

A GIFT TO HIS COUNTRY and a memorial to his God

One of the most awesome edifices I've ever had the pleasure of viewing is the famous, unfinished cathedral of Antoni Gaudi: LA SAGRADA FAMILIA (*Spanish for 'The Holy Family'*). Architect Gaudi was clearly one of Barcelona's favourite sons. His colourful, push-the-limits, fairytale creations are on-show all over this lovely city on Spain's Mediterranean coast. And his grand finale, the Sagrada Familia, has become the region's best-recognised symbol.

LOOK, NO EXAGGERATION: I've seen plenty of cathedrals in my time, and after a while they all start to look the same. But this teetering, towering, weirdly-wonderful construction took my breath away. And, when I got up close, it also gave me a stiff neck!

The eight completed bell-towers already jut more than 100 metres against the sky. And there are four more towers still to come, the highest of which (in honour of Christ) will reach an incredible 170 metres. But wait — there's more: the whole thing, from the base of the huge columns to the tips of each spire, is encrusted with a tangle of fantastical sculptures — which tell the Gospel story and breathe light and life into this mountain of stone and steel.

Gaudi launched his vast project in 1882, but he died in 1926 (knocked down by a tram) before it could be completed. Thankfully, Gaudi's vision has been kept alive and the work has continued, with each new generation of designers and sculptors adding their own



contemporary touch — including the current Executive Architect who, believe it or not, is a New Zealander!

La Sagrada Familia is still far-from-finished (you'll see cranes and scaffolding in almost every photograph) and it's anybody's guess when it will be completed.

THERE WAS A TIME IN my younger days when I was scornful of religious monuments like these, and inclined to write them off as extravagant wastes of money. But I'm learning these days to be more appreciative and grateful ... and (along with millions of other visitors each year) I've found Gaudi's vision utterly inspiring!

This was his most ambitious creation ever — a work of faith, devotion and love — a gift to his country and a memorial to his God. And when someone once queried the time it was taking to build, Gaudi responded, *"My client is not in a hurry!"*

Regrettably, I was in a



hurry that day in Barcelona. And I'd love to go back for a more leisurely look-see when the Sagrada Familia is finally done. Because, let me confess: I sensed something genuinely sacred about Antoni Gaudi's Holy Family Cathedral.

I'M REMINDED OF SOMETHING ELSE I ONCE LEARNED about cathedrals. Some of the oldest (*you may recall me writing about this previously*) date back 700 years. And, like the Sagrada Familia, they weren't erected overnight. In fact, 200–300 years is what it often took!

But listen to this: when the ancient architects and stonemasons began their work, guess what they did first? **THEY PLANTED OAK TREES!**

Yes, OAK trees! Because here's how they saw things: *"We'll get the foundations laid. Then our children will continue the work. But our grandchildren and great-grandchildren will eventually need timber for the beams and arches in the roof. So we'd better plant some oak trees today."*

And that's how it happened — no kidding! — with those big old cathedrals in England and Europe. They were built with love, they were built with excellence, they were built to last. And most of them have lasted brilliantly.

Imagine being one of several generations involved? Imagine working on a cathedral that your grandfather worked on? Imagine milling timber from an oak tree that your great-grandfather planted?

That's called *'looking ahead'*, eh. That's called *'investing in the future'*. And we could learn a few things from those cathedral-builders — don't you reckon?



YOU'RE GOING TO LOVE THE NEXT EDITION of Grapevine. It features a round-table discussion with three young widows — all of whom have recently, tragically lost their husbands. We're calling it **'THREE WEDDINGS & THREE FUNERALS'** ... and it's followed by another thought-provoking interview with a teenage mum: **'YOUNG, SINGLE & PREGNANT'**.

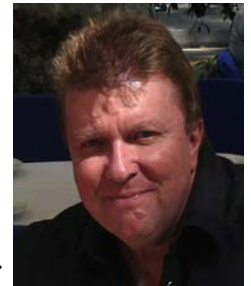
There are lots of potent, honest, hopeful ideas in this new magazine. And as we send it on its way to 160,000 Kiwi homes, I firmly believe we're not just doing something nice. *We're looking ahead ... we're investing in the future ... we're planting oak trees!*

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If your answer's YES ... can I invite you (once again) to help us (once again) **by sending an extra-generous, bigger-than-usual, from-the-heart MAY DONATION?**

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Thanks so much!



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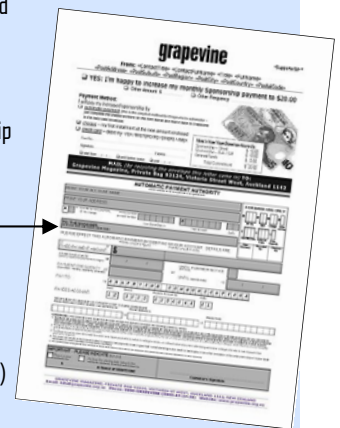
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