

**GRACED TRADITION – SPIRITED FUTURE
150 YEARS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
IN QUEENSLAND**

1 December 2009

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Background

In July 2007 the Auxiliary Bishop of Brisbane, Most Rev Brian V Finnigan DD, wrote to a number of people inviting them, on behalf of the Archbishop, to form a committee to plan for the Sesquicentenary of the Archdiocese to be held in 2009. To assist the committee the Archdiocese had also appointed a Project Officer. This role changed hands to Catherine Newell who undertook outstanding administrative support to the work of the committee throughout its life.

The committee also established a range of working parties for particular aspects of the Sesquicentenary as they unfolded. It would be remiss of me to not acknowledge the enthusiasm of the Archbishop for the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Church in Brisbane and the great assistance to him given by Bishop Finnigan and Fr Peter Meneely, the Moderator of the Archdiocese. The Catholic agencies of the Archdiocese, particularly Catholic Education and Faith & Life, provided tremendous support to various aspects of the implementation of the Sesquicentenary throughout 2009.

What Were We Celebrating

When the committee first met it needed to do some research about what we were in fact celebrating. As many of you would know the Church was present in Queensland prior to Bishop Quinn being appointed as the first Bishop.

The events of 1859 established the colony of Queensland and the establishment of both the Catholic diocese of Queensland and the Anglican diocese. It was also the establishment of the City of Brisbane. Thus we were celebrating a conflagration of events; the appointment of James Quinn as the first Bishop; the commencement of the State of Queensland, the Anglican Diocese and Brisbane City. As a committee we saw it as an imperative that we worked in collaboration with these groups.

The Archbishop wrote in his pastoral letter for the commencement of the Sesquicentenary year, which we decided would commence with Advent of 2008 (the beginning of the Liturgical year):

The 150th celebrations will be a perfect time for the Archdiocese to reflect upon the Church's history of faith and service, a history that has always been powerfully linked and happily interwoven with the growth of Queensland itself.

The Archbishop said further:

It's an anniversary of 150 years of faithfulness to Jesus Christ and the following of the Catholic Church's traditions.

The choosing of a theme was important and it was decided that the theme of *Graced Tradition – Spirited Future* summed up what we were wishing to celebrate. The notion of being a 'Graced Tradition' indicates that we celebrate and remember God's presence throughout our history and in time. The notion of a 'Spirited Future' suggests we are not resting on our laurels as a community. We are moving forward with hope and confidence that we will minister to the people of Queensland in new and vibrant ways into the future.

Dr James Quinn, a priest and the President of St Laurence O'Toole Seminary in Dublin was named Bishop elect on 14 April 1859. He was consecrated Bishop of Brisbane, New South Wales, in Dublin on 29 June. A few weeks before, on 6 June in London, documents had been signed constituting the colony of Queensland.

Bishop James Quinn arrived in his diocese, the boundaries of which corresponded with those of the state, by coastal steamer on the night of 10 May 1861. He took formal possession of his diocese at St Stephen's the following Sunday (May 12) as has been recorded and noted in the paper, *From Quinnsland to Q150*, by Fr Chris Hanlon in his Aquinas lecture of 3 December 2008. Folk law suggests that one of Quinn's first comments was, 'Where is the city of Brisbane?' and one of the first sights to greet him was that of a bullock team stuck in the mud of the town's principal street.

For us, as a committee, what were we celebrating? As indicated above, the Church had existed here with the ministry of certain clergy and prior to that the arrival of Catholics as either convicts and then ultimately as free settlers. In fact, early research undertaken by Fr Dennis Martin, the Archdiocesan archivist, indicates that Catholics were present among the first convicts and soldiers who landed in Redcliffe in September of 1824. There was no clerical presence for almost twenty years, that is until 1843. Bishop Polding had encouraged the establishment of a mission for the aborigines. He and Fr Snell, a Swiss born priest, arrived in Brisbane town on the Sovereign on Saturday 13 May 1843. It would appear they were the first Catholic clergymen to come to Moreton Bay.

