

# The Catholic Church

in Dubbo

... a brief history

The Wiradjuri people have lived on this land for countless generations - possibly as long as 60,000 years - and their gentle spirit still permeates the Dubbo region and our parish.

The first known Europeans to travel in the Dubbo area were the explorer John Oxley, the Surveyor General, and his party of 16 men on 11th June 1818. In 1824 permits were issued for the occupation of land for grazing, thus beginning a clash of cultures that has had ramifications to the present day.

Robert Dulhunty selected "Old Dubbo" station in 1829, three miles south of the current city. Dubbo village was gazetted in November 1849. The 1851 census recorded 28 males and 19 females in the village with 7 houses and 1 partially built. Aboriginal people were not recorded in any census in Australia until 1967.

The pioneer's cemetery just off the Old Dubbo Road contains graves from the 1830's and 40's.

## The First Churches

Official Catholic history in the Dubbo area begins with Father Michael McGrath of Kings Plains (near Blayney) who made the first recorded visit of a priest when he baptised Catherine, the daughter of William and Anne Smith, on the 10th October 1847 at Dubbo.

In 1854 the first attempts were made to build a Catholic Church in Macquarie Street, between Bultje and Cobra Streets. This was a slab building with a shingle roof which could hold twenty to thirty people. Father Patrick White of Wellington regularly celebrated Mass here from 1856 until the church was blown down in a storm. He celebrated the first recorded Catholic wedding at Dubbo between John Hubert Crowe and Mary Giles on Friday 12th September 1856. At this time Wellington was the larger centre and Dubbo was just an outlying station church.

A second church site was dedicated on 16th July 1863. The Diocese of Bathurst was established in 1865. The following year Bishop Matthew Quinn arrived from Ireland with some clergy and Sisters.

The parish of Dubbo was established in 1865 with Fr McAuliffe as Parish Priest. He used the "old chaff shed" in Brisbane St. (opposite the present-day Commercial Hotel) as his "church" after the first one had been destroyed. In May 1870 St Aloysius School opened on the site of the current Dubbo City Council Administration Building in Carrington Avenue. It served as a church on weekends until the end of 1873 when the new sandstone church opened for worship.

St. Brigid's sandstone church was designed by Mr Edward Gell, a leading architect in the colony, who had been a pupil to the famous Pugin in Europe. The original plan had to be reduced in size because the Catholic community was unable to afford the original design. The building has a sense of perfect proportions about it. The sandstone walls, locally quarried on the west bank of the Macquarie River, were 12 feet above ground level in May 1870. The building then came to a stand-still because of lack of finance and remained thus for three years. In 1872 there were about 700 non-indigenous people in Dubbo and district.

Fr Chastagnon had come as the second Parish Priest in 1871. On the 23rd June 1873 he called a meeting at St Aloysius Church/School about getting a roof on the sandstone walls. He mentioned at the meeting "the boltiness of the contractor" which could have been the reason for the unfinished church. A new contractor began to put the roof on, but halfway through the job asked for an advance payment and then 'departed for fresh fields and left a number of sorrowing creditors'. Finally another contractor completed the roof towards the end of 1873. Pews and windows were beyond the financial reach of the community, so calico took the place of stained glass.

Bishop Matthew Quinn of Bathurst solemnly opened and blessed the church on 8th March 1874. After 1876 the new stained glass windows were installed at a cost of 700 pounds. The 'rose window' above the choir gallery in the western wall was given by local land-holder Duncan MacKillop, uncle of Saint Mary MacKillop. The church seated 280 people and cost 2,500 pounds. The original building consisted of only the central nave section. The sanctuary and sacristy (with open fire place) were added in 1880 at a cost of 395 pounds.

Fr Julian Tenison Woods, co-founder with Saint Mary MacKillop of the Sisters of St. Joseph, preached a Mission in the church from 8th-22nd October 1880 and also delivered a public lecture on Monday evening the 23rd October entitled "My Adventures in Australia", in which he spoke about his botanical and geological expeditions in northern Australia.

"The Reverend gentleman's lecture was interspersed with amusing personal experiences, and the attention of his audience was kept occupied for an hour and a half." (*The Express*, Sydney 4th November 1880).

Nearly 300 pounds was collected after his lecture towards the cost of the new sanctuary and sacristy.

Since 1865 the priests had lived in various houses throughout Dubbo. In November 1901 Dr John Brophy PP, DD, BA, LLB commissioned the building of the two storey 'fifth' presbytery—the present day Parish Offices.

With the new century came the need for enlarging the original church nave by adding transepts. The foundation stone was laid in January 1906 and 575 pounds was collected at the ceremony. The following year Cardinal Francis Patrick Moran of Sydney and other dignitaries were present for the blessing and opening of both transepts. An ecumenical spirit allowed the following luncheon to be held in the Methodist Hall.

