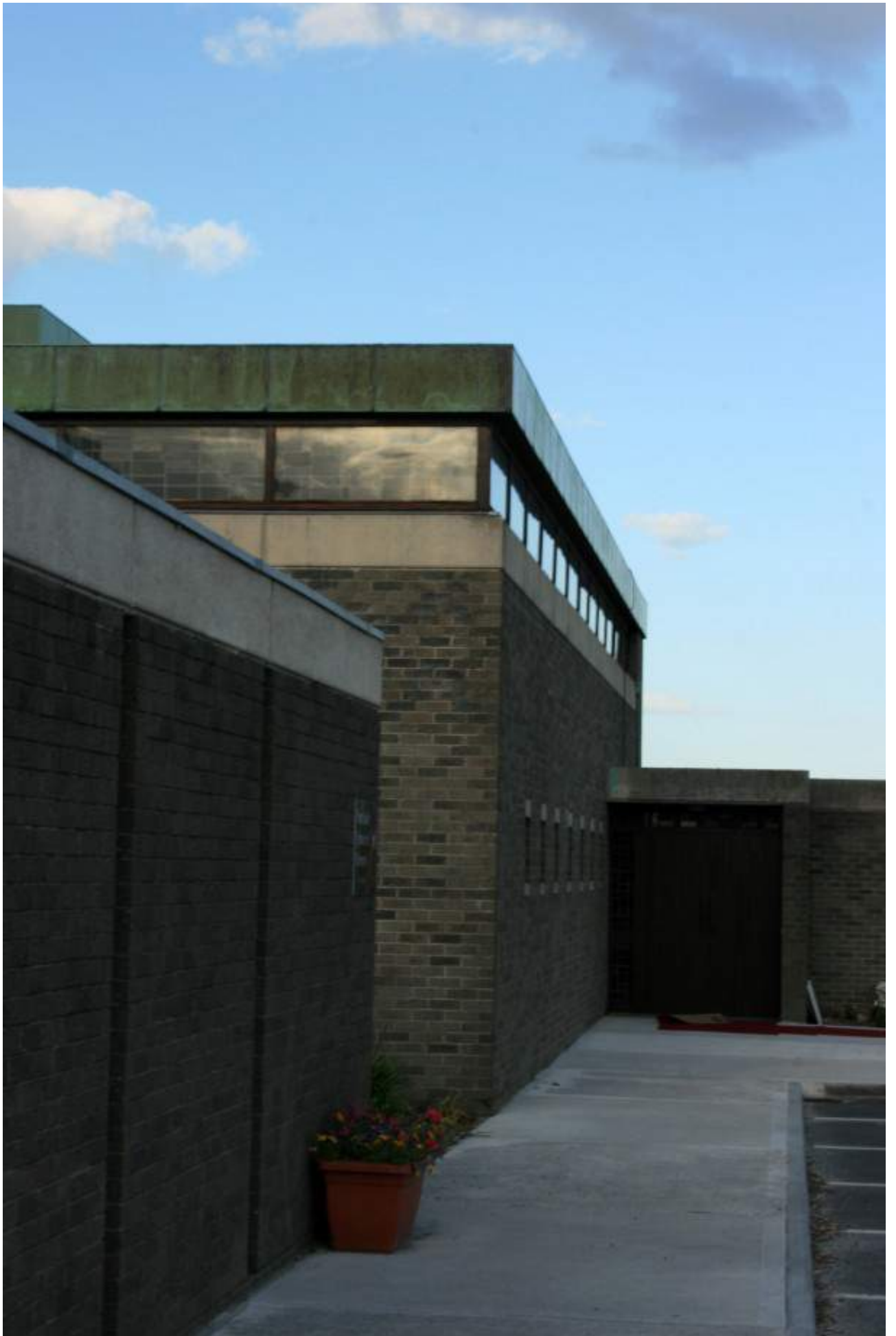
In the centre of the atrium landscaping stands Imogen Stuart's sculpture Madonna Fountain (1969).

