

Edmonton Catholic Parish

*under the patronage of St Thérèse of Lisieux,
patroness of the Missions*

Our past and our growth – a very brief overview

While a systematic account of the parish's development is currently underway, this potted history provides a simple overview of the evolving life of a new parish community in the Edmonton area since earlier last century.

A strong foundation

The work of the Gospel was active in the lives of the people of this area many years before the parish was officially proclaimed, and the first resident priest appointed from 1 January 1965.

The history of their effort is filled with determination, initiative, dedication and generosity; symbolised in the remarkable way in which the current parish complex and way of life was brought about and held together over time.

It all began at Edmonton, centred around a small settlement on the Bruce Highway ... hence the name *Edmonton Catholic Parish*.

In the early 1900s, Irish Augustinian priests, from St Joseph's Parish community, Parramatta Park, Cairns, travelled periodically (later fortnightly) to Edmonton by rail motor, and then by car, to celebrate Mass with the local community (initially in the home of a local settler family, and then in the settlement's first church up until the foundation of the new Edmonton parish. The same home provided a place for Sunday religious instruction of local catholic children, until the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy (Cairns) and the school.

The land on which the original parish complex was to be built (the church, school and convent) was donated by a well-known local family; one of the early settler families in the area.

Early church and priest's residence

The construction of the **first church** (*pictured below*) a small timber building under the patronage of St Thérèse of Lisieux, was financed by another of the early settler families; providing the community with a worship space for 74 years: from 1927 to 2002. That building co-existed with two different school structures on the site; all under St Thérèse's patronage.

In 1966, the daughter of the family who financed the construction of the church, further donated a house which was to serve as the **first priest's residence** in the new parish. In time, a larger building was purchased to become the **second residence** (*pictured below*) including a **parish office**.



Early schools and convents

Before 1928, local catholic children attended the Blackfellow Creek State School (later to become the Hambledon State School on its current site). The **first catholic school** structure (a two-storey wooden building *pictured below, 1950's*) – Edmonton Convent School – was transported from Chillagoe in 1928, along with a **convent** building to house the Sisters of Mercy (Cairns) who provided the initial teaching staff for the school. Piece-by-piece these buildings were de-constructed at Chillagoe (following the decline in the local mining economy), transported and re-constructed on their new site at Edmonton. The Sisters lived in a temporary residence until the convent was completed.



A **second school** structure (now brick) was constructed adjacent to the church, and opened in 1969; cementing the local community (catholic and other) through volunteer labour. The parish motto of the time serves as a hallmark of the growth being sustained: 'Through the work of many, united as one, great things are done'.

The withdrawal by the Sisters of Mercy from the school led to the appointment of the first lay principal in 1976.

The Handmaids of Our Lord (Sisters whose congregation was founded in PNG) were invited to the diocese; three of whom arrived at Edmonton in January 1974 and lived in the then vacant Sisters of Mercy convent. They worked in a variety of pastoral

ministries in the Cairns and Edmonton areas, as well as Thursday Island and, in time, purchased a local house as their own **convent**.

A new era of growth

By 1990, the parish complex on the Bruce Highway was deemed too small to accommodate the needs of a growing urban development and the future demands of the parish and local communities. A 7.781hectare site was purchased (located today at 135-167 Robert Road, in the newly named Bentley Park development) and dedicated in October 1992. The site was developed progressively over 8 years, in 4 stages:

- the parish's **third school** structure (1995, under continued patronage of St Thérèse of Lisieux), now also includes the recent development of after school hours care and kindy facilities
- a **convent** built by the Handmaids of Our Lord (1998)
- **Parish Centre**, including the third priest's **residence** (1999), and
- the parish's **second Church** (dedicated to the patronage of St Thérèse of Lisieux on 17 June 2001).

Many hands, many ministries: a community of faith

Since its proclamation in 1965, the Edmonton parish community has grown under the leadership and custodianship of not just 7 diocesan priests; not just a host of Sisters of Mercy; not just a number of Handmaids of Our Lord Sisters, but of a remarkable and large number of people whose spirit forged a setting for growth, and of service into the wider community.

Our history continues to build on the story of our forebears; a story and life of diverse membership; and of continued engagement with the world's changes and challenges.