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# ST CHRISTOPHER'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH COMPLEX



View of church from north side

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## Location

34 ROBERTS ROAD,, AIRPORT WEST VIC 3042 - Property No 218552

## Municipality

MOONEE VALLEY CITY

## Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO344

## Heritage Listing

Moonee Valley City

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

### *What is significant?*

St Christopher's Church complex, 34 Roberts Road, Airport West, comprises a large brick church of distinctive wedge-shaped form, designed by architect Max Chester in 1969. It replaced the original brick church building, built in 1961 to the design of Smith & Tracey, which still remains in use as a Parish Hall. The site also includes a

presbytery (1964) and later school buildings.

#### *How is it significant?*

St Christopher's Church complex is of historical, social, spiritual and architectural significance to the City of Moonee Valley.

#### *Why is it significant?*

Historically, the church complex is significant for its ability to provide evidence of the expansion of community services in Airport West during the 1960s, which was a period of particularly intensive development in that area. Socially and spiritually, the church has been and remains as an important focus for Roman Catholic activity in the Airport West area.

Architecturally, the church is one of the earliest and more successful applications of the new liturgical planning principles that were put forward by the Second Vatican Council in 1965. These principles, which include such things as allowing the sanctuary to be visible to all members of the congregation, have resulted in a building of unusual form on a distinctive wedge-shaped plan. The church is also of interest as that first church designed by architect Max Chester, who went on to maintain a prolific association with the Catholic church in the 1970s and '80s. Of the three churches that Chester designed in the north-western suburbs, St Christopher's is the most intact and the most distinctive in design.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Moonee Valley - City of Moonee Valley Gap Heritage Study, Heritage Alliance, 2005;
Construction dates	1961, 1969,
Architect/Designer	Chester, Max, Smith & Tracey,
Hermes Number	29781
Property Number	

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## Physical Description 1

The church has been described by historian Jill Barnard as one of the earlier and more successful applications of the new liturgical planning principles that resulted from the Second Vatican Council in 1965. These principles, which would characterise all new Catholic churches built thereafter, included open planning to allow the altar to be seen by every member of the congregation. At Airport West, this was realised as a broad fan-shaped plan, which was extruded upward with exposed brick walls, surmounted by an angular skillion roof. A number of contemporaneous Catholic churches in Melbourne are very similar in form and materials, including St Christopher's, Syndal (Paul Archibald, 1970), St Clement of Rome, Bulleen (Smith & Tracy, 1971) and St Mary's, Greensborough (Max Chester, 1971).

St Christopher's Church, Airport West, can also be compared with a number of other churches designed by prolific Catholic architect Max Chester. It was the first of several churches that he designed in Melbourne's western suburbs; two more examples are located in the study area. The church of St Peter the Apostle in Parkside Crescent, East Keilor (1970) is comparable in date but otherwise entirely different in form, being a rectilinear brick hall with little architectural pretension, originally intended to be temporary. It has, in more recent years, been entirely remodelled externally. Chester's design for St Martin de Porres, in Military Road, Avondale Heights (1987) itself replaced an earlier church/hall, built in 1961. It is more traditional in form, having a basilican plan and steep gabled roof and pointed windows evocative of the Gothic style.

## Historical Australian Themes

## THEMATIC CONTEXT

6.2 Establishing schools

8.6 Worshipping

8.13 Living in cities and suburbs

## Physical Conditions

### CONDITION

The church is in excellent condition.

### Integrity

#### INTEGRITY

The church is substantially intact.

## Physical Description 2

ARCHITECTS/DESIGNERS Chester, Max

MAKER/BUILDER Robert Owen & Sons

### CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

**Construction started ?**

**Construction completed** 1969

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*