

# A History of St Michael's Parish and Mass Centre, Kaleen ACT

## A PLACE FOR WORSHIP

On 7 October 1976, Archbishop Cahill officially "... dismembered the parish of St Monica, Evatt, and erected the parish of St Michael the Archangel, Kaleen, as from the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1976". The suburbs of Giralang and Kaleen had been formally created in January 1974 and for archdiocesan purposes were attached to St Monica's.

The first months of the parish relied on the Giralang pioneers, as housing construction in Kaleen started later. Giralang parishioners have been integral to the spiritual and practical life of the parish which was often described locally as "St Michael's Kaleen-Giralang".

The first Mass was celebrated on 7 November 1976 at the new presbytery in Powlett Street. Sunday Masses were soon celebrated at Kaleen Primary School in Ashburton Circuit. On commencement of classes at the new St Michael's primary school in February 1982 all Masses were celebrated in the school hall. Weekday masses were in the small annex at the back of the hall.

In 1990 St Michael's Church was opened. The foundation stone was blessed by Archbishop Carroll on 13 May 1990 and the dedication took place on 8 December 1990. The church and presbytery are adjacent to St Michael's school, with easy and safe access between school and church. The house at Powlett Street was sold in February 1991.

A young St Michael's parish thrived, but reflecting its suburbs the demographics slowly changed. From a peak of 156 Baptisms in 1982-83, St Michael's saw only 18 Baptisms in 2016-17.

The parish was formally absorbed into the new North Belconnen Parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (OLOPH) on 1 January 2018. The 'Decree for the Modification of the parishes of Evatt and Kaleen' was issued on 30 August 2017 by Archbishop Prowse. A simple Liturgy of Inauguration of the new parish was held on 18 February 2018, at St Francis Xavier High School, Florey. The church building retained its name, as did St Monica's. St Michael's presbytery became the OLOPH office in 2018.

Kaleen has a claim as the suburb of churches, with four purpose-built church buildings – St Michael's, St Mark Coptic Orthodox, St Simon's Anglican and All Saints Greek Orthodox. In addition to these buildings there are other places of formal worship in the suburb.

## OUR SUNDAY WORSHIP

In 1977, Sunday Masses started with the 6 pm vigil, and 8:30 and 10:00. Mass was also celebrated every day of the week. A Sunday evening Mass was introduced by Father Bernie Patterson in 1986, and later a 7:15pm Saturday Charismatic Mass. In 1996, Sunday Masses were the 6pm vigil, and 9am and 5:30. The Monday Mass was discontinued. With the appointment in 2012 of a Parish Administrator based at St Monica's, changes to Mass times were necessary. St Monica's had the 6pm Vigil while St Michael's retained the Sunday evening 5:30pm Mass. The 9am Sunday Mass became 8am. Weekday Masses were celebrated on Tuesdays and Thursdays. In 2015, Saturday morning Mass was added.

## THE PARISH SCHOOL

Among the tasks facing the newly created Parish in 1976 was the construction of a parish school. As early as March 1978, 87 children were being bussed to Holy Rosary school in Watson. That task was pursued successfully, and St Michael's school opened in February 1982 (the official opening was in

June 1983). In its first year, the school had 250 pupils. The parish's annual return to the Archdiocese reported enrolments at St Michael's school as 440 in 1987, 365 in 1997, and 185 in 2017.

The School of Religion had 40 students in 1978 rising to 94 in 1991 but falling to 22 by 2001. In 2010, no school of religion figures were reported. The parish's final annual report in 2016-17 showed no school of religion.

### Not the first St Michael's to the north of Civic.

St Michael's School in Lyneham opened on 19 September 1961. The school, near St Ninian's, was also to be used as a church. This St Michael's was not a parish, however, as it existed primarily to provide additional classrooms for an overflowing St Joseph's O'Connor. The school closed in December 1973, when there was no longer sufficient demand in O'Connor/Lyneham.

St Michael's Lyneham had been staffed by Sisters of the Ursuline Order, which also provided Sister Ita Maher and Sister Anne Cogle as the first two principals of St Michael's Kaleen.