Andy Devane of Robinson
Keefe and Devane
Architects

Dublin Airport
1964











The Star of the Sea chapel

Liam McCormick

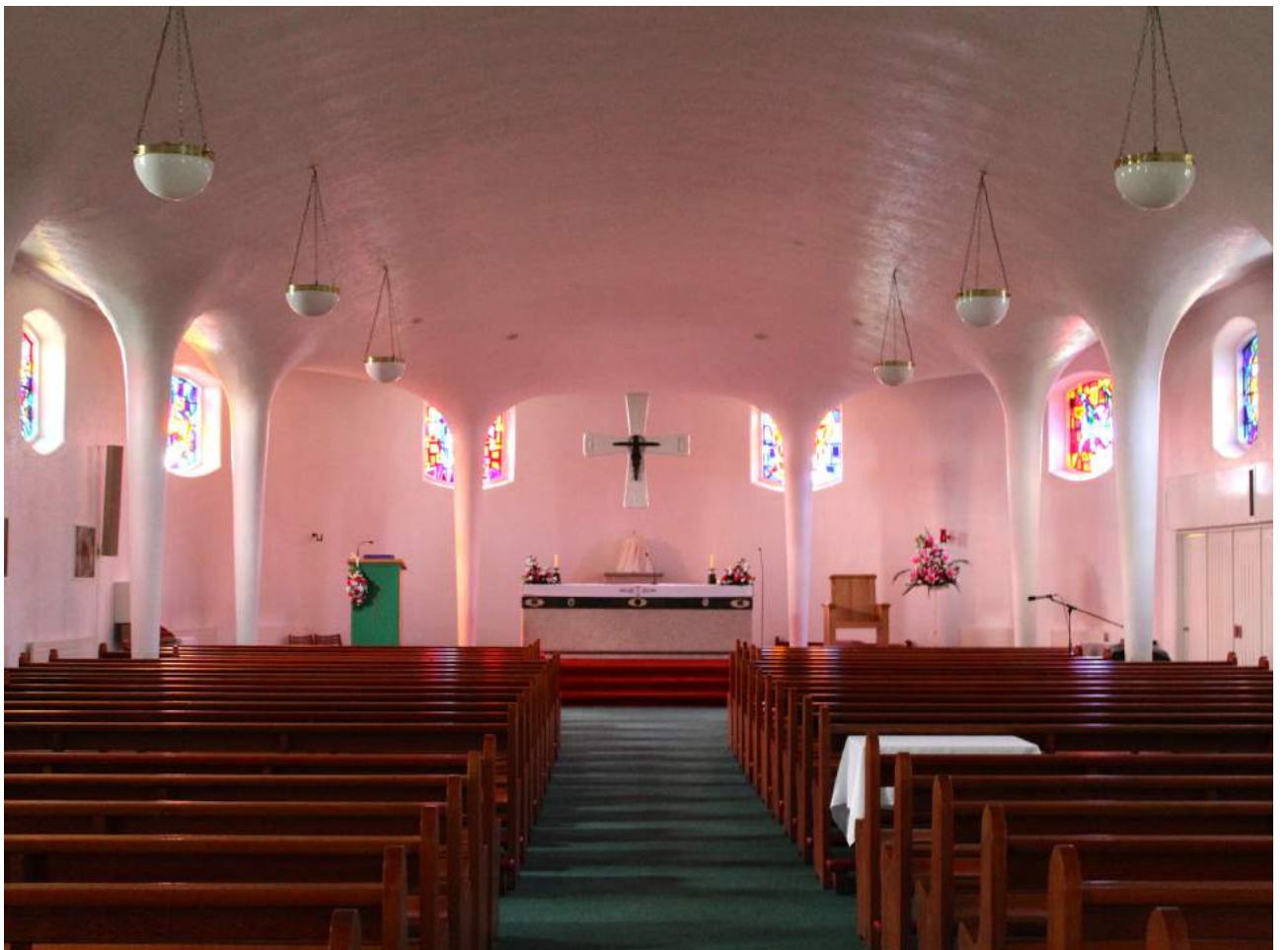
Desertegney, Inishowen,
County Donegal
1964













Corpus Christi Catholic Church

Ronald Tallon - Michael
Scott & Partners

Knockanure, County Kerry
1960 - 1965











Saint Aengus Church also known as 'Burt Chapel'

