

I REMEMBER

The new church in Forestville, now the Parish Hall, was blessed and opened by Bishop Thomas Muldoon in December 1967. As with the school before it, voluntary labour was used in its erection. Holding up to 800 parishioners it was packed four times on Sunday, so the Parish Priest, Father Gailey wrote to the Cardinal and Auxiliary Bishops requesting that a new Parish be created in the Belrose area as the development continued to expand.

Back in 1960 the Sights Committee for the Archdiocese of Sydney had purchased five acres of land in Hilversum Cres, Belrose, for five thousand pounds. In 1963 Father Gailey visited the Lands Department and paid ten pounds holding deposit on five acres, west of the Frenchs Forest cemetery. All roads and development ceased at the cemetery, so it would not be available until some years later.

A meeting of Parishioners who lived north of Adam Street and west of Forest Way was called. A caretaker committee was appointed to plan for the new Parish and gather the people together to form a community with social events and fund raising. One of our committee was able to organise for the committee to submit a tender, to lay fertilizer over a large area of a housing commission estate, our tender was successful and the work had to be done on a Saturday, with our committee member being present to supervise the work. Back in those days all sport was played on Saturday morning as well as some having work commitments, so only 3 volunteers were found to complete the enormous task. They worked hard all day spreading the fertilizer with bare hands from a bucket. Our member supplied morning tea and a cup of tea for lunch, and each worker had brought a cut lunch. It took all day to perform the work and darkness prevented us from watering it in. At previous meetings discussion had been made about selecting a Patron for our expectant Parish. It was decided we would have a Patron that had not previously been used in the Archdiocese of Sydney. Several names were put forward but the most popular choice was "St Martin De Porres". This name was reasonably topical at this time as "St Martin" had been canonized by the Good Pope John XXIII, also Martin Luther King, a Baptist Minister, had used non-violent means to lead his people from bondage in the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King fell to the assassins bullet and we regarded him as a martyr for the Gospel. Over lunch back at the working bee, discussion took place as to what to do with the cheque we earned, we decided we would approach Father Gailey and ask him to open a new account called "St Martin De Porres". Fr Gailey was very supportive and agreed, and our first finance raising began. The workers had decided they would return on Sunday morning and water in the fertilizer. Following a prayer to St Martin that night the heavens opened and beautiful light rain fell all over the area we had worked. We did further work for the Housing Commission at other sites and more volunteers were able to join in.

At last the roads and streets were made west of the cemetery and the area was named Davidson. It took several trips to the Lands Office before we could get a

satisfactory deal and deeds to the church land. The Sights Committee for the Archdiocese paid for the land.

The first building was blessed and opened by Cardinal Freeman on 1st June 1975. It remained a mass centre until December 1975 when a new parish was proclaimed with Fr Patrick Gillic as the first Parish Priest. The pews for the church were obtained from Riverstone parish who had updated and we had an enjoyable trip to collect them one Saturday, organised by Fr Gillic. Starting from scratch we had no equipment for the church and relied heavily on the generosity of parishioners to donate items. I never cease to wonder at the goodness of people with their time and charity. So many gave of themselves and as couples and are still available when someone needs help.

Our organists began the process of teaching new hymns as we were limited in our scope. Our hard working Ladies committee organised market research sessions, which paid well and we were able to purchase Hymn books from the Liturgical office in Brisbane. Crowds flocked to our church and Fr Gillic was successful in obtaining the Augustinian Fathers to celebrate two masses each Sunday morning.

The building of the school of religion, now the foyer of the church, was then undertaken and bathroom facilities and a bedroom would be included to provide accommodation for Fr Gillic. The kitchen would be shared by Fr and the community. Fr's living room was known as "The Blue room" because of the carpet and it is the current sacristy. At this point in time we did not intend to build a school as our mortgage was stretched to the hilt. What we were looking at was purchasing a parish bus and transporting children to the school of religion on Sunday. (This was before the destruction of the Christian Sunday). The enrolments at Mimisa School were the highest in NSW, and the Catholic Education Office advised to build a school. A modest grant was made from the Government but the onus was on the Parish to service the debt. The school was opened with Sister Marcia, the first Principal, who imbued the Brigidine Ethos, which happily the school has retained. The parish decided that if we could build a school for healthy students we should also assist schools that cater for special needs children. The Knights of the Southern Cross undertook to raise ten thousand dollars in the parish to assist St Gabriels Deaf school at Castle Hill, and St Lucy's and St Edmunds.

A permanent presbytery for Fr Gillic was erected. The generosity of the people through direct giving to the envelope collection enabled the mortgage payments to be made. I should not say this but I know that the Pastor baked his salary on more than one occasion in the church account to ward off the Bank Manager.

Many amusing events occurred in our parish and I will recall one. For our First Easter vigil (1976) on the Saturday we received a distraught call from the Pastor to say he had nothing to bless the Holy Water in, and would we have a 'boiler'. I explained that we had a boiler but we had lashed out to celebrate the great fast of

Easter and a piece of Silverside was in it on the stove. The silverside was hastily cooked and the scrubbing process began. The boiler containing the Holy Water was used and repeated on the next two vigils, although it was not used prior and was decorated with crepe paper. Then while on a camping holiday a parishioner renowned for her shopping, spied a ceramic container in a bargain shop. It was ideal for the purpose except that it did not have a tap and the water had to be sloped out the top.

The price fell within the budget so it was purchased and used until the new church opened with its built in font. Fr Gillic was followed as Parish Priest by Dr John Hill. It was Fr Hill's first parish as he had always been in education and was an academic and undoubtedly one of the church's highest intellectuals. We relished in his homilies and he challenged us in all aspects of our faith. Fr John set up extra ministries involving more and more of the laity. He undertook the construction of the new church. Once again the people rallied and did a lot of voluntary work on the building of which we are immensely proud. Always prepared to experiment, Fr John decided to hold the Easter Vigil at 5am on Sunday morning to coincide with the time Jesus rose from the Dead. As the liturgy always had to be perfect the congregation raised the roof off the church with their response to 'Exultant' "Blessed Be the Lord, the God of Israel, He has visited His people and redeemed them, Christ the Lord is Risen, sound the trumpet of salvation". At that time of the morning sound travels and following complaints the police arrived and we had to turn off the sound system.

Fr Hill was followed by Fr David Taylor who maintained the ministries etc set up by Fr John. Fr David was also renowned for his Liturgy which inspires all to keep the first commandment. "The Greatest in the Law".

With the merging of the Parishes of Forestville and Davidson, Fr Meek came to assist Fr David. After Fr Frank was appointed to Kincumber, Fr Clem Hill came to assist. Fr Clem was also a renowned educator, due to his influence and the cooperation of our organists, he left us with 2 of the best choirs in the Diocese. Fr Clem's own liturgy was impeccable. Bishop David changed the system for education and the parish was no longer responsible for the school debt.

Fr David was replaced by Fr Michael O'Toole who has brought his own style to the parish. Many comment on his gift of oratory.

Fr Geoff Bugden came as assistant priest. Fr Geoff was friendly and a good communicator, and endeared himself to many in the parish. He was called to minister to the people of Cobar which our Diocese had undertaken to staff.

Finally we welcome our friends from Kerala, India. How grateful we are to them for coming among us to minister to our spiritual needs. They bring with them a rich culture and tradition that goes back to St Thomas The Twin. We hope we can keep them for many years to come and their example, will inspire others to leave all things and follow "Him".

While it is good to look back, the important thing is to concentrate on the present, and look forward with trust in Divine Providence to the future.

Written by Bruce Walsh.