## PASTORAL CARE - RELIGIOUS

The first Mass in the new parish was concelebrated at the Powlett Street presbytery by Archbishop Cahill and the first Parish Priest, Father Hilton Roberts in November 1976. In April 1986, Father Bernie Patterson was appointed Parish Priest, serving the area to May 1996. Father Steve Tynan MGL assisted for a short period in 1993.

Fathers Chris Irwin (from May 1996), Lachlan Coll (July 2002) and Peter Ha, Doai (August 2008) followed. In October 2012 Father Warwick Tonkin, then Parish Priest of St Monica's Evatt, was appointed Administrator for St Michael's. Father Luis Viovicente (Father Loi) took over from Father Warwick in July 2015. He became the first Parish Priest of the newly created North Belconnen parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Help on its creation at the beginning of 2018. Father Johny Abraham became the Assistant Priest in the new parish, having supported Father Loi when he was Administrator prior to amalgamation.

Our Parish Priests have had valuable support in their pastoral work from other religious and from the parish community including, in order, Sister Anne Fitzpatrick (mid to late 1980s), Sisters Anne Cogle and Genny Ryan (late 1980s to the mid-1990s). Sister Kate McMahon who commenced at St Michael's in July 2013, has continued with the new Parish, extending her work beyond Kaleen and Giralang into McKellar, Spence, Melba, Evatt and Lawson.

## PASTORAL CARE – THE COMMUNITY

The parish prospered as a living community from its inception. The St Vincent de Paul Society and the Catholic Women's League were active as Parish-based organisations from the beginning. Members of the parish from older suburbs of Canberra provided valuable guidance to the many eager young families moving to their first Canberra home and sometimes from interstate.

As the parish grew in population so did its support for its own and in outreach. While by no means extraordinary in Catholic communities throughout Australia, St Michael's did live the mission of the Church through the pastoral care provided. By 1997, the four Pastoral Council committees were co-ordinating over 40 separate groups and activities.

After 5 years as principal of St Michael's School, Sister Anne Cogle together with Sister Genny Ryan and Father Bernie Patterson formed the Pastoral Planning Team.

No single event defined St Michael's. It was a place of worship and community for the suburbs' Catholic population, and some non-Catholics too who enjoyed both our worship and community. Like its neighbours, the priestly and lay leadership changed regularly, each turnover bringing

different talents. Many parishioners have been and continue to be active members of the many Catholic and other Christian prayer and support groups that are Canberra or national rather than parish-based.

Community activities have included:

- Strong acolyte and Mass co-ordination participation by parishioners. Altar decoration and church cleaning.
- Community-based choirs. The choir composition and hymn and song selection have reflected the changing demographics of Kaleen and Giralang.
- Care group, providing meals to families in short term need.
- Prayer trees and chains – members circulated urgent prayer requests
- Morning teas held mid-week in parishioners' homes for young families and newcomers throughout the 1980s and '90s.
- Morning tea after the Sunday morning Mass, since mid-1999 (excluding January!)
- Parish commitment to building and supporting the school from 1976 to today. Combined school and parish fetes and trivia nights, and working bees.
- Active support for World Youth Day in July 2008. In February 2008 St Michael's (with St Monica's) had hosted the WYD Cross on its journey to Sydney. For the Days in the Diocese which preceded the formal Sydney WYD, St Michael's Parish through our many parishioners hosted overseas pilgrims from Papua New Guinea, France and Germany. A number of parishioners attended WYD.
- Youth groups thrived in the peak school years of 'first settler' families. By 1990, a Year 6-7 group and a Year 8 – 10 youth group made good use of the school hall and provided fun excursions. A primary-school-aged youth group ran from 2001 to 2010, and formed the drive for the parish participation in World Youth Day in 2008.

## THE BUILDING AND ITS FEATURES

On his arrival as Parish Priest in 1986, Father Bernie was greeted with the news that the parish wanted its own church building. And adjoining presbytery! The Powlett Street presbytery was a handy walk to the Tyrrell Street school, but not ideally placed for busy pastors.