Liam McCormick

Carrownamaddy, Speenoge,
Co. Donegal,
1964-67



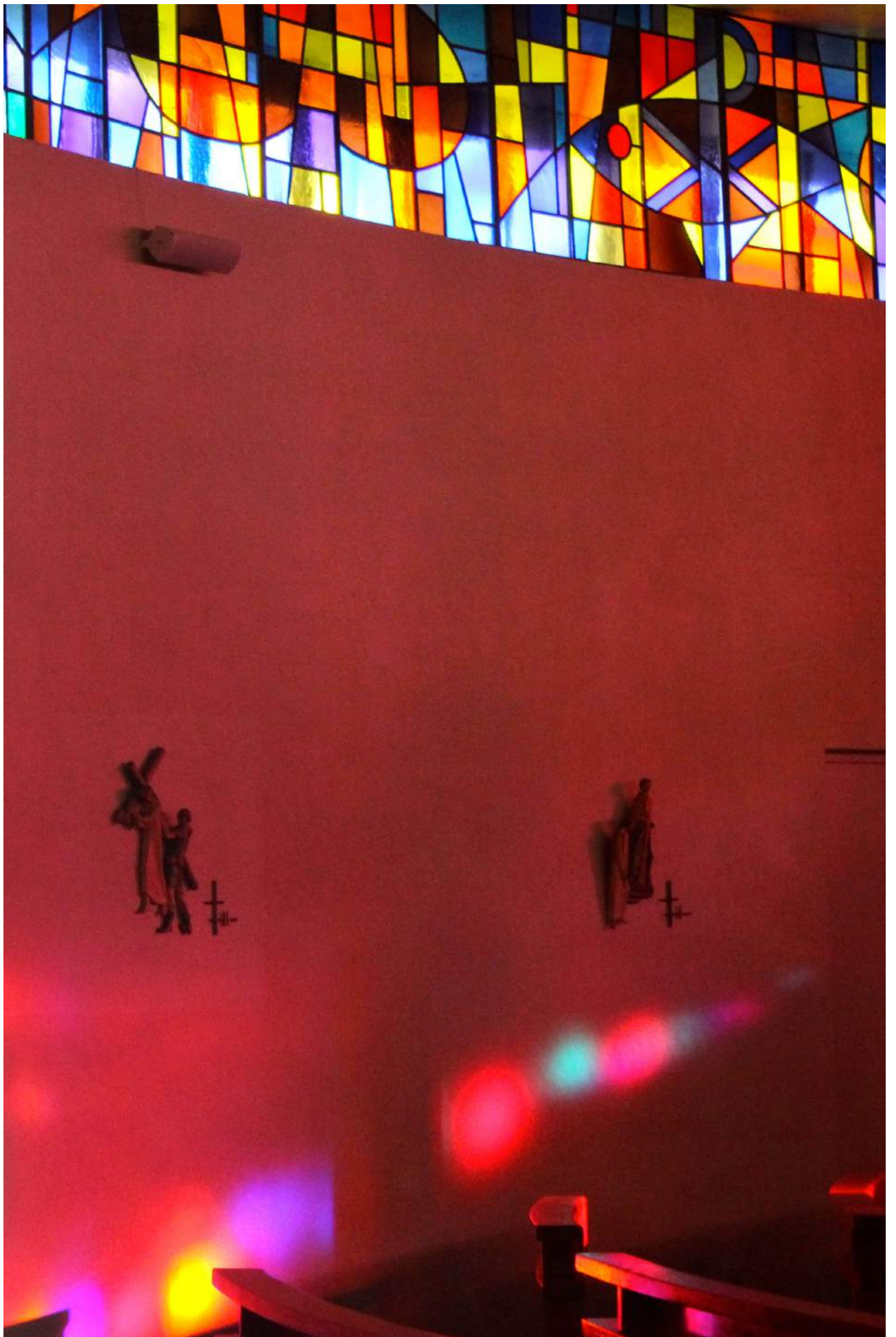














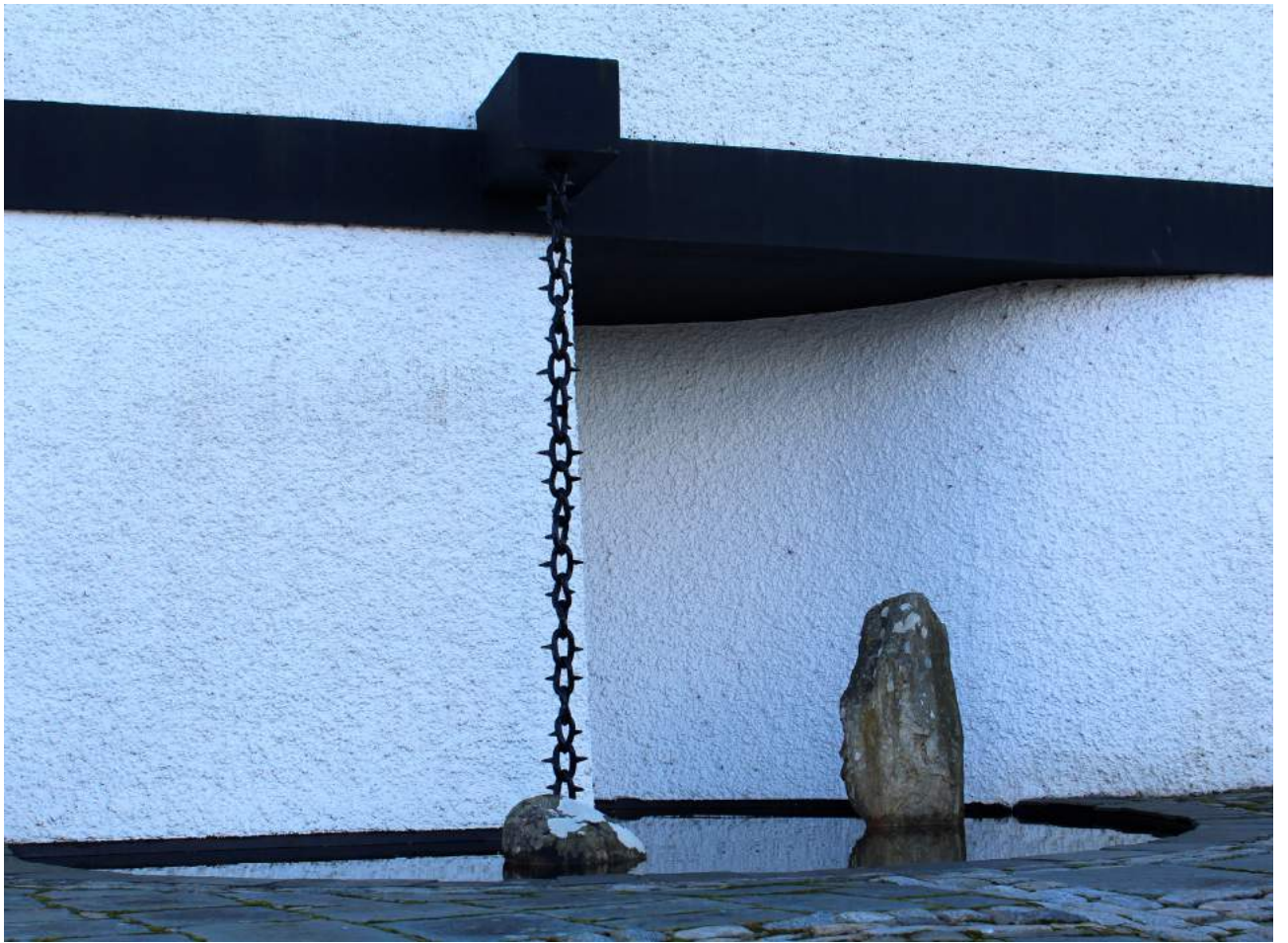
St Micheals Church

Liam McCormick

Creeslough, Co. Donegal,
Ireland
1971





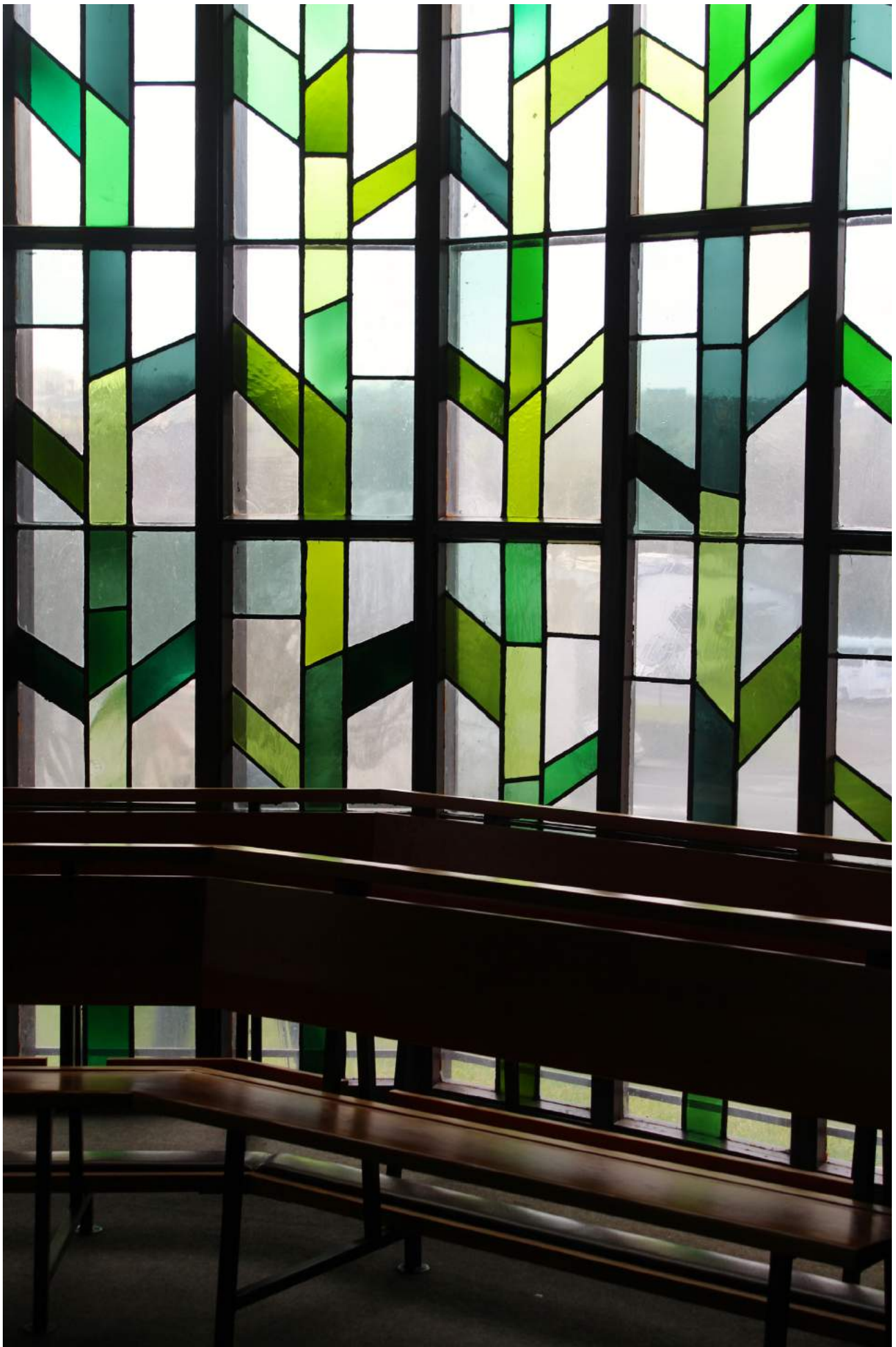