We were celebrating the formal establishment of the Church in Queensland.

Celebrating in Contemporary Times

The committee undertook some research into what had occurred with previous celebrations, most notably celebrations surrounding the 100 years establishment of the Church in Queensland. Great support was provided through the Archdiocesan archives. Committee members divided up tasks to look at certain aspects of the history.

What was notable in the 100 years celebrations was the engagement of the country dioceses in the celebrations. There was a desire to engage them as well. The most significant way that this occurred was through the clergy events around 29 June and Catholic Education Week (facilitated by the Queensland Catholic Education Commission) in the final week of July.

The Archbishop had a view that, because of the great ecumenical endeavours that had occurred within the Catholic Church in Queensland, most notably with the signing of the common declaration by the Anglicans and the Catholics 25 years previously, that it was important to celebrate ecumenically where this was possible. The conclusion of the restoration and building of St John's Anglican Cathedral in Brisbane was seen as a significant way that the Catholic Church could honour this partnership. A gift of a stained glass window was provided to that community.

It was also seen as imperative that there needed to be a web presence and a detailed website was developed linked to the Archdiocesan Home Page. This web site contained historical information and a list of all the events that were to unfold as the year progressed. Senior role holders in the Faith & Life Vicariate undertook the leadership in developing and maintaining this website for which the committee was most grateful.

Links to Keep in Mind

The committee was sensitive to the early history of the development of the Church. Queensland had been seceded from New South Wales. The diocese of Brisbane, which at that time took in the whole of Queensland, was given birth from the mother church of Sydney. James Quinn was a priest from Dublin. Thus the committee saw it imperative to engage Cardinal Pell, the Archbishop of Sydney and also Archbishop Martin, the Archbishop of Dublin, in the proceedings over the course of the year.

The Archbishop was also keen to keep his dream of a prayer summit alive. One of the events, later in the year, was the opening of the Santa Teresa Spirituality Centre at Ormiston. This will become a place of great benefit to the Archdiocese given the paucity of retreat centres that are in easy access of Brisbane. The dream for the prayer summit did not eventuate during 2009. It is occurring in 2010 as an offshoot to all the preparatory work undertaken from 2007 onwards in the planning for the sesquicentenary events.

The most significant public events were the celebratory Mass on 29 June at the Cathedral of St Stephen to celebrate the appointment of Bishop Quinn as Bishop of Brisbane and the events of 30 July at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre. These latter events included a morning event for students in Catholic schools and an evening celebration of the Eucharist. Some 6000 people attended these events on 30 July.

Some Observations

The following observations are personal more than systemic ones.

The committee attempted to engage a range of people in celebratory events over the course of 2009. Some events attracted greater numbers than others. Some events were particular to some groups.

The Archbishop's desire for the Archdiocese to celebrate ecumenically was achieved in a sustained manner.

A concluding event symbolised this. A reception, held by the Lord Mayor Campbell Newman on Monday 14 December, saw senior delegates from the Anglican and Catholic communities acknowledged for the work of the respective churches over the past 150 years. The Lord Mayor wished to thank the work undertaken collaboratively with Brisbane City Council through the year's events. The Church representatives noted, in particular, the joint Lenten Pastoral Letter by the Anglican and Catholic Archbishops and the joint service of sorrow. The year was not about triumphalism and also included opportunities to redress the darker sides of our history.

The major events on both 29 June and 30 July were significant in the life of the Archdiocese because they also attracted people from other places. The events around 30 July attracted some 26 Bishops from other diocese in Australia. This was also a great testimony to the manner in which Archbishop John Bathersby is held in such high esteem by his brother bishops. The events reflected the life of the Church at this time.

The fact that we are moving towards Pray 2010 midway through that year is a good legacy. As stated above, it fulfils the Archbishop's desire to orient our work towards a prayer summit. There is much reason to give thanks for this year and to acknowledge the work of those who have gone before us.

It has been a year of celebrating *Graced Tradition and a Spirited Future*.

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