

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ST FRANCIS XAVIER PARISH

By Maryanne Branson

Today's parish of St Francis Xavier Armadale was formally established in 1945 but its history is an intertwined story of three churches and three locales (Jarrahdale, Serpentine and Armadale) which reaches back to 1885.

Jarrahdale

Records show that, by 1885 – just 56 years after the foundation of the Swan River Colony - Jarrahdale was a thriving community of 400+ involved in agriculture and the timber industry (felling and milling). It was in June 1885 that Fr J Duff blessed and opened the first Catholic church in Jarrahdale – known as St James Church – on land apparently donated to the Catholic Church. Fr Duff, however, is believed to have resided in Fremantle even though the Jarrahdale community was in the care of the Pinjarra Parish.

Jarrahdale's first resident priest was Fr Thomas O'Grady. His relatively brief tenure (1923–1926) saw the establishment of a school with 35 students in 1924 and the presbytery become a convent for the Sisters of St Joseph with Fr O'Grady living in the back of the church. By 1923, the church building was found to be infested with white ants and was condemned by health authorities; repairs and renovations were undertaken and the church was able to function until 1957 when it would be replaced.

On the death of Fr O'Grady in 1926, Fr T Lynch was appointed to serve the Jarrahdale community. A new school was built in 1927 as was a two-room presbytery for Fr Lynch.

The Depression of 1929-1933 severely impacted the Jarrahdale community: the timber mills closed, workers and their families left the area ... the Catholic school and convent were closed. After an unsuccessful attempt to reopen the school in 1930, the Sisters were transferred to Pinjarra where they established a convent and school. Fr Lynch also relocated to Pinjarra during 1930. It must be noted that the Jarrahdale community was administered from Pinjarra, being part of that Parish, until it was transferred to the care of the Armadale Parish in 1949.

In 1957, the old weatherboard St James Church which was infested with white ants and declared unfit for use, was replaced by the St Maria Goretti Church, built predominantly with volunteer labour under the supervision of Fr Phillip Farrelly, the Parish Priest of Armadale. The cost was £1,400.

As the years passed, the Jarrahdale community and St Maria Goretti Church experienced a chequered career. Various plans were put in place for Masses for the community: the monthly Masses of the early 1970s which alternated with Serpentine and Mundijong eventually gave way to fortnightly Masses in the late 1970s, still alternating with Serpentine. However numbers were dwindling: the development which had taken place in and around the Jarrahdale townsite in the 1980s and 1990s had made little impact on the number attending Masses in the church, even with some coming from Mundijong. In 1988, it was decided to close the church at Jarrahdale as the building was regarded as being unsafe, it was regularly vandalised and there were no toilets on site. Various items were taken to St Kevin's in Serpentine for safe keeping – including the wooden cross from Jarrahdale's original church, St James. While the church was not used regularly for worship, it was made available for use by the local community.

During the next 18 years, St Maria Goretti Church would host occasional Armadale Parish events including the annual Healing Mass celebrated close to the feast of St Maria Goretti during the latter years of the 1990s – these were well supported. In addition, one element of the Armadale Parish Easter liturgies - the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday - would be conducted on the site for several years from the early 2000s.

In 2006, following several meetings of members of the local community with Fr Kazimierz (Kaz) Stuglik, Parish Priest of Armadale, it was decided to re-introduce a monthly Mass at St Maria Goretti Church, initially on a trial basis. This would replace the Mass at Serpentine on that weekend.

By 2015 it was sadly clear that despite so many initiatives over the years, the church in Jarrahdale was no longer viable quite apart from the extremely low numbers attending the infrequent Masses. The St Maria Goretti Church Report presented to the Armadale Parish AGM in 2015 identified *“regular attendance varying from 20-35 parishioners from Serpentine, Mundijong and Jarrahdale”*. The building itself – almost 60 years old – required significant ongoing maintenance and costly major repairs while the grounds required constant attention; the report to the Armadale Parish AGM in 2015 also noted *“The exterior of the church remains an eyesore but inside (...) provides a delightful space for Mass and prayer”*.