St. Fintan's Church

Andy Devane of Robinson,
Keefe and Devane
Architects

Sutton, Co. Dublin
1972























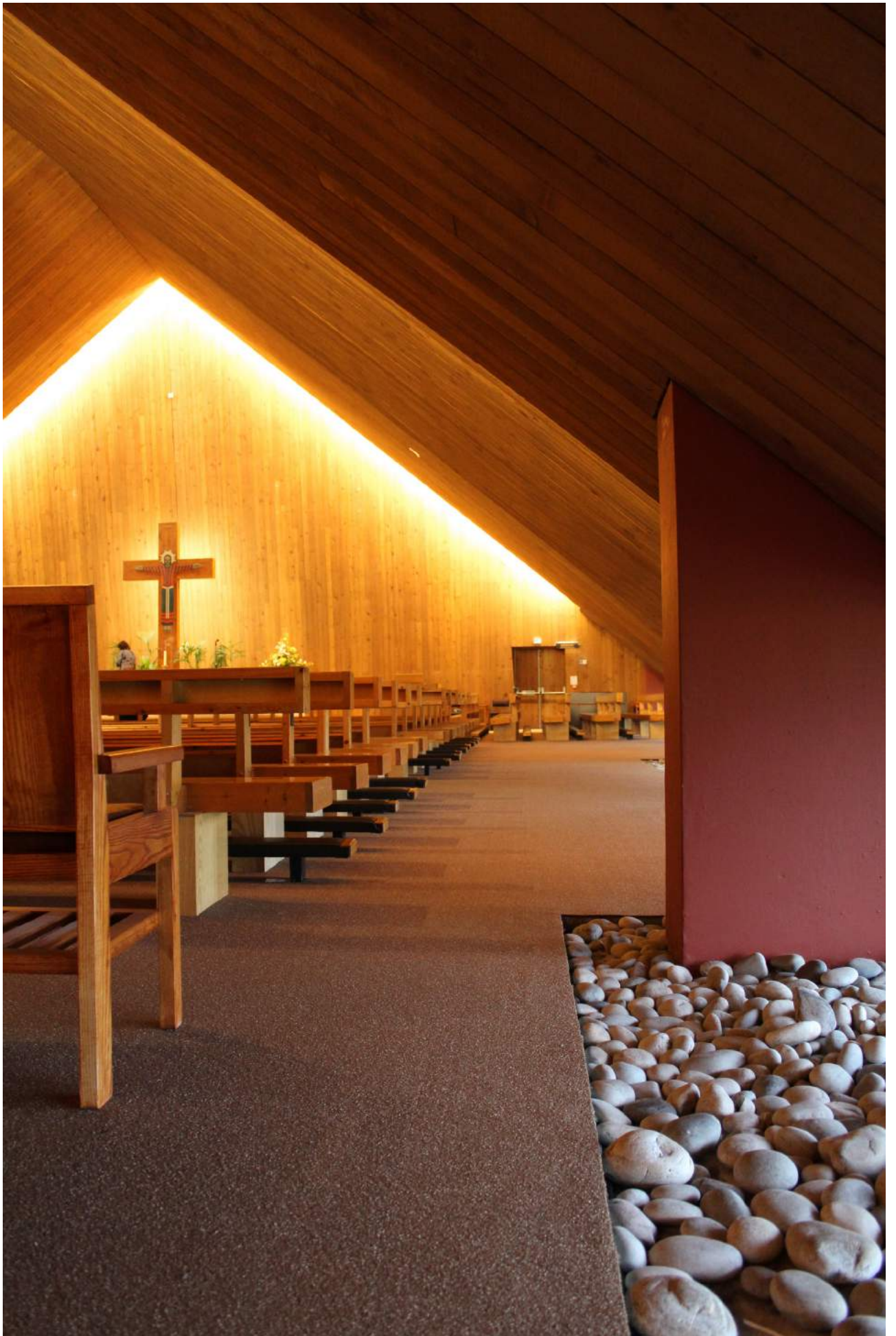
Our Lady of Lourdes

Liam McCormick

Steelestown, Co. Derry
1974













The Basilica of Knock

Daithi Hanly

Knock, County Mayo
1976

Built on an industrial scale (can accommodate approximately 10,000 people) at the site of the Knock Shrine where it is alleged that apparitions of the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, and Saint John the Evangelist appeared in 1879.