A church building committee was established in 1988. It prepared a detailed design brief for a field of architects, and selected Canberra firm Munns, Sly and Associates. The architect's statement on the dedication of the church explained the design as follows:

St Michael's church and presbytery have been sited next to St Michael's School in order to create a parish centre. The church has been designed as a symbol of that community and as a physical sign of the commitment of its members. ....

The form of the church consists of a series of simple pitched roofs with a clerestory light which reflects the spatial and symbolic intentions of the interior. The roofs hover over very firm masonry walls.

The interior of the building is organised around a central axis which concludes with a huge cross carved through the northern wall. The cross is flanked by the tabernacle and baptismal pool. Together the three elements are powerful symbols of the sacraments and suggest the Trinity. ...."

Construction of the church building was undertaken by Caesar Defranceschi. The Master Builders' Association of the ACT awarded his company D & F Enterprises Pty Ltd an Excellence in Building Award in 1991 for its work on the church.

As at June 2019, the building fabric is unchanged from its original construction.

Stained glass windows installed to the side and rear of the altar were designed by Sister Genny Ryan. The blue and green glass windows near the Baptistry symbolise water; the church design had included an immersion baptismal pool in the front right corner of the altar (which has now been covered). The windows near the tabernacle are a deep red wine colour surrounded by glass with salmon and other pink hues. All four windows were made by Canberra glass artist Alois Mikula. The ceiling-suspended sanctuary lamp was designed and fabricated by glass artist Velta Vilmanis.

**The furniture:** All major items of altar furniture were designed and made by Donald Fortescue and Anteon Merman of Murrumbateman, from silky oak and jarrah timber. The architect's statement noted that "... the furniture and art works ... have been thoroughly integrated into the design and add to the ambience and serenity of the Church." The pews, made from silky oak and Tasmanian oak, were also designed by this firm, and constructed by Canberra firm Fine Design.

The large wooden crucifix mounted over the main doors were crafted by Peter von Rack from Western Australia at the same time as he crafted an altar for the Seafarers' Mission in Dampier; the timber came from the demolished Point Samson jetty. It was installed in the school hall in 1982, and was moved to the new church building in 1990.

A traditional crucifix is framed by the glass and steel cross integrated into the wall behind the altar. That crucifix – without the wooden cross - was obtained from the deconsecrated St Peter's Church in Coolac (near Gundagai). A suitable timber crucifix, made by parishioner Bill Jones, bears a small plaque from the original Coolac cross and reads: 'Pray for Patrick John Sullivan Died 11<sup>th</sup> July 1964 R I P'. The retention of the plaque symbolically acknowledges the role of so many families in the Catholic Church's history in country New South Wales, while forming a link within the Archdiocese between the old (St Peter's was consecrated in 1925) and the new.

**The gardens:** The tree-based garden layout was undertaken by parishioners as was subsequent garden maintenance. Later tree plantings marked World Youth Day (2008) on the front corner and behind the church. The rear planting for this celebration included five birches in the formation of the Southern Cross has been slightly more successful, with four trees surviving. A rejuvenation of the front garden by parishioners in the late 2000s added year-round colour.

**Later furniture:** Additional items of altar furniture were added in the 2000's. Most were made by parishioner Bill Jones, at the request of the Parish Priests. These included the cover for the immersion baptismal pool (Tasmanian Oak, with a merbau cross inlay), a stand for a traditional baptismal font (Tasmanian Oak and merbau), an altar of repose (mountain ash and merbau), a matching stand for the Paschal candle. The Stations of the Cross were added by Father Coll. The timber bowls used for the first collection at weekend Masses were turned from solid timber (Brazilian teak) by parishioner Helen Heindl's father, Mr J Boulding, in 1993.

Intellectual, labour, skill and monetary contributions by so many parishioners and visitors to the building are recognised by the simple 'Make your home in me" (John 15:3) plate affixed to the exterior of the church.

## AND NOW!

In 2019 St Michael's church is filled with a rich mix of people from many parts of the globe. The future leaders of the new parish will come from this mix and from St Monica's, bringing with them interpretations of parish and community relevant for them and their children.

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This brief history has been prepared from primary documents held in the records of St Michael's church. Additional detail has been sought from other sources in those few instances where the records are incomplete. A more detailed history is held in the parish archives.