

**FROM THE BARRIER REEF TO THE OUTBACK:
HISTORY OF THE TOWNSVILLE DIOCESE
1930 – 2005**

4 April 2006



Mr Len Horner

Townsville is a very transient city and one does not find a lot of people who have been living there for a long time. My forbears/ancestors have been around for most of the history of white settlement in this district and many of my relatives still live in the area. When I accompany Bishop Putney to functions in Townsville, he often asks, 'Who should I meet here and to whom are you related!'

White settlement was established in Townsville in 1864. My great grandparents on my mother's side were Patrick Walsh and Kate Flanagan who migrated to Queensland in the 1850s and James O'Donohue who married Bridget Killurrie (Clowery) in Ballach Whacken in County Clare in 1856 and migrated to Townsville in 1884. Their children, Edward Walsh and Ellen O'Donohue, were married in St Joseph's Church, The Strand on 13 August, 1892. Their son Jim, my grandfather, was born in 1896.

Irish migrants Charles George Bell and Mary Anne McCann were married in Townsville in 1871 and their son George Bell married Louisa Teresa Kuhn, the daughter of German immigrants Gottfried Kuhn and Augusta Shultz, at St Joseph's Church, The Strand, on 12 July, 1897. Their daughter, my grandmother, was born in 1902, the same year the Sacred Heart Cathedral opened.

This introduction, I guess, presents my 'credentials in a continuous relationship with North Queensland and Townsville in particular...'

To mark the 50th Jubilee of the Diocese in 1980, Bishop Faulkner commissioned a history of the diocese to be written by John

McGuire. The book remained unpublished until the 60th Jubilee of the Diocese in 1990. John Maguire's erudite book, *Prologue: A History of the Catholic Church as Seen from Townsville 1863-1983*, is an excellent record of the development of the Church in this region, set within the history of world and Church events and showing how they impacted on the Townsville Diocese. In my short paper here, I owe a great deal to John's research.

As John McGuire did, I too would like to acknowledge that the relatively recent history of white settlement and the Church in North Queensland, broke in upon the ancient and noble history of the Aboriginal - and later Torres Strait Islander peoples of the region - with consequences that society and the Church are still trying to overcome.

The Catholic Church in Townsville Diocese came first to Bowen with the discovery of the Port Denison Harbour by Captain Sinclair on the *Santa Barbara* in 1859, the same year that Queensland was separated from New South Wales. Capt Sinclair accidentally drowned in Cleveland Bay ten years later in 1869; St Mary's Church in Bowen is situated in Sinclair Street; and, until recently, the Bowen parish had a kindergarten pre-school building called *Santa Barbara*.

The settlement of Bowen was established by the first Governor of Queensland, Sir George F Bowen, in 1861. Although Fr Murlay visited the new settlement in 1862 from his base in Rockhampton, the founding father of the Church in the Townsville Diocese was Fr William McGinty who arrived in Bowen in 1863. He built a church there in 1866 and is buried in Bowen with a fine monument. This was the focus in 2000 – the Year of Great Jubilee - of the Pilgrimage Walk back to Bowen, 'the cradle of our faith'. The Walk was arranged by the Townsville Diocese and almost 2000 people were present.

Another settlement had been formed in 1864 at Cleveland Bay. In February 1866, Fr McGinty and the Rev Searle (Anglican priest in Bowen) accompanied Robert Towns on the SS *Rangarita* on his only visit to Townsville where it was announced that the settlement of

Cleveland Bay would henceforth be known as Townsville. On 16 February 1866, Townsville became a municipality.

On the following Sunday, 18 February, (140 years ago this year) the first Catholic Mass was celebrated in Townsville at the Court and Customs House on Melton Hill and Michael Galvin was the first Catholic child to be baptised. The first Anglican Communion service and the baptism of the first white boy born in Townsville were also held in the same building that day. So the Church has been significant in the community from the early days of its establishment.

Although Fr McGinty, and later Fr Clementine, continued to visit Townsville from Bowen, by 1872 Fr Connolly had been appointed as parish priest of Townsville and was responsible for the first church of St Joseph on the Strand. He was replaced in 1878 by Fr William Mason Walsh who had recently returned from 'exile in Buenos Aires' following the dispute between Bishop Quinn and a number of his clergy in the Brisbane Diocese in March 1867.¹

Fr Walsh was a man of vision. He remained parish priest of Townsville for 30 years from 1878 until his untimely death in Sydney in February 1908. In 1882 the new Diocese of Rockhampton was formed under the leadership of Bishop John Cani, and Townsville remained a part of the Rockhampton Diocese until 1930, although a new diocese based in Townsville had been mooted since the early 1890s.²

On 22/23 January 1892, following an unprecedented downfall of 19½ inches of rain and moments after Fr Walsh had safely removed the Blessed Sacrament, the parish church of St Joseph on the Strand was washed out to sea.

The new Sacred Heart Church was officially opened and blessed in November 1902 by Bishop Higgins. Then six months later the Cathedral (as this Church was to become), along with much of Townsville, was badly damaged in severe tropical cyclone Leonta.

Another important initiative in the development of the Church in the Diocese by Fr Walsh shortly before his death was the introduction of the first conference of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in October

1906. The diocese is celebrating the centenary of the Society this year.

Building a New Diocese

The foundations were set for the centre of a new diocese but it was not until 12 February 1930 that the new Diocese of Townsville was erected by a Papal Bull issued by Pope Pius XI.