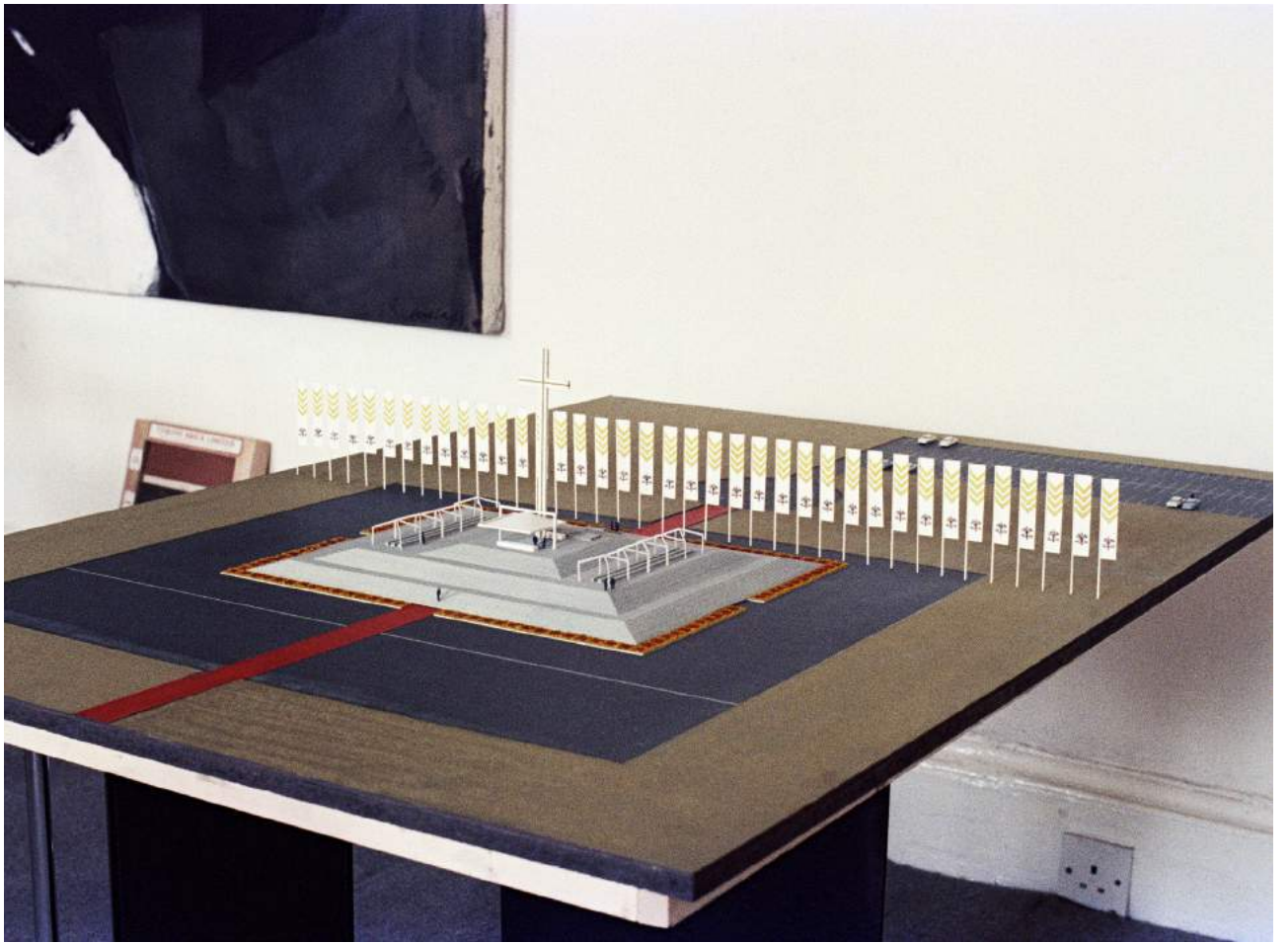




Papal Visit

Pope John Paul II's visit to Ireland took place from Saturday, 29 September to Monday, 1 October 1979