Unique features of the 'old' St. Brigid's are the different designs of the six carved sandstone crosses on the various roof points. No reason can be ascertained for the differences, apart from being exhibits of the skills of the stone-masons in the 1800's.

## Schooling

**St Aloysius' Boys School** in Carrington Avenue, opened in 1870, and was originally run by laymen. Six Sisters of Mercy arrived on 9th July 1880 to open **Our Lady's College** for boarders and day-pupils and **St John's Primary School**. Two Patrician Brothers arrived in 1889 to take over St Aloysius Boy's School from the lay teachers. The Brothers left in 1892. The Sisters of Mercy then taught the boys. The Patrician Brothers returned in 1921 but left again in 1924 after criticism from the bishop. The De La Salle Brothers were invited to take over the boys school in 1927. They remained in the parish until 1974.

The Sisters of Mercy College (**St Patrick's**) and the **De La Salle Brothers College** were combined and reorganised in 1969 as **St John's College** - with the Infants Department in Brisbane Street, the Primary Department in Bultje Street and the Secondary Department (to year 10) in George Street. From the 1970's lay teachers gradually replaced religious in all facets of education.

As enrolments increased, and the secondary College began the expansion to a full 7 - 12 high school, the George Street site became too small. A new secondary school was commenced at Sheraton Road. In 1986 years 7 and 8 re-located to the Sheraton Road site, while the senior years remained at George Street. In 1991 the George Street site was sold to the TAFE and St John's College was fully located at Sheraton Road. Other facilities were added over the years - Barbara Amos Hall in 1991, Technics block in 1997, the Human Movement Centre in 2002, the Music Centre in 2004, significant additions to the library in 2010, and plans in place to build a Trade Training Centre to cater for students from various schools in Dubbo.

In 2006, **St John's Primary** school was re-located to a new site in Sheraton Road, beside St John's College. In 2007 it was expanded to a two stream K - 6 school.

**St Mary of the Angels Infants School/Church** opened in 1910 on the corner of Macleay and Bourke Streets, North Dubbo and was staffed by the Sisters of Mercy. The school was moved to a new site further north in Bourke Street in 1961 and staffed from 1969 - 1974 by the Daughters of Charity. St Mary's Infants School re-located to the Myall Street/Wheelers Lane site in 1983 and had expanded to a full two stream K-6 primary school by 2001.

St Mary's Church was used until 1989. It was demolished in the early 1990's. The North Dubbo congregation worshipped in Lourdes Hospital Chapel until the mid 1990's when the decline in clergy numbers meant that Mass could not be celebrated in multiple locations throughout Dubbo and district.

**St Laurence OToole's School/Church** in South Dubbo opened in 1953 and was staffed by the Sisters of Mercy. The Parish of St Laurence was established in 1964 and the church was officially opened in 1972. The parish of St Laurence closed on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2008. St Laurence's School completed its transition to a single stream K - 6 school in 2010.

**St Pius X School/Church** was opened in 1974 and was staffed by the Sisters of Mercy. Sunday Mass was celebrated in the School rooms until 1990 when the new St Brigid's Church was opened. A Chapel was established in 1989 and Mass has been celebrated there each Saturday ever since.

## Care for the sick and frail aged

**Lourdes Hospital** was opened in 1958 by the Daughters of Charity as a home for frail aged men and women. In 2007 Catholic Health Care Services took over the running of Lourdes. A new Lourdes Hospital will be completed in 2011, situated between the current hospital and Holy Spirit Aged Care facility on Yarrandale Road.

**Ozanam Villa** Aged Care Facility opened in 1978 and was run by the St Vincent de Paul Society, with the help of local volunteers and committees. In 2008 the Villa passed into the hands of Catholic Health Care Services and was renamed **St Mary's Villa** in July 2008.

**Holy Spirit Dubbo** Aged Care Facility was built by Catholic Health Care Services in 2004 to provide high quality care for 62 people in four separate housing units.

## The new St Brigid's Church

The original St Brigid's Church served the needs of the parish until the late 1980's when a declining number of clergy, combined with an increasing Catholic population, meant that the old church was constantly overcrowded at Masses and parish liturgies.

The new St Brigid's Church had its beginnings in parish reflections during 1987 on the Second Vatican Council teachings about church, liturgy and worship. The basic teaching that our Eucharistic worship is 'the source and summit of the Church's activity' meant that the design and features of the new church needed to be different to the former style where a long building made the congregation spectators to the action of the priest in the sanctuary. The new understanding of liturgy called for 'conscious, active and full participation of the people, motivated by faith, hope and charity' (*Vatican Council II, General Instructions on the Celebration of the Eucharist, Ch. 1, no. 3*).