It is difficult to talk about the history of the Diocese of Townsville only covering the past 75 years from 1930. In reality, the church was present in the diocese for almost 70 years before the diocese was erected. There were 15 parishes already operating and many pastoral initiatives were already well established. However, from its inception in February 1930 there have been some significant developments, especially since the consecration of its first Bishop on 25 May 1930.

The Diocese of Townsville has had five bishops - all of them Australian-born. Bishop Terence McGuire, the first Bishop of Townsville, was the first bishop in Australia not to have attended an Irish seminary. He was Vicar General of the Lismore Diocese and President of the Manly Union at the time of his appointment as Bishop of Townsville, and an advocate of nurturing and developing an Australian clergy. Terence McGuire chose the date of his episcopal consecration on 25 May 1930 because of its proximity to the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, Patroness of Australia, and under whose patronage he dedicated the diocese. In a way, it was his attempt to stamp an explicit mark on the new diocese as not just being a part of Rockhampton.

He set about visiting all areas of the diocese in his first six months as bishop, including Mount Isa twice, where the new parish was established at the western extremity of the outback of the diocese. Mt Isa celebrated its 75th Jubilee in 2005 along with the diocese. A permanent mission was also established on the eastern boundary on the Barrier Reef with St Anne's on Palm Island whose 75th Jubilee we celebrated a few weeks ago. From the beginning, the diocese has maintained an evangelising outreach to its Aboriginal and Islander communities. At the last census, Townsville Diocese recorded the fifth highest number of Catholic Aborigines in Australia. From the

beginning, Bishop McGuire reinforced the boundaries of the new diocese - from the Barrier Reef to the Outback - with new parishes.

Bishop McGuire inherited a rag-tag group of individual priests he had to bond into a diocesan body of priest. This was made easier with the ordination of Townsville-born-and-bred man Fr (later Monsignor) Ormond Rush on 30 November 1930, in the first months of the diocese's existence. Fr Rush was the first of nineteen priests ordained for the diocese during Bishop McGuire's 8-year episcopate, including eight from Ireland despite his dream for an Australian clergy. He had laid claim to several seminarians from the Townsville Diocese, who had entered the seminary for Rockhampton. He was successful in his appeal to Rome for them to be allocated to Townsville. In 1931, the first priests' retreat was convened at Mt Carmel College in Charters Towers. Nineteen diocesan priests gathered at the retreat (today we have nine local priests in ministry and ten from religious orders or other dioceses).

The other most enduring legacy from Bishop McGuire was his investment of time, resources, and energy into the establishment of St Teresa's Agricultural College at Abergowrie. McGuire was required to build up the resources of the diocese more or less from scratch. He saw Abergowrie as a source of income for the diocese in the long term; and, 70 years later, it is finally receiving some return on the investment. The foundations of the Townsville Diocese were laid in the years of the Great Depression and it has never achieved the level of prosperity enjoyed by many other dioceses in Australia.

Even after his move to Goulburn, McGuire maintained an interest in the Townsville Diocese, writing to Bishop Ryan frequently and visiting Abergowrie several times from Canberra. He also contributed financially to Abergowrie and other projects.

He had led the fight for a native-born clergy but was well aware that the Church in North Queensland was established by Irish people, priests and religious. Although the Feast of Mary Help of Christians was celebrated as Australia Day (we were still singing *God Bless Our Lovely Morning Land, Australia* when I was growing up in the

1950s) St Patrick's Day was when the Diocese celebrated its Catholicism. However, John McGuire records

...by 1933 the 1000 school children at the show grounds no longer formed a tableau of the word 'Erin'; instead the tableau was of a map of Australia, a shamrock in the middle and an Australian flag at the site of Canberra...'

In 1938, Terrence McGuire was called to Goulburn, which included the new National Capital of Canberra. In 1948 he became Archbishop of the Diocese of Canberra Goulburn. It was fitting that a real Australian be appointed as the first Bishop of the National Capital. For the first eight years of the Townsville Diocese its history was centred on its bishop.

McGuire was the focus and the driving force for so much that happened. It was his leadership that inspired others, laity and priests; his energy, generosity and obstinacy that maintained a commitment to projects...It was his personality that welded the diocese together.³

The Townsville Catholic News of September 1938 records his last words to the people of the diocese:

Keep faithful to God, in your churches, your schools and in your homes. Be kind to fellow citizens of every walk of life. You have a duty to be good Australians and good Catholics.

The Man from Mooroopna

When the appointment of Hugh Edward Ryan, parish priest of Mooroopna in the Bendigo Diocese, as second Bishop of Townsville, was announced, it was said that Archbishop Duhig of Brisbane responded 'Who is this Ryan and where is Mooroopna?' Ryan too was Australian born - on Anzac day 1888 in 'Kelly country' in Victoria just eight years after Ned Kelly was executed. He was scholarly and athletic. He was well versed in Australian culture and had memorised 'reams of Australian poetry.'⁴ In continuing the request that McGuire had left his people to: '...be good Australians and good Catholics...' Bishop Ryan had two flagpoles erected at his new house adjacent to the Cathedral, on which he raised both the Australian and Vatican flags for important occasions.

McGuire had appeared to be the genial Aussie boss. Appointing a young priest to Mt Isa in 1934, his instructions were 'You've the faculties for whatever crops up, especially in relation to mixed marriages. Just give me the details afterwards'. Ryan on the other hand, was more bureaucratic and institutional, reserved and shy. He maintained a formal relationship with his priests. He never used their Christian names – always addressed them as 'Father' and insisted on clerical dress. Soutane had to be worn at mealtime in the Bishop's House.

He chose to have his episcopal consecration in Bendigo rather than his new diocese and his own Cathedral. Speaking at his consecration his friend Fr Gerald Bartlett stated:

The sacred canons demand that a bishop must be a man of piety, must have zeal for souls, must be prudent, and must have administrative ability; it is the duty of the bishop to see that churches are built, that schools are erected, and at the same time he must take care that heavy debts are not contracted...But above all the Church demands that her chief pastors should be men of God, men of holiness...He must be a father to all under his jurisdiction; he must judge with justice and mercy.⁵

His holiness was never in doubt. His chosen motto, 'Mane Nobiscum Domine' (Stay with us Lord), was an indication of his faith and prayerfulness. But the holy man was also demanding on his priests and not always aware of the difficulties under which some of them toiled in the isolated communities of the diocese. Yet, once he became aware of their problems or failings, he was supportive and understanding. Nevertheless, he was a hard taskmaster and could deliver a dressing-down to perceived wrongdoers, that left them in no doubt of what he thought. He always had a close priest confidante / secretary but invariably fell out with them and moved them on.

It is reported that James Cook University Professor, Colin Roderick, when preparing an obituary for Bishop Ryan after his death, had wanted to headline it 'Hugh the Builder'. During his long episcopate of almost thirty years (1938-1967) Hugh Ryan oversaw the expansion of the diocese with the construction of most of the schools

and churches in it today. For the only time in its history, there was a surplus of priests, parishes, and religious in the 1950s; and in order to find work for them all, many new parishes were established in Townsville and the bigger regional towns of Mt Isa, Ingham and Ayr. New churches were built, including many mass centres - mostly with Ryan's encouragement.

With his active involvement, the Sisters of Mercy were encouraged to purchase the Lister Hospital in West End from Dr. Les Halberstater (one of Ryan's collaborators), and eventually expand to the current site of the Mater Hospital in Pimlico and the establishment of the Villa Vincent Aged Care facility at Mundingburra. With the siting of St Paul's College staffed by the Franciscans and St Raphael's College headed up by the women from The Grail, he was responsible for the Church's involvement in the newly established University College. The resiting of the Palm Island parish mission from the original site of Butler Bay to the main township was successfully negotiated by Ryan with the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs. Hugh Ryan oversaw the establishment of the Diocesan Provident Fund (now Development Fund), which helped to set a more secure financial basis for the diocese. In all of these programs Ryan engaged a small group of laymen in whom he had absolute trust and confidence.

To most of the laity he remained aloof and reserved in what Jim Carey referred to as the 'loneliness of his exalted position' - a position in which he had placed himself. Although he maintained a presence among the ordinary people, he never seemed to be completely at ease with them; except in the case of children with whom he appeared more relaxed. 'He did appreciate however, the involvement of lay people on Committees, Boards etc. and they in turn appreciated his decisiveness and determination'.⁶

Soon after his arrival in Townsville, Ryan was - like everyone in North Queensland - involved in the Second World War which was very evident in Townsville, Mt Isa and Charters Towers whose populations were swelled to bursting point with the deployment of so many Australian and American troops. Several Catholic Schools

were commandeered by the Armed forces. Several priests enlisted, with Ryan's blessing, as Army Chaplains and American and Australian chaplains were afforded hospitality at the Bishop's House. A former housekeeper estimated 264 chaplains stayed at 'Ryan's Hotel' during the war. Troops were especially welcome in the Cathedral and other churches for Mass and Sacraments; including 110 marriages between American soldiers and Townsville girls. Parishes organised dances and socials.

Under the leadership of Monsignor Vince Vandeleur with lay collaborators, Judge Douglas, Jack Shanahan, Alec Ahearn and Laurie Quinlan, the Townsville Catholic Soldiers Club was opened in 1942 and was later incorporated into the National Catholic United Services Auxiliary (C.U.S.A) whose rooms in Flinders Street were open 9am – 10pm seven days a week, 365 days a year. The Apostleship of the Sea, of which Vince Vandeleur was also chaplain, was stretched as well during the war years. Travel restrictions during the war led to the expansion of the school networks with high schools starting in Ayr, Bowen and at West Townsville to cater for local students from St Patrick's College taken over by the American war machine after the nuns and boarders were transferred to Winton, Ravenswood and Hughenden.

The church was not entirely focussed on the war. St Anne's Aboriginal Mission was extended to establish a leprosarium on Fantome Island in 1940. During the war years the growing interest in the Catholic Action movement, a precursor to future Lay involvement in the church, was encouraged. The Young Christian Students (YCS) and Young Christians Workers (YCW) movements, the Legion of Mary, the Catholic Daughters of Australia (later the Catholic Women's League) were all introduced to the diocese and flourished during the war years and beyond. Banyo Seminary was also opened in 1941. Although none of the first batch of six Townsville seminarians made it to ordination, a future Bishop of Townsville - Ray Benjamin - was one of the first enrolments in Pius XII Seminary.

In terms of piety, devotion to Our Lady was a high priority, in particular the Rosary Crusades with Fr Peyton, and Novenas to Our Lady, praying especially for the overthrow of Communism. Hugh Ryan led the Diocese through the heady Catholic triumphalist days. The emergence of a real national spirit in the Second World War led to the replacement of the traditional St Patrick's Day celebrations with the May celebrations focussing on Mary Help of Christians with a magnificent display of Catholicism: a two-day schools concert, Holy Name Society men's breakfast, Mass and function for Catholic Women, a parade through the main street of Townsville of all Catholic schools and organisations, with special trains and buses transporting contingents from Ingham and Abergowrie, Charters Towers and the Burdekin. Distinguished guests were invited for the weeklong celebration with the visit of Australia's first Australian-born Cardinal, Norman Gilroy, in 1947 as the most extravagant of these events.

Ryan achieved a great deal of his vision for the Church. In his time:

- the diocesan population doubled in size – 20 000 Catholics had grown to 43 000;
- 19 parishes became 36;
- 47 churches had become 76;
- 37 priests had become 68 (secular and religious);
- 15 brothers had grown to 38;
- 143 sisters had grown to 211;
- 26 schools with 3 600 pupils became 56 schools with 8 000 pupils; and
- several new religious orders were introduced to the diocese.

Despite wars and cyclones and droughts, Ryan left the diocese with a strong administrative centre, a degree of lay involvement in the decision-making bodies, a dynamic infrastructure (with State Aid finally kicking in to help the Catholic Education System) and a large body of priests and religious.

Ryan's last years as bishop were spent attending the Second Vatican Council. It would appear he realised the implications for the Church resulting from the Council over which he and the other bishops of the world had presided.

I recall meeting him at the outdoor Mass to farewell him in the grounds of Mundingburra parish. He taught my mother and me to pronounce the name of his new titular diocese – Nigizubi. Commenting on the new directions and the consequences for the Church, Ryan is reported as saying 'I'm glad I'm on the sidelines now; at least we don't have these problems in Nigizubi.'

Spirit of Vatican II

Bishop Leonard Faulkner arrived in the diocese just months after publication of the Second Vatican Council documents. They inspired him with the new vision for the Church in which the laity would play a bigger role. He had been a long-time chaplain of the Young Christian Workers Movement (YCW) in Adelaide and, as a sign of things to come, his episcopal ring did not include the precious resource of gem stones but was fashioned in the form of the YCW emblem – symbol of the precious resource of lay people.

From these he developed the vision of his episcopal ministry especially the quotation from the Decree on the Bishop's Pastoral office '...in exercising his office as father and pastor, a bishop should stand in the midst of his people as one who serves...' ⁷ that he incorporated into his motto and crest. During the Mass of Consecration at the Townsville Sports Reserve, the English Canon/Eucharistic Prayer was used for the first time in Queensland.

Faulkner set about visiting every parish and talking up the possibilities of involving the laity in the life of the Church, as the following observation shows:

The development of the lay participation in the life of the Church was strongly emphasised in the Vatican Council document on the Church. (Faulkner) began to introduce parish councils after about two years ...it was the same for the Diocesan Pastoral Council. We had the first meeting in 1972. By the end of the 1970s every parish in the Diocese had a parish council of some sort.⁸

Whenever Faulkner undertook a parish visitation, he always met with the Parish Council and usually provided some feedback to them, complimenting what was good and gently encouraging areas of pastoral need that warranted improvement. He also saw the Cursillo Movement as an excellent means of renewal and reinvigorating the faith of the laity commenting: '...its secret was that it was about lay people speaking about important issues like piety, study, action and changing the environment'⁹ More than 1000 men and women participated in the Cursillo weekends and provided the basis of lay involvement in many areas of parish life. It was an excellent tool for introducing the Vatican II vision to lay people.

Coinciding with the difficulties of his early years as Bishop of Townsville, Faulkner's implementation of the Vatican II vision, which caused some unease for older Catholics, lay in Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. This disappointed many younger Catholics and, together with the sociological changes taking place throughout the world (including the Vietnam War), saw the beginning of the decline in Catholic practice in church attendance, in numbers of vocations and in adherence to the morality of the Church, together with defection of priests. If nothing else, this controversy led to the establishment of the National Family Planning Group and the formation of Catholic Family Welfare Bureau (later Centacare). Australia was involved in the increasingly unpopular Vietnam War and Townsville was a major army base from which many troops were deployed to the war zone.

Another of Paul VI's encyclicals, *Populorum Progressio*, together with the Post Synodal document on 'Justice in the World' in 1971, was also to have an influence in the church in Townsville. It led to the first major efforts at dialogue among the Christian churches with the formation of Action for World Development. Involvement in AWD also raised the profile of Aboriginal people, especially since the 1967 referendum. Faulkner embraced both issues with enthusiasm.

Another of the challenges of life in the modern world was that of the changing patterns of marriage. In 1953, thirty-five percent of

marriages in Catholic Churches were 'mixed marriages'. Perhaps influenced by the new approach to other Christian Churches through the increasingly significant ecumenical movement, by 1963 the number of mixed marriages had grown to 53 per cent and by 1973 to 63 per cent. The divorce rate was also rising, especially following reforms introduced in the early 70s by the Whitlam government. To counter these trends, Faulkner had encouraged the Pre-Cana talks and introduced the Marriage Encounter Movement. Both of these initiatives followed the theory of like ministering to like.

The rising phenomenon of single parent families and divorced Catholics was addressed by the introduction of the Paulian Association for one-parent families, by Mary Ann Lucas (Secretary to Bishops Faulkner and Benjamin) and Fr Peter Kerwick in 1979. This also led to the establishment of the Beginning Experience for Divorced, Separated or Widowed Catholics.

Another trend sparked by the Second Vatican Council was the renewed interest in Scripture by the laity, partly because of Liturgical Reform, which saw lay people now proclaiming the scriptures. From quite early in his episcopate, Faulkner invited guest speakers and arranged seminars on the scripture and biblical catechesis, with growing numbers participating in these courses and lectures. Much of the growing ecumenical contacts centred on sharing insights on the Bible. The emphasis on seriously reading the scriptures also moved some people to be 'reborn in the Spirit' as the charismatic renewal movement joined the other renewal movements that provided a rich menu for the laity to choose from to help understand and express their Catholic faith in this modern world. Faulkner encouraged whatever formations the laity took.

The Liturgical renewal was left mainly to Faulkner in the early years after the Vatican Council and was probably done as well or as badly as anywhere else in Australia. In 1970 he set up a Diocesan Liturgical Commission - under the leadership of Fr Terry Lyons - to oversee the implementation of the new post-conciliar liturgical rites. By the mid-70s the most obvious changes had been effected; altars now faced the people, altar-rails, those effective symbols of the

separation of the 'teaching church' from the 'learning church', had been dismantled – almost everywhere. There were difficulties adjusting to the new 'rules'. Bishop Faulkner concelebrated mass one morning at the Cathedral with Myles Lyons in the days when this way of saying Mass was still new; every time the Bishop turned he bumped into Father Lyons and when they genuflected they tripped over each other. As they returned to the sacristy at the end of mass, Lyons remarked to Faulkner: 'If there'd been a referee, I'd have been sent off'.¹⁰

For lay Catholics, the liturgical changes and the changes in the traditional ways of praying, with the new emphasis on Scripture, led to the formation in Townsville of the House of Prayer at Mundingburra. In 1981, Vicar General Fr Micky Mullins, together with Josephite Sisters Carmel Street and Elaine Smith, and Ms Judy Brown, pioneered this new concept with wary support from Bishop Faulkner. It has since developed, as its founders had dreamed, into a lay-led institution in the diocese for prayer, meditation and spiritual direction, which has provided formation in prayer leadership for thousands of people throughout the diocese, with offshoots in other areas.

Some people in the diocese during Faulkner's time reacted to what they perceived as 'decline' in the Church: fewer priests and the numbers of these who resigned from the priesthood; religious leaving convents and traditional roles in the Catholic schools; reaction to the more radical stand by the YCW and its declining influence; opposition to the direction of Australian Catholic Relief - its support for Aboriginal causes and perceived communist 'sympathies'; and slacking off in traditional prayer forms like the Rosary and Benediction (new fangled House of Prayer – 'we already have houses of prayer – we call them churches!').

Many, with strong leadership from Bishop Faulkner, took up the Pro-life cause - in particular the anti-abortion crusade. Weekly prayer meetings outside the abortion clinic were regularly attended by Faulkner. This became another opportunity for ecumenical action.

Faulkner, from his arrival in the diocese, fostered a genuine concern for the indigenous community. In May of 1967, Australians had voted in a National Referendum to give the Commonwealth Government power to legislate on Aboriginal matters. A few months later Eddie Mabo, together with members of the Trades and Labour Council, the Anglican and Catholic Churches, Townsville branch of OPAL (One People of Australia League) and the University Staff Association, approached local council aldermen to convene a public meeting to discuss a proposal to hold a conference on the status of aborigines in the Australian community.

A large organising committee was set up, but factional groups (especially from the Trades and Labour Council and National Civic Council) meant that the proposed conference became a political hot potato. The Catholic representative, Fr Cassian Double ofm, resigned and the Anglicans withdrew their official support. In the interim, Bishop Ryan had resigned and Catholic involvement was at a standstill. Leonard Faulkner was consecrated just a few days before the opening of the conference. When informed of what had happened he was concerned that the Catholic Church would not be involved, so he requested Fr Kev Livingstone to attend as his personal representative. As a consequence large numbers of Catholics (priests and religious and lay people) attended. So from the very first days of his episcopate, Faulkner publicly showed his concern for Aborigines and Islanders – a trait that was to be exhibited by both his successors.¹¹

He spent many hours visiting and sitting with Aboriginal people in the parks and welcoming them into his home. He supported the establishment of the Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council in the diocese (and Queensland) and attended several State Conferences of the AICC. He supported the priests involved in this ministry and was instrumental in the training and ordination of Aboriginal Deacon Monty Pryor – a move not totally supported by all the clergy.

He had already ordained in 1976, Deacon Jim Erskine, an American who, with his wife Barbara, had worked as missionaries in Port Keats and Yarrabah where Faulkner had met them. This move to reinstate

the diaconate indicated a willingness to proceed in a new direction for the Church. He also experimented with new types of leadership models, especially with the Team Ministry approach in Mt Isa. One criticism sometimes levelled against him was his willingness to increase the number of priests in the diocese by accepting men who had fallen foul of the system in their own dioceses or religious orders and who often brought their problems with them. During his episcopate more priests left the ministry than were ordained. He seemed to have a naiveté about his approach to priests and their questioning of the system. Perhaps his own personal commitment to his priesthood prevented him from understanding their frustrations.

His faith in lay leadership saw his appointment of lay people to positions within the diocese that were filled by clergy or religious in many other dioceses – including my own appointment as Diocesan Secretary in April 1982.

His departure from the diocese in November 1983 was soured by his implementation of the recommendations of the Wheeler Report which had been pressed upon him by the Diocesan Education Council. It investigated the operations of diocesan structures, especially the Catholic Education Office and led to the dismissal of the CEO, Director, and Accountant just days prior to his departure. Nevertheless, thousands turned out to farewell him at a formal function at Ignatius Park College. The sentiments were summed up by Aboriginal Pastoral Worker, Rose Thaiday, who said to him 'we know you always loved us – and we love you too'.

Signs of the Times

The Episcopal Ordination for Townsville's fourth Bishop, Raymond Conway Benjamin, was another outdoor celebration which took place at the Townsville Sound Shell on 9 May 1984. He was our first Queensland-born-and-bred (in Rockhampton) bishop. He had not studied in Rome but completed all his seminary training at Pius XII Seminary at Banyo where he had been one of the first students.

Following the transfer of Bishop Faulkner to Adelaide, a committee was set up by Vicar General, Fr Micky Mullins. Clergy, religious and lay people were consulted about the type of man most suited to lead

the Townsville Diocese. A profile of the diocese was drawn up along with the characteristics required of our new bishop and these were forwarded to the Apostolic Nuncio for consideration. It was considered a first that the local community had been consulted and listened to – the profile matched pretty well with the appointment.

Bishop Benjamin opted to include in his episcopal motto the scripture quote 'At Your Right Hand Forever'. It was a sign of his unswerving faith in God and faithfulness to the Church. Nevertheless, he was open to questioning the ways of the church and to exploring practical ways to make it work in our situation.

One of the requirements listed for the new bishop was that he be aware of the needs of the indigenous community and open to their finding a place within the Catholic Diocese. Ray Benjamin together with Fr Mick Hayes in Rockhampton had been instrumental in the foundation of the Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council in Queensland. Benjamin was well known to the local Aboriginal Catholic leaders, as he had been present at all AICC State Conferences. Benjamin was always relaxed in his approach to Aborigines and supported those in ministry. He commented recently:

Monty Prior was a great prison visitor of the Aboriginal inmates (at Stuart Creek Prison)...When he got among the prisoners and the sick he shone. He had a marvellous way with him.¹²

Bishop Benjamin often accompanied Monty on those visits to the prison. Benjamin was a gallant promoter of Aboriginal Land Rights and that earned him great respect in the Aboriginal and wider community but sometimes led to confusion and disdain from some of his diocesan flock. Following the International Year of Indigenous Persons, with the support of the Diocesan Pastoral Council (and some opposition from other quarters of the Church), the diocese purchased the surplus St Teresa's Church in Garbutt in 1991 from the newly combined parish of West End; to become the Aboriginal Catholic Community Church in Townsville. St Teresa's Church had become the worshipping centre for Aborigines in the 1970s but they had always felt like the poor relation in someone else's church.

During Benjamin's ministry, the various Aboriginal and Islander communities were brought together for the first time as a Diocesan Aboriginal and Islander Pastoral Council. Representatives from Mt Isa, Dajarra, Palm Island, Charters Towers and Townsville have met on a quarterly basis for many years to share ideas, arrange formation opportunities and generally advise the bishop and the diocese on the pastoral needs of Aboriginal Catholics. He appointed an Aboriginal lay woman from Mt Isa, Colleen Muckan, as an official Catholic Marriage Celebrant - primarily for Aboriginal people - and advised Rome of his decision. Colleen was later one of the inaugural members of the Commission for Australian Catholic Women.

Bishop Benjamin participated wholeheartedly in the consultation process and hearings that led to the publication of the document *Woman and Man; One in Christ Jesus*. He displayed a genuine openness to the involvement of women in the life and ministry of the church. One woman recently summed up Benjamin's episcopate as a 'time of excitement, experimentation and exploration of ways for ordained and non-ordained to work together in the Church.'

He continued the work of his predecessor in searching out ways for ongoing renewal of the laity. The major focus in his early years was the RENEW program in which all but a few parishes participated. A renewed effort was made towards Adult Faith Education. Winter Schools arranged in conjunction with the Catholic Education Office, provided an annual opportunity for people to obtain access to top quality lecturers. The need to extend these opportunities beyond the city of Townsville to all quarters of our vast diocese of 434 000 square kilometres has always been a challenge. A novel move to arrange for a roving itinerant preacher to move around the whole diocese for several weeks each year for a number of years proved very successful.

Bishop Faulkner, not long before his departure, had reconstituted the Diocesan Liturgical Commission with Good Samaritan Sister Ursula O'Rourke at the helm. Benjamin remained committed to the need to provide quality Liturgical formation with a series of full-time people with expertise in liturgy moving around parishes; ensuring good

liturgical resources and formation for even the most isolated communities.

Youth ministry has always been a challenge in the diocese. Not since the YCW days of the fifties and sixties could we boast of a youth group focus in every parish. Bishop Benjamin recalled recently 'the old YCW produced leaders, but then it died. Youth organizations provided grounding for future leaders. Antioch was strong for a time ... if you get a good Antioch group, which goes well for five, or six years you have done a lot of good among those young people.' He maintained a youth budget with several young people employed by the diocese to promote ministry to youth. A crisis in diocesan resources towards the end of his episcopate led to a decline in diocesan youth ministry with a much smaller financial commitment to the Edmund Rice Camp ministry, which continues to flourish. He encouraged the fledgling House of Prayer which already had been operating for a couple of years on his arrival. Through the support of Vicar General Fr Micky Mullins and the financial and moral support of Bishop Benjamin, he acknowledges 'it has grown to something very special now'.¹³

Bishop Benjamin loved the western region of the diocese and was very aware of the difficulties the people and the church faced there. Many of the small towns were dying with the withdrawal of services like banks and stores and government agencies. The diocese too was struggling to keep the parishes open and to provide clergy. Some money was offered to him to assist with drought relief from a southern parish. In response to the expressed wishes of the western parishes who had told him:

we are not doing too badly...at this stage we don't really need money...we really need the rain...but is there anyone who could come out to help us pray through this?

He allocated the money to establish the Western Ministry for Spirituality and, with assistance from the Josephites, Sr Carmel Street and Mrs Mary Stark have built this ministry from small beginnings. In 1993, Sr Carmel Street, talking at a gathering (the Western Muster), said:

It just took off...I gave ten spiritual direction sessions on the first day. People travel hundreds of kilometres for a day of prayer...many have participated in Prayer Leadership Courses.¹⁴

When Benjamin arrived in the Diocese, Faulkner apologised for leaving him with so few priests. There were 27 priests in active ministry. This number was steadily reduced during Benjamin's episcopate and the average age was on the rise. In the sixteen years as bishop he ordained only two priests for the diocese and he buried fourteen. The child sexual abuse scandals had a serious effect in the church, and Townsville Diocese was not spared its share. Deaths and illness among the clergy and the aging of the clergy called for a rethink on the deployment of clergy and the style of leadership required in our parishes.

In his first address to the Diocesan Pastoral Council in August 1984, Bishop Benjamin stated: 'Out of poverty comes new riches. Few dioceses have so few priests yet so many lay people willing and ready to accept responsibility for the Church'¹⁵ With the Diocesan Pastoral Council Executive, Bishop Benjamin established a Task Force in September 1990 to look at parish restructuring in Townsville / Thuringowa cities. The Task Force was required to develop a consultative process in order:

- to determine the most effective parish groupings in Townsville/Thuringowa;
- to ensure the needs of each area are addressed; and
- to provide alternative models of ministry.

A year later, after a widespread consultation process, the Task Force delivered its final report entitled *Never Ending Story*, to Bishop Benjamin and the Council of Priests. The report, that included a detailed restructuring plan, was received enthusiastically by most, but with some reservations and misgivings by a smaller (but vocal) group.

The bishop appointed Sister Mary Lowcock rsm, as Director of the Pastoral Planning and Formation team, with a steering committee to assist with the implementation of the plan. The report called for a

major shakeup of parishes, that saw – over the coming years - several churches close and parishes amalgamated; and the formation of people in parishes to deal with the changes. Not all proposals were implemented fully but enough to ease the pressure at the time. In looking at leadership in their parish, several adopted new models of partnership between ordained and non-ordained people. Some formed a team ministry approach - of which a priest was part; others opted for a lay Pastoral Leader to be appointed, under the requirements of Canon 517.2, where a retired or semi-retired priest provided the priestly presence in a lay-led parish while he or some other priest was appointed as mentor. (The canonical and practical complexities of this model would require another lecture!).

The Pastoral Planning Commission worked closely with Bishop Benjamin and the Council of Priests, especially in areas of parish leadership structures throughout the whole diocese; exploring ways of maintaining a mission-focussed church despite the shortfall in resources - both clergy and financial.

The road was not always a smooth one. Some clergy did not appreciate what they saw as an erosion of clerical authority in these new models, or the influence that women were now having in leadership within the church. Comments about 'petticoat government' unduly influencing the bishop were common and some priests who opted for a leadership role in partnership with a female Pastoral Leader did not feel totally supported by some of their brother priests. The system, though, has survived the test and continues in several parishes today.

Bishop Benjamin submitted his resignation in the Year of Great Jubilee, which was celebrated in great style in the diocese with the three years of preparation culminating in a Diocesan Pilgrimage to the foundations of our faith in the diocese: in Bowen, around the tomb of Fr William McGinty.

In the years between 1984 and 2000, Bishop Ray Benjamin presided over a diocese in crisis (by standards in other Australian dioceses) – a shortage of personnel and resources - but he did not display any signs of panic. In many ways, his leadership was prophetic. He

encouraged the possibilities that would provide good pastoral care of people so that communities could continue to pray and worship together in the Catholic tradition and be open to serve the world. To some, the approach would seem unorthodox but he was trying with his advisors to discover from the 'signs of the times' a new way to be the Church Christ wanted.

New Evangelisation (everything old is new again)

Brisbane auxiliary bishop, Michael Ernest Putney, was installed as Townsville's fifth bishop in a beautiful liturgical celebration on a sweltering evening at Holy Trinity Church, Mundingburra on 27 March 2001. Queensland-born, he was raised, from the age of five years, in Townsville where he attended St. Joseph's School, North Ward, and Our Lady's Mount Christian Brothers College until his family moved to Brisbane in 1960. Like his predecessor he attended Pius XII Seminary in Brisbane, but later studied at the Gregorian University in Rome and at the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium. His doctoral thesis was on *The Presence and Activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church in the Studies of the Commission of Faith and Order (1927-1983)*

This study engendered in him a lifelong commitment to ecumenism. At his Episcopal Ordination, Archbishop Bathersby described him as a person with a passion for overcoming the destructiveness of division within the Church: 'As one of the top theologians in Australia he is recognised both nationally and internationally, while his work in the field of Ecumenism has been outstanding.'

Bishop Michael Putney recalls that he planned to become a priest when he was a youngster in Grade 4 or 5 at Townsville's Christian Brothers College. 'For me priesthood meant being dedicated to assisting people in their relationship with God – and that was clearly the most important thing to do with my life.' As priest and bishop, this belief has always remained a basic in his life. 'I believed, and still do, that there could never be anything more important than to dedicate one's life to building relationships between people and God, thereby building up the Church and so transforming the world.'

Like all previous Bishops of Townsville, Michael Putney, faithful to the Gospel in his concern for the marginalised, went first to the Aboriginal community. On the morning of his installation his first pastoral visit was to the elders of the Aboriginal community who were gathered at St Teresa's, Garbutt; and he has maintained a close interest in their welfare, with a particular interest in the Palm Island community. He has established a Round Table Conference of all diocesan agencies (CEO - Centacare, St Vincent de Paul Society, Finance and Property Council, and Diocesan Office Staff) that meet quarterly with Palm Island representatives, to ascertain how the diocese can best serve the Aboriginal community. When the riot on Palm Island occurred in November 2004 - following the coroner's report on the death in custody of Cameron Doomadgee - he travelled to Palm Island two days later, and moved around the community listening to its concerns. In Townsville, the special Mass at St Teresa's, over which he presided, attracted almost 500 people. The elders from Palm Island were flown over for the occasion and Townsville's Catholic community was afforded an opportunity to stand in solidarity with the pain of the Aboriginal people in an unforgettably moving ceremony.

Two years after his arrival in Townsville, Putney nominated four priorities or objectives as being of high importance in his ministry to the diocese; and, in a courageous move, he undertook a review of that ministry to obtain feedback from priests and people, so that if it were on the wrong track he could take action to correct himself. The priorities he had set himself were in the areas of :

- Evangelisation
- Vocations
- Prayer and Spirituality
- Financial Stability

It is difficult to incorporate into history what is still a work in progress. In all areas of the review of his priorities, the respondents overwhelmingly commended the bishop for his enthusiasm and zeal. It was also noted that he had set out a very clear direction.

In an interview for an oral history project for our 75th Jubilee, Bishop Michael Putney said:

My focus in the Diocese from the beginning has been evangelisation...I believe very strongly that at this point in its history the Church, which has diminished considerably in Australia and still seems to be diminishing, needed to regain its mission and commitment to see itself as an agent of transformation in society and as spreading the good news of the gospel. This is what I wanted to share with the Diocese of Townsville.¹⁶

In the area of evangelisation, Putney has engaged the media and wider community in a manner reminiscent of the first Bishop of Townsville – even if he is here for only a short time everyone will know he has been here! He has re-established the Diocesan Pastoral Council, which had lapsed in the last years of Benjamin and it has focussed on programs of evangelisation as our main pastoral focus in the diocese. He has brought together a group of diocesan leaders known as the 'Bishop's Advisory Council' and, together with the Council of Priests, he takes advice on all major initiatives in the diocese. One particular initiative that has focussed on evangelisation, has been his setting up of the Family Life Council from which, in turn, have grown the new Mary MacKillop Childcare Centres incorporating his vision for a new institution in the diocese, that is focussed on families.

This focus on families spills over to the area of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, that he rightfully acknowledges grows out of good Catholic families and vibrant, committed young people. Youth ministry has taken priority in his push for vocations. He joined the largest contingent ever, of youth delegates from Townsville Diocese, to attend World Youth Day in Cologne and this year, the biggest group ever will attend the Queensland youth leaders Movers and Shakers gathering. He has committed time and resources to the youth ministry that had been downgraded before his arrival. In just five years Bishop Putney has buried six priests. There is only one seminarian for the diocese. He has maintained and renewed contracts for three lay pastoral leaders in the diocese and, in a personal arrangement with Archbishop Legaspi, engaged the services of

several Filipino priests from the Diocese of Caceres. He has also successfully negotiated for several priests from religious orders to exercise their ministry here; although no long-term commitment has been made by these orders.

In his third priority area of prayer and spirituality, he has continued diocesan support for the House of Prayer in Townsville and has supported the foundation of a new diocesan initiative to establish the new Mary MacKillop House - A Western Centre for Spirituality - which opened last weekend, in the midst of the outback at Richmond.

As Patron of the World Community for Christian Meditation, Putney was happy to learn that this form of prayer was already operating at the House of Prayer but has encouraged and inspired the expansion of this form of prayer throughout the diocese. Two visits from exponent of Christian meditation, Dom Lawrence Freeman, a Benedictine monk from the United Kingdom, have been supported by the Catholic Education Office and Christian Meditation has been introduced as a form of prayer in most schools in the Diocese.

Financially, the diocese has been placed on a more even keel.

It is...very heartening that the financial situation in the Diocese has stabilised and that there is new energy with buildings and new projects. There are projects which assist the financial health of the Diocese, such as the commitment to childcare. Childcare, which is a whole new institutional venture for the Diocese, is integral to its mission (of) assisting families...without finances we can't fund any of these dreams.¹⁷

Even in the face of financial difficulties he launched a major refurbishment project for the Sacred Heart Cathedral during its centenary year. The three million dollar, much needed facelift and upgrade of the Cathedral, has been possible because of his appeal to the business and government community. This has been done without allocating any funds from other diocesan pastoral programs or asking for a contribution from any parish. The Cathedral will reopen on the feast of the Sacred Heart this year.