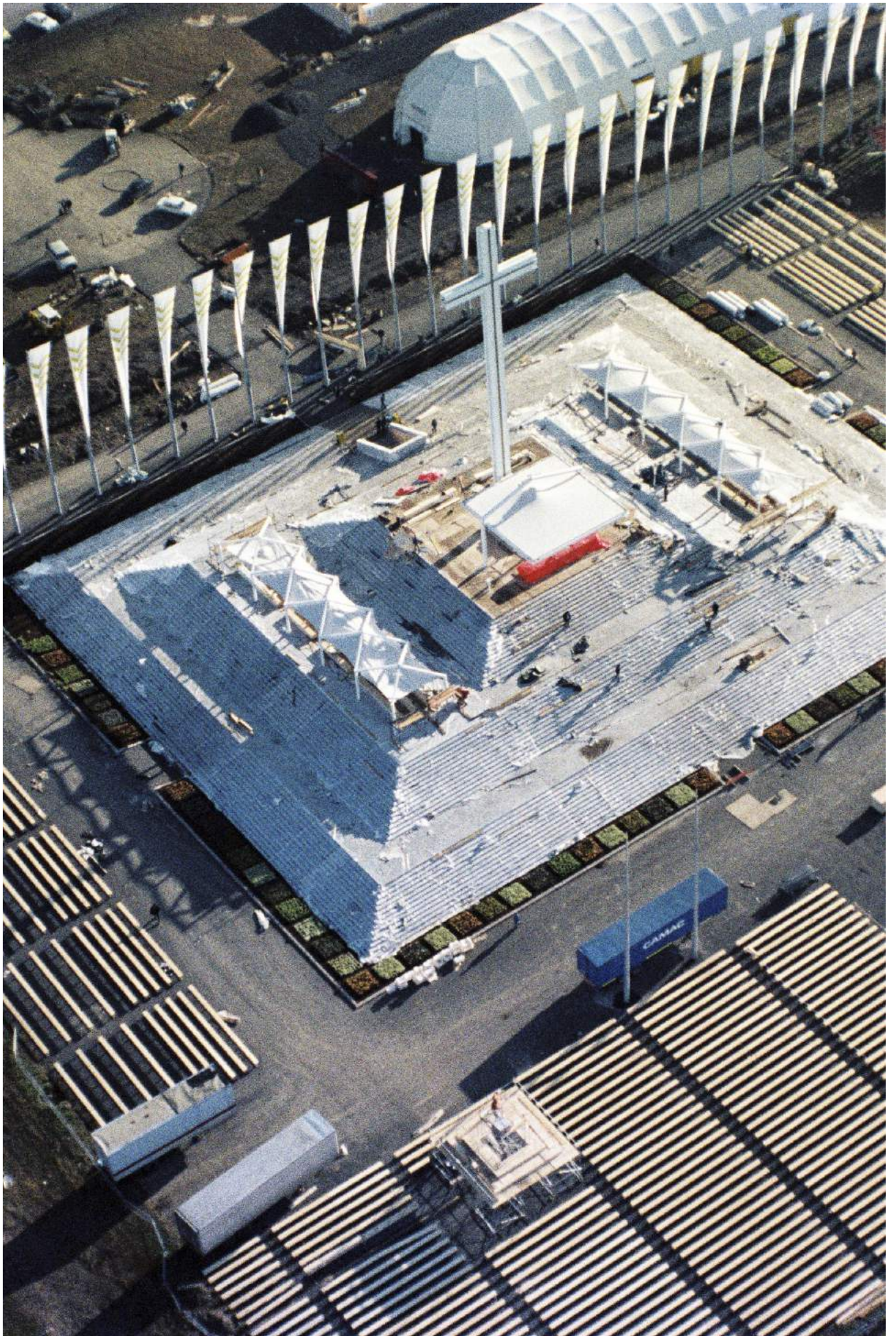
The architects Scott Tallon Walker were given a programme of seven weeks to organize all the physical arrangements for papal visit. This involved designing and constructing several architectural edifices across the state and erecting the setting of a great liturgical event in the capital on a 100 hectare park which had no infrastructure services available. Logistical challenges included moving 1,250,000 people to the venue in safety, providing communications networks and installing the necessary sanitary and other services. The private and public agencies of Ireland worked purposely together to realise this great spectacle. A cross, weighing 30 tons was made up from 6 rolled steel joists, required 5km of welding. It was sized to the maximum height to come within the load and reach capacity of the largest mobile crane in Ireland. The cross was set on a scaffold podium covered with 4,000m² with grey carpet, designed to look like a great granite ziggurat. A concrete chamber supported the cross, and served as a vestry chamber on the day. The cross remains standing to the present day.

























Our Lady of the Wayside Church

Information regarding this structure has proved difficult to source.

