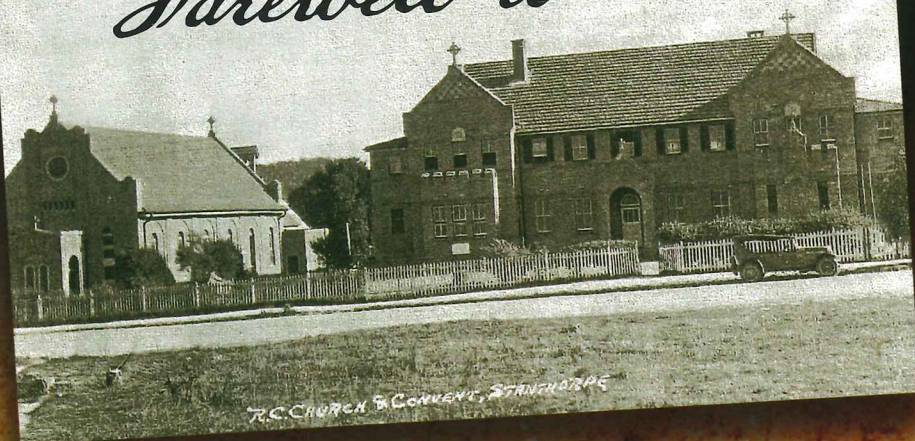


Farewell to



The Sisters Of Mercy
1875 - 2016

St. Joseph's Parish Stanthorpe

Sunday 17th April 2016

Very little is known of the Government approved "non-vested" (religious) School which Fr. Stephen McDonough began in October 1872 with two lay teachers. Fr. McDonough regularly travelled from Warwick to Stanthorpe to provide for the Sacramental and spiritual needs of the Catholics of the district. It was not until after the appointment of Fr. Jerome Davadi as the first Parish Priest in 1874, that the Sisters of Mercy from All Hallows, Brisbane were able to finally accept the many requests for the Sisters to come to Stanthorpe and staff a Parish School.

On 9th February 1875, four Sisters of Mercy arrived in Stanthorpe – and this is recognised as the Foundation Day of St. Joseph's School. The first four Sisters were Sisters M. Agnes, Emilian, Muredach and Malachy. Their trip to Stanthorpe was very dramatic when near Cambooya their train was caught in a fierce storm which washed their carriage off the rails. They escaped through the carriage windows and returned to Toowoomba at 3AM on 25th January 1875. This was prophetic of the many hardships and challenges the Sisters were to face and live through for many years in their new "mission" in Stanthorpe.

When the first Sisters arrived their accommodation was a building that had been used as an overnight sleeping place for the Warwick Priests when visiting the Stanthorpe Parish. The building was altered and extended. Years later it was purchased by the Vichie Family and relocated to Severnlea where it is still occupied as a residence.

Very sadly the young Irish Sister, Sr. Muredach Ford died six months after arriving in Stanthorpe. Her grave is not far from the grave of Fr. Davadi.

In 2011 on the 150th anniversary celebrations of the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy in Brisbane, the Memorial over the grave of Sr. Muredach was restored,



and more information inscribed so that her memory and role in the founding of St. Joseph's School will long be remembered.

The original St. Joseph's School was known as "The Old Globe School" because the building had formerly been the Globe Hotel. It was located where the Presbytery now stands. The initial enrolment was in excess of 120 students, some of whom walked large distances to School from the outlying tin mines. The original School was one large room with the barest of furnishings.

During these pioneering years, the Parish Priest Fr. Jerome Davadi (who died from a brain tumour in 1900 at the age of fifty-three) was severely criticised by Archbishop

Dunn of Brisbane for neglecting to provide suitable accommodation for the Sisters. The Archbishop wrote ***"if the Stanthorpe people, will not give them shelter from the rains and frost, such as the shearers and the sheep-washer gets in the wildest parts of Australia, let them say so at once and I shall withdraw the Sisters and send them to a place where they will be well appreciated."*** To remedy the situation bazaars and social functions were conducted in the Parish to raise funds to improve the Sisters accommodation.

The Old Globe Hotel remained the School until 1907 when Fr. Matthew Ryan arrived as Parish Priest and a new School was built on

the site of the present Secondary School Campus. Built off the ground on stumps the Sisters and students complained of the draughts and cold conditions in which they had to work.

To make way for the building of the new St. Joseph's Church, the original Church that Fr. Davadi had built was moved back in 1919, joined to Fr. Ryan's building and extensively renovated. In 1955, the old School was sold





for removal. The Primary School was relocated to the present site of the new Library/Administration building, on which had stood a Guest House. This had been occupied by Somerville House Girls from Brisbane during World War II. Today a modern complex of buildings caters for an enrolment of over two hundred students from Prep to Year Six, a far cry from the very basic and primitive conditions (by today's standards) under which the Sisters worked and lived for so long.

Secondary education as far as Junior (today's Year Ten) began in 1932. Sr. Mary Victoire Cartan was one of the founding Sisters for the Secondary School. The

newly opened Convent provided accommodation for many students for both primary and secondary. A further milestone in the development and growth of the Secondary School Campus is recorded on the plaque on the entrance to the Convent. It reads

St. Joseph's High School, Stanthorpe was blessed and officially opened by His Lordship,

The Most Rev. William Brennan, D.D.,
Bishop of Toowoomba
Sunday 2nd May 1965.
Very Rev. J. P. Skelly, P.P.

Ten years later in 1975, the Parish and School celebrated 100 years of service by the Sisters of Mercy in the School and Parish.



For God
and
For Work

It was during Fr. John Concannon's time as Parish Priest (from 1929-1937) that the foundation stone for the new Convent was laid in 1931. The two storey brick building was blessed and opened on 17th April 1932 by Bishop Byrne, who had become the first Bishop of the newly created Diocese of Toowoomba in 1929.



Finally the parishioners had fulfilled the challenge of Archbishop Dunn many years previously to provide ***“suitable accommodation for the Sisters” ... and “shelter from the rains and the frost.”***

The former Convent is today one of the finest buildings in Stanthorpe and a lasting memorial to all the Sisters of Mercy who lived and taught and worked in the School and Parish for so many years. A not to be forgotten part of the history of the Convent are the many boarders from outlying areas who were cared for by the Sisters during their time as students at St. Joseph's School. Boarding ceased in 1970.

Besides teaching all the academic subjects and religious education, the Sisters of Mercy also made an amazing contribution to the cultural life of the Granite Belt through music, speech and drama. Many of the Sisters were musically gifted and for over one hundred years helped develop the musical talents of generations of students, some of them becoming outstanding musicians themselves.

For many years the Convent became very popular during the Christmas School Holidays with visiting Sisters. There were always several rows of seats full of Sisters at the weekend Masses.

The last Sisters to live in the Convent vacated the premises in 1985 and relocated to a house which the Parish had purchased as a residence for the Sisters in Short Street. Subsequent to the departure of the Sisters from the Convent, the building was used by St. Joseph's School for Administration on the ground floor and classrooms on the upper level.

No longer meeting the requirements for today's educational and child safety needs, the School vacated the former Convent in 2011-2012. It is now used by the Parish for Hospitality, daily weekday Mass in the Chapel, and planned future administration needs for the Parish.



With the departure of Sr. Esther in mid 2016, the Parish wishes to acknowledge with deep gratitude 141 years the Sisters of Mercy have contributed to the educational and pastoral needs of the parishioners and families of St. Joseph's parish and the community of the Granite Belt.

Hundreds of Sisters of Mercy have lived and prayed, taught and worked in St. Joseph's School and Parish Stanthorpe since 1875. The last Sister of Mercy on the staff of St. Joseph's School was Sr. Teresa Shannon in 1988. Since then the School has been staffed by dedicated lay Principals and Staff.

For some years a number of Sisters lived and ministered in the Parish. Since 1997 Sr. Esther Dowling has been the only resident Sister, firstly in the role of Pastoral Associate and in more recent years in retirement but continuing her involvement in the work of the Pastoral Council, Liturgy Committee and Visitation.