A committee of parishioners and priests planned this building in consultation with architects Bill & Dan Gibbons of Sydney. The fan-shaped design ensures that everyone is close to and focused on the liturgical actions.

The Sanctuary furnishings focus on the key aspects of liturgy; i.e:

- the altar - the table of the Eucharist, from which we receive the spiritual nourishment of Christ's Body & Blood;
- the lectern/ambo - the table of the Word of God, from which is proclaimed the message of the Gospel - compassion, justice, truth and love;
- the chair- from where the priest presides over the assembly and leads the people in prayer.

The sloping floor of the church assists peoples sense of total participation in the worship.

The new church was opened and blessed by the Bishop of Bathurst, Patrick Dougherty DD on the 1st July 1990. It has a seating capacity of 900 adults. A final Mass was celebrated in the 'old church' on the 30th June 1990 and then all the furnishings were removed and it was set-up as a 'hall' for the luncheon which followed the opening of the new church. Transferred to this new church were the sacred vessels, processional cross, presidential chair, and the hand carved wooden crucifix which now hangs on the wall of the Blessed Sacrament chapel.

The **front stained glass doors** and the sunken **baptismal font** remind us that rebirth comes through baptism and this sacrament brings us into membership with the Church - the people of God. *When we were baptised we went down into the tomb with Jesus to join him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life.* (Romans 6:3)

The intimate relationship between Baptism and Eucharist is highlighted by the use of the same material (granite) for the Font, Altar and Tabernacle stand. The new life of Christ, into which we are incorporated at baptism, is continually nourished and strengthened by our reception of Christ in the Eucharist.

The running water of the baptismal font reminds us of the Living Water: *If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me, and let those who believe in me drink ... Jesus was referring to the Spirit* (John 7:37-39).

It is on the stone **Eucharistic Table** that the Body of Christ is blessed, broken, and distributed to all who approach it for their spiritual nourishment. The altar is a granite boulder from the Eugowra district.

*Trust in the Lord forever ... our everlasting Rock* (Isaiah 26:4)

*The Lord is my rock ... in whom I take refuge* (Psalm 17:3)

*...all of them drank from a spiritual rock following them, and the rock was Christ* (1st Corinthians 10:4)

*On this rock I will build my Church* (Matt. 16:18)

The rock altar also recalls our Irish roots where the 'Mass-rock' in Ireland's hills was used for secret worship during the Penal Days when Irish Catholics were persecuted by the English government and not allowed to worship publicly.

The sculptures of the **Mother & Child** and the Scriptural **Stations of the Cross** in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel are the work of the Perth sculptor Gerard Darwin. He used a mother and son as his models in the former and was commissioned to create a sculpture that depicted Mary gently giving Jesus to the world.

The 14 gospel scenes of the Stations follow the Revised Form of the Stations (Rome 1975) recalling Jesus' journey from the Last Supper to the Resurrection. They are placed in the chapel to assist private prayer. Public Stations of the Cross in the Parish are celebrated at a hillside site on Mugga Hill (Dunedoo Road). These stations were erected by the Knights of the Southern Cross in 1980.

The **Risen Christ** figure on the front wall is the work of Alex Sandor Kolozsy of Sydney and highlights the fundamental truth of our faith that, even though Jesus died, he was raised from the dead to live forever - thereby guaranteeing that we too will move through death to everlasting life.

**St. Brigid's Cross** on the lectern/ambo symbolises the cross woven by her from straw or rushes and used to teach the Irish about Jesus.

A major feature of this church is the Tasmanian oak timber used in the up-swept ceiling to create an atmosphere of prayer as we lift up our hearts, minds and voices to God in worship, praise and thanksgiving.

The **chapel of the Blessed Sacrament** is set aside as space for private prayer and devotion and is the place from which Holy Communion is taken to the sick and house-bound. "It is highly recommended that the Holy Eucharist be reserved in a chapel suitable for private adoration and prayer" (*General Instructions on the Celebration of the Eucharist- no 276*).

In 2010 a new roof was built over the old one to stop water leaks that had grown worse over the years. As well, a new choir area was designed and built to specifically cater for the choir and other musicians. The audio visual system was completely upgraded at the same time.

The church remains the space where God is present when the Assembly gathers, the Word of God is proclaimed, the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of the Risen Christ and the priest presides, speaking and acting in the person of Christ.

*St Brigid's parish community hopes that you receive the blessing and peace of God from your visit to this church, which is our place of celebration and prayer. Wishing you a safe journey.*

*Fr Paul Devitt  
Pastor*