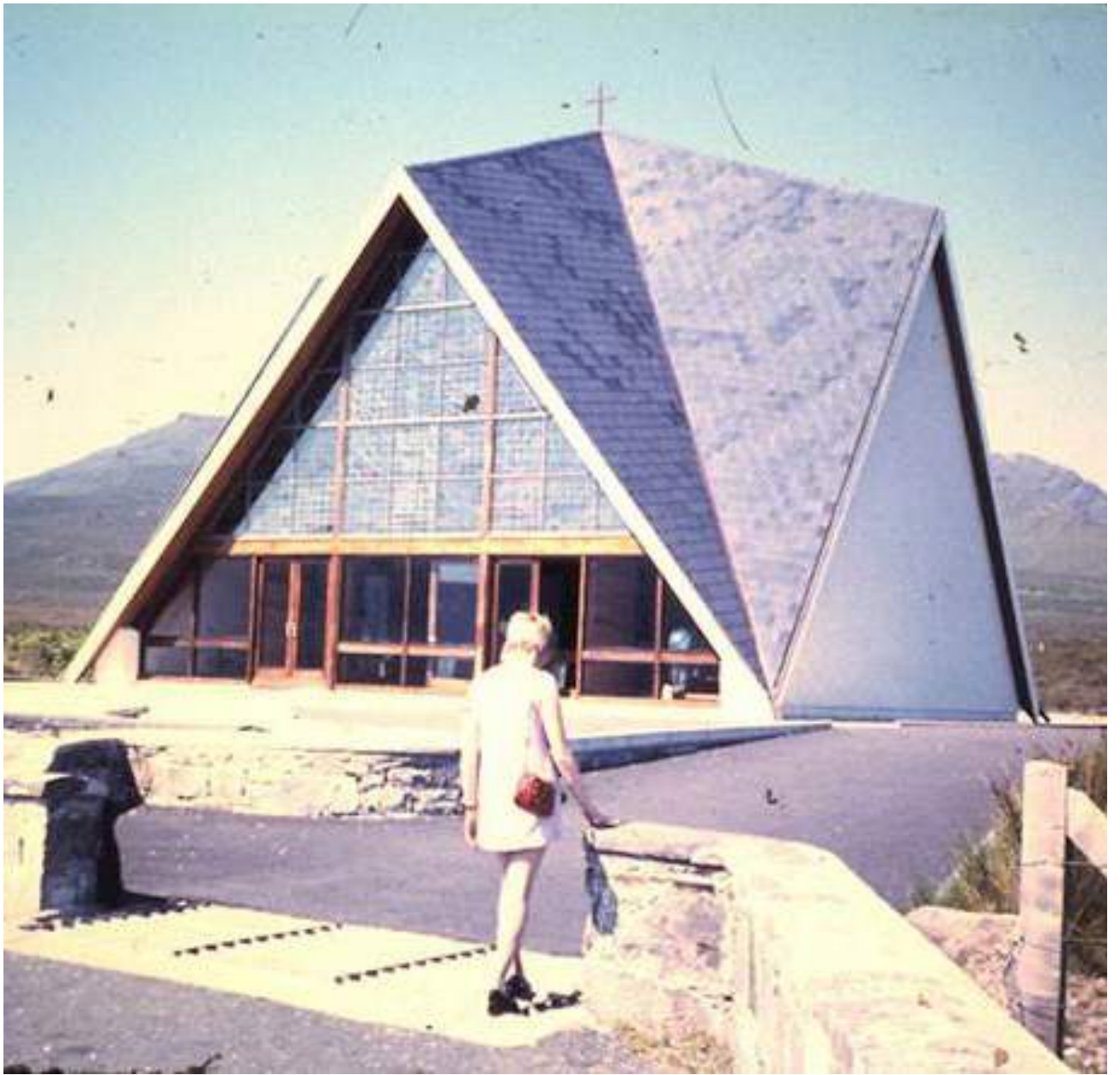
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Leenaun Creeragh County
Galway

1980









Miscellaneous

I. Lourdes House

Lourdes House exemplifies the sort of social housing built in Dublin in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The construction of Lourdes House began in 1957 and was finished in 1962. The development was named after the small town of Lourdes in France where in 1858 Marian apparitions were alleged to have been seen by Bernadette Soubirous, a young girl who was later canonized.

Lourdes House was demolished in 2009



II. The Cathedral of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven and St Nicholas

Construction commenced in 1958 on the site of the old city prison and was completed in 1965. Unlike other structures featured in this dossier The Cathedral of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven and St Nicholas emulated more traditional styles albeit on a mammoth scale. The architect of the cathedral was John J. Robinson



III. St. Mary's Church, Tallaght

St Mary's Priory was built between 1855 and 1864. In 1969 this arcaded seventeen-bay portico and aisle was added. The architect is unknown.



IV. St. Micheals Church, Dun Laoghaire

This church was designed by Sean Rothery, Pearse McKenna, and Naois O'Dowd and opened in 1973. While the exterior is clad traditionally with stone, the interior features exposed concrete and is lit by rooflights and windows just under the roofline. This duality reflects and reflects the new thinking in the Roman Catholic Church after Vatican II.



V. St Patricks Chapel, Drumcondra

Designed by Andrew Devane
1964



Image credits

Images of Church of our Lady Mother of Divine Grace, Our Lady Queen of Heaven and St. Fintan's Church courtesy of Lisa Cassidy.

Images of The Star of the Sea chapel, Saint Aengus Church, St Micheals Church and Our Lady of Lourdes courtesy of Letitia Magee and RIBA.

Images of The Basilica of Knock and Papal Visit courtesy of RTÉ Photographic Archive and Pearl Quinn

Images of Lourdes House courtesy of Dublin City Archive

RTÉ Archives

Colophon

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