The decision was taken to close the church. The final Mass was celebrated on 27 December 2015 and the church closed after 130 years' presence in Jarrahdale. Notes from meetings of the Armadale Parish Council during 2017-2018 indicate that the land was Crown land; it would be left to the government agency, Landgate, to assess the property and to determine its future *given “the site has some heritage value but the current building does not fit into this” (St Maria Goretti Church Report to Armadale Parish AGM 2015)*

Serpentine

St Kevin's Church in Serpentine was blessed and opened by Archbishop Prendiville on 3 March 1940 – it was part of the Pinjarra Parish until 1945 when it was placed in the care of the Armadale Parish. During the early 1960s, St Kevin's was transferred to the Mandurah Parish for some 12 months then reverted to the Armadale Parish.

In the 1920s, Masses were celebrated in the Serpentine Hall (now the Clem Kentish Recreation Centre) with the priest coming from Jarrahdale on horseback. At this time, the local community formed a committee to raise funds to build a church in Serpentine. The land in Richardson Street, where St Kevin's now stands, was donated by Mr Harry Boan. Under the leadership first of Mr John Keily and then Mr Dan Coffey, the committee organised raffles, dances and St Patrick's Day Balls and so raised the amount required. This strong community spirit and drive would manifest itself throughout the story of the Catholic Community of Serpentine.

St Kevin's did not have the luxury of its own priest – indeed it didn't have weekly Masses; in these early years, Masses alternated on a monthly basis between Jarrahdale, Mundijong and Serpentine with each centre having Mass perhaps four times per year.

By the 1970s, Mass was no longer celebrated in Mundijong. With the brief appointment of Fr John Ryan as Assistant Priest in the Armadale Parish in 1979, weekly Masses alternating between Jarrahdale and Serpentine became a reality.

Prior to this, records show that Fr Brian Harris (Armadale Parish Priest, 1967-1973) visited the two local schools (Serpentine and Hopeland) on a monthly basis for religious instruction. Sandwiched between the two schools was lunch with the Mullers; Margaret Muller, a very active member of St Kevin's, would prove to be a dynamic catalyst in developing the St Kevin's community and integrating it more into the Armadale Parish.

In addition, it must be acknowledged that successive Parish Priests at St Francis Xavier gave strong support to the Serpentine/Mundijong group whom Fr John Lisle (Armadale Parish Priest, 1973-1974) would affectionately call "*the outstation*".

Reflecting on the development of St Kevin's, it would seem that having weekly Masses in the community contributed significantly to its progress – that plus the time and effort which so many invested into the community. Having an Assistant Priest in Armadale ensured the weekly Masses in Serpentine – but after Fr Ryan, records show that there were few Assistant Priests assigned to Armadale: Fr Zygmunt Wloczek SDS (1990-1993), Fr Gerard Beeson (1994-1995), Fr Anthony Vu (2018-2019) and Fr Matteo Verdi (2019-). In the interim, The Oblate Fathers at Mazenod College (Lesmurdie) served the community for 15 years to be followed by Fr Greg Carroll who would be assisting with Serpentine's weekly Masses, Christmas and Easter liturgies, baptisms, funerals and weddings for over 20 years.

The Country Catholic Group was formed in Serpentine in the 1970s. Its focus was to provide a social atmosphere that would encourage members to participate and share towards the further education of adults and children, as well as the general upkeep and maintenance of the two churches, St Kevin's and St Maria Goretti.

On the practical level, the Group met monthly and determined to raise sufficient funds to enable the upgrading of St Kevin's which was in a state of disrepair that had been aggravated by damage caused by Cyclone Alby in 1978; not only were repairs effected but major interior renovations were also funded ... and power was connected to the church. Records also indicate that prisoners from Karnet Prison were enlisted to build several new pews. The Group continued to fundraise through cake stalls, Melbourne Cup lunches and dinners etc for various projects designed to improve the church building, provide various amenities and to wage the ongoing war against the indefatigable white ants. Major works and repairs would receive some funding from the Armadale Parish. In time, a mini-Parish Council was established which met quarterly to focus on local matters and to liaise with the Armadale Parish Council.

Over the years, the community has developed its own rhythm; on the one hand, it has integrated itself into the broader Armadale Parish through participating in various events in Armadale while, on the other hand, being self-sufficient in hosting parish initiatives locally – these include celebrating the annual outdoor Mass on Christmas Eve, after-school religious instruction, preparing local children for the sacraments, hosting Advent and Lenten programs and establishing a local offshoot of XavierCare. While the Parish Priest in Armadale would be as present to the community as other demands on his time would allow, successive Pastoral Associates in Sr Francis Gibb OLM (1982-1993), Sr Ann Cullinane SJOG (1993-2005) and Ms Helen Lesniak (2007-2018) offered considerable support and practical assistance to the local community.

In 2020, St Kevin's proudly celebrated its eightieth anniversary; as with its previous milestone celebrations, there was much gratitude for that long line of priests, families and individuals who had contributed so much time, talent and energy to the life and story of local community and who were, at times, the source of a great fund of hilarious anecdotes. But in 2020, as has been the case throughout its past, there exists an underlying concern with respect to the future of this small

church with its regular attendance of some 40 worshippers particularly if a church were to be established in a nearby centre of considerable growth like Byford where a new Catholic school was established in 2016. Notes from a meeting of the St Kevin's Community (March 2020) indicated the view of the then Parish Administrator of the Armadale Parish, Fr Mark Baumgarten, that as long as the church building survived and the congregation support was maintained, then there would be a future for St Kevin's even if another church or parish were to be established in the future at Byford where land is reserved for that purpose by the Archdiocese.

Armadale

The story of St Francis Xavier Parish is itself a narrative of three churches, a narrative which officially begins on 11 August 1912 with Bishop Clune laying the foundation stone of its original church at the corner of South Western Highway and Thomas Street. This marked the formal start to construction of the church on land said to have been donated by Mrs Kate Wilkinson, owner of the nearby Narrogin Inne, but which perhaps had been purchased for £75 prior to 1912 when Armadale was effectively part of the Pinjarra Parish.

Records show that by 1911 the planning for a church in Armadale had begun. Bishop Clune, en route to Beverley, stopped in Armadale to meet a small deputation of local Catholics to discuss the question of building a church. Prior to 1911, Mass was celebrated twice a month in the local Agricultural Hall – with the priest coming from Jarrahdale. There is mention of Dean O'Reilly and Fr Fagan having charge of the Armadale district/area in these years. Although the Armadale Catholic population was small, the meeting with Bishop Clune noted that there were several local developments proposed which would bring about an inevitable increase in population:

- stone quarries were to be opened in the vicinity – these would supply materials for new Federal buildings in Perth and a naval base;
- a new timber mill – said to be WA's largest – was to be erected by Millars & Co nearby on the Perth-Albany Road;
- it was probable that the Trans-Australia railway line would come through Armadale.

In addition, land had been acquired for a church – this described as being *"in a splendid position as a site for the church"* (*The WA Record, 18 November 1911, page 12*) and £150 had been collected towards the building of a church. Bishop Clune donated £25 to the collection but could not commit to the building of a church even though *"It was always his idea to have a resident priest and Convent School in Armadale (...) however he was not able to fulfil this project for the present as he had no priest to spare ..."* (*The WA Record, 18 November 1911, page 12*).

By August 1912, however, Bishop Clune was back in Armadale, *"a small village some 20 miles from Perth on the Bunbury line"*, to lay the foundation stone for St Francis Xavier Church. There were many visitors and dignitaries present for this occasion, including 60 members of the Cathedral choir. Much was made of the name of this new church: St Francis Xavier – it was the first church in the diocese to be dedicated to that great missionary, the patron saint of Australia whom *"The Record"* lavishly described as *"intrepid and zealous and self-sacrificing"*. (*"The WA Record", 17 August 1912 – page 7*)

The sturdy brick and iron-roofed church, with its altar made of West Australian jarrah, was designed by RJ Dennehy of Barrack Street, Perth and constructed by Michael Joseph Hart; it was completed in 1913 at a cost of £800 and could accommodate 140-150 worshippers. The church was blessed and opened on 16 March 1913 by the Vicar-General, Very Rev. Patrick Verling with the first Mass being celebrated in the new church by Fr Patrick Brennan, immediately after the blessing.

It would be in 1939 that extensions in the form of a new sanctuary and sacristy at the southern end of the building were completed and blessed by Archbishop Kelly. These additions were described in the archdiocesan Catholic newspaper, "The Record", as *"new and beautiful (...) The new sanctuary is finished in cream and is fully liturgical"*. This echoed Archbishop Kelly's describing the extension as *"a sanctuary which was in strict conformity with the liturgy – strikingly simple yet beautiