

## Wilston Parish Centenary

1 April 2014

*Josephine Nolan*

Early in 2012, I was asked by Father Jan (our Parish Priest at the time) if I would consider being part of a Committee to talk about St Columba's Centenary in 2014. I agreed and in June that year, four people met for the first time, to talk about how we, the parishioners, could celebrate this historic occasion.

The outcome of that first meeting was a series of meetings—some not so well attended—to develop a plan. The plan resulted in the forming of three groups of people to be called the 'Past', the 'Present' and the 'Future'.

The Past would deal with the history of the Parish, and the Present Group's role was to co-ordinate social gatherings and other events. These events would raise money that would help defray the costs of holding the Centenary events in 2014. The Future Group was to discern what the Parish could do to leave some lasting memory of this historic event that would be of benefit to future generations.

As well, there was an overall Planning Committee which met regularly to receive the reports of each of these three committees and to handle any problems or co-ordination activities that were required. Representatives from each of our Past, Present and Future Groups, plus the Parish Priest, were part of this group.



St Columba's Centenary Piazza

Parishioners were asked to indicate their area of interest, the names began rolling in and the meetings began! For myself, as a member of both the Past Group and the overall Planning Committee, I have attended close to forty meetings in the last 21 months; a necessity if everything was to be organised and ready on time. We have our Chairman, Graeme Rush, to thank for keeping us focussed on our goal.

The Past Group to which I belonged had decided to write a book. When one of our group (originally six, but now four) made the suggestion, I thought ‘What would we write about?’ Mary Mennis, who had been a member of the Staff of St Columba’s Primary School, had written and published a book in 2009, called *History of St Columba’s Wilston*. Sections of this book had focussed on the Church, its beginnings and its many pastors.

However, we very soon decided on what the contents of our book would be: a chapter on each of the ten Parish Priests who had served at St Columba’s, plus other interesting facts about the church, its buildings and its parishioners, over those 100 years.

Having done some genealogical research on my own family, I (and the others) turned to researching our parish priests and the history of the church building. With aids such as online research engines, the Catholic Archives, the State Library etc, and interviews or chats we had with our oldest parishioners—those still in the parish and those who had left—we began writing. The result is: *A Community of Faith: 100 Years*.

Throughout the first eighteen months, many energetic parishioners under the baton of Mary Phillips, a parishioner who has spent her whole life in the Wilston parish, held a Wine & Cheese evening, sold tickets on some wonderful raffles,

organised cake stalls and, in the process, raised an impressive amount of money.

Research into the early years of St Columba's (and we are grateful for the early accounts of Wilston which appeared in *The Age*, *The Catholic Advocate* and *The Catholic Leader*) had provided us with a list of dates, and it was these dates which gave us opportunities for celebration—the first Mass, the first purchase of land, the opening of the Presbytery—to name a few.

The other benefit of all this activity was that parishioners were provided with opportunities for socialising with each other; which, in a Parish where planned-giving is the method of providing funds, can sometimes be overlooked. While our children are at school, we have many opportunities for getting to know other parents. Once the children have flown the nest, and tuckshop days are no more, the opportunities to get to know fellow parishioners are few and far between. Also, some of the social activities of our parish had all but ceased.

So it was with the people at Wilston. And perhaps, none more so, than when the Future Group revealed its plans—and in this they were guided by the questionnaires that parishioners had answered about what they thought needed to be done in the parish. The first was the building of a gathering space—a place where we could gather for a 'cuppa' after the Sunday morning Mass, or meet after funerals, baptisms, weddings and Parish social get-togethers. Its sails would provide shade and this area, built at the front of the church extending inwards from the boundary fence, would be an invitation to gather. Importantly this space would not ignore the fact that St Columba's is an historic site and therefore cannot have any structure blocking its facade from view.

An initiative of the Future Group was to sell pavers with the names of donors on them, as a fund-raising exercise. What a success! An ordinary brick paver cost \$25 but a cream paver with one's name on was sold for \$150 each. I, for one, was doubtful that the named pavers would be popular. How wrong I was! The cream pavers were limited in number, as they are a feature of the design. They were all sold and the revenue raised was in excess of \$30,000!

One gift from the Parish was that each of our Parish Priests and Curates (or Associate Pastors as they are now called) would be remembered with their own 'named' paver.

The Future Group also arranged the updating of our PA System (two previous systems not providing adequate reception). Now the readings and homilies can be easily heard and the congregation is a happy one. No more frustration!

Another of their tasks was to provide a candelabra area in front of Our Lady's altar on the northern side of the church. The design for the railing and gates which complete the candle area was made by Robert Everingham; the same man who made the artistic entrance for the baptistery which Father Chris Hanlon had renovated during his time as Parish Priest at Wilston.

Already this year we have been able to celebrate some of the key events of 1913-1915. We have chosen 2014 as our Centenary year so that we could cover most of the 'firsts', although the first Mass in the new Church was not said until January 1915.

The Centenary, we felt, covered more than just that one occasion—we wanted it to be a celebration of

- the concern by the local population for a church close to their homes;
- the meetings held in Mr Hurley's home in 1913 and the first Mass there in 1914;

- the raising of money back then, either by donations or holding social functions;
- the letting of the first building contract;
- the purchase of the various parcels of land over a number of years; and finally
- the building of the magnificent church in just four months for the sum of £2,094.

We have already remembered the first Mass, celebrated in the home of Mr Patrick Hurley, by Archbishop James Duhig. This we did on Sunday 9 February at the 9.30a.m. Mass. Thanks to a member of our Parish community, who has gathered together a collection of vestments and other church artefacts, no longer used in today's church celebrations, Father Michael Grace was able to robe in the vestments of days gone by and the altar was adorned with beautiful, tall, brass candlesticks, and a brass crucifix.

A remembrance of the Latin Mass, which would have been celebrated one hundred years ago, was that Father Michael faced the altar for most of the Mass. Incensing of the altar, lectionary, gifts etc. also took place. The homily was thoughtful and the music and singing of hymns from those early years was very reverent. It was an event to be remembered and appreciated by all who attended.

Our second event was the Stations of the Cross, on 9 March, to celebrate the blessing of the Stations when they were first installed in February 1916. Again, it was Father Michael who led us in prayer. A group of 21 people gathered and at Father's invitation, we were able to walk with him the journey of the Cross; pausing before each of the Stations to recall what this journey meant for Jesus—and for us in our lives today. Certainly a moving experience.

On Sunday, 23 March, a group of thirty people met, again at the Church, to listen to a talk by Father Chris Hanlon on the stained glass and leadlight windows. During his time with us as Parish Priest, Father Chris had arranged for the much needed repair of the windows and we are grateful for that as, hopefully, they will now last for another hundred years. We learnt many interesting facts about the windows, realising that the flowers portrayed in the windows are all Australian natives, and wondering at the ability of these artisans to produce such beautiful, detailed pictures—in glass.

On Sunday 30 March at 3.30 we had two events to celebrate. The first was the opening and blessing of St Columba's Centenary Piazza when Father Jan spoke about the planning for the Piazza and declared it open and Bishop Joseph Oudeman performed the blessing. The second event was the launch of our book by Father Michael Grace. Despite the inclement weather we had an enthusiastic crowd and we believe our guests thoroughly enjoyed the occasion. Book sales went well and not too many went home early.

Our future celebrations are

**Sunday 6th April** at 10.45a.m. when we will plant a jacaranda tree on the northern side of the Church—to celebrate the first purchase of land.

**Thursday 15th May** from 6.30-8.30p.m. : a *Wine and Cheese Evening* to celebrate the opening of the Presbytery in 1921. This will be held in our Piazza.

**Friday 6th June** at 7.00p.m. : *St Columba's Dinner Dance*—reintroducing an event that, for many years, was held annually, usually around the time of St Columba's Feast Day.

**Sunday 8th June**—our final celebration : the Centenary Mass at 4.00 p.m. to be celebrated by Archbishop Mark Coleridge.

The Centenary Mass will be a great celebration with, hopefully, a large number of priests and lay people attending to give thanks for one hundred years of worship. The Mass will be followed by Supper in The Good Samaritan Centre (which was the original primary school building, now restored to its former grandeur).

I came across the following paragraph in the research concerning St Columba's Parish History and would like to quote it here. It was taken from an address given by Archbishop James Duhig at the Blessing and Opening of additions to St Columba's in 1936. I think the sentiments are as true today as they were then.

*A church is all in all to the Catholic people. Here you bring your children to be baptised; here you come for the reception of the Sacraments; it is here that the young men and women have their unions blessed by God in the Sacrament of Matrimony. On these altars, Sunday after Sunday, your dear departed are remembered in prayer by priest and people. The church is the centre of the pulsating life of the parish. Here are made the friendships second only in intimacy to the friendship of home and family. Here on Sundays you come, to find rest and peace from the labours of the week, and here you are strengthened and refreshed to begin another week's work.*

I like to think that this is what St Columba's—church and parish—means to us.



*Josephine Nolan (nee Walker) was born in Warwick, Queensland, in 1934, the second youngest of seven children. She started school on 1st August 1938 in Mackay and her schooling, from then until she completed the Junior Examination in 1949, took place in five different schools as she moved with her parents when her father was transferred in his role as a Station Master with Queensland Government Railways.*

*Another transfer to Brisbane, at the end of 1949, and Josephine joined the staff of QGR and worked in the Secretary's Office as a stenotypiste. She was residing in Our Lady of Victories Parish at Bowen Hills at that time.*

*Marriage to John Nolan in 1956 and a move to The Grange followed. Here they reared their eight children who attended schools at Wilston, Enoggera and Mitchelton. In 1976 Josephine started secretarial duties at Mt. Maria College at Mitchelton and remained in that position for the next twenty-one years.*

*Family (there are now twenty-one grandchildren and two great grandchildren) play a big part in her retirement years. As well, Josephine has retained an interest in her local parish and its history, and was involved with others in preparing for the Centenary of St Columba's Church in June 2014.*



Parishioners of St Columba's Wilston  
enjoying 'a cuppa' in their Centenary Piazza