

Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish, Deepdene

History

The parishes of Kew, Camberwell and Hawthorn were established in 1889. The area which the Deepdene Parish encompasses was, at this time, part of the Parishes of Camberwell and Kew.

In 1919, a local Catholic, Stanislaus Day, wrote to the then Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr Daniel Mannix DD, to ask if a 'small church should be built... for the elderly people and maids at service'. His letter reasoned that there was a population of Catholics who lived on the boundary of the Parishes of Hawthorn, Kew and Camberwell, but they were 'about two miles from each church'. At this time, and for a number of years following, the area comprised market gardens and was rural in character. There was very little public transport and this posed great difficulties for those who wished to attend Mass. It is unclear how influential this correspondence was, nonetheless, within three years, in 1922, the Parish of Deepdene was established.

The first Parish Priest of Deepdene, Fr T B Walsh, was appointed in 1922. At that time, there was no church or school. The Masses were celebrated in the chapel of Genazzano FCJ College in Cotham Road, Kew, and marriages and baptisms took place in the surrounding parish churches.

Fr Walsh purchased the residence that was to become the presbytery, followed by the six building blocks to be used for the school and church. The first building, on the Whitehorse Road site, which is now part of the school, was used by the parish as both a church and school. The foundation stone was blessed by Archbishop Mannix on 26 November 1922.

The new parish started with about 80 families, which meant there was a heavy burden of debt for the parishioners to carry. In order to raise the funds to build the school and church, the parishioners held many functions – dances, fetes and raffles – and it required a concerted effort and the good will and hard work of these families. Monsignor J F Kelly's brief history of the parish, 'Past and Present', published in 1982, attests to the hardships of the pioneer parish and also to its many joys:

The numbers were small and did not grow as rapidly as the Archbishop hoped. The parishioners were not affluent (not many Catholics were in those days). The debt, which in terms of our day seems small, was a very heavy burden. A large number of functions, necessarily small, raised small amounts to meet the interest, if the capital, of the debt... [However] To speak of the pioneer parish only in terms of finance would be to ignore its real value and the joy in Christian community life.

Church Construction and Architecture

The construction of the current church began in the 1950s, when Fr Godwin was the Parish Priest. It was completed in 1955. The long narrow shape of the church was dictated by the land that was available between the presbytery and the school. The architect was Mr L Sam Miguel and the builder was Simmie & Co. The church was officially opened and blessed by the Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr Daniel Mannix DD, on 3 July 1959.

The wooden statues of Our Lord and Our Lady, which stood either side of the altar, were carved by Hans Knorr and were added to the church at a later time, whereas the large painting Our Lady of Good Counsel was probably placed in the church around the time of its construction. The Stations of the Cross were replaced in the 1970s with carvings made from Queensland Beech by Leopoldine Mimovich.

The Church has undergone several refurbishments over the years, the most recent being to the internal structure throughout 2016 –2017 and the addition of a gathering space adjoined to the church. The new internal layout respects the original architecture of the building and reflects current liturgical norms and celebrations. There is now increased internal and external areas for parishioners and visitors 'to gather and connect, to sit and talk, to reflect, to celebrate, to be, and to see the Church as a space of welcome'.
(Fr Brendan Reed)

Parish School

Our Lady of Good Counsel School was officially opened on 29 January 1924 and was staffed by the Sisters of the Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ), with Mother Evangeline as Principal. The enrolment for that year was 62 pupils. The school numbers increased to 100 in 1927 and reached 150 in 1938.

In its early years, especially during the Depression period and for years afterwards, the parish school was not affluent. A number of families in the school had no link with the parish, and the daughters and sons of many parishioners attended either convent schools or the junior schools of boys' secondary colleges.

In 1951, lay teachers joined the staff and grew in numbers over successive years. By the mid-1960s, three more classrooms were needed to accommodate the growing school population. It was in the 1950s and 1960s that the Mothers' Club developed into a powerful force. Their support of the sisters and lay teaching staff was multi-faceted and their fundraising efforts resourced the school with essential teaching aids, amenities and equipment.

The FCJs' association with the school ended in 1981. Over their years of service, 20 sisters had taught at OLGC in conditions and with class loads that would now be considered intolerable. The first lay Principal of OLGC was Mrs Maureen Burke, herself a devoted FCJ past pupil who understood the traditions established by the sisters. During her 14-year tenure (1981–1994), enrolments increased by 30 per cent (360 in 1993) and there was a long waiting list of applicants.

Currently the school is a vibrant learning environment and community for students and their families. Its facilities are well equipped for contemporary learning and the school continues to be enriched by the partnerships between the parish and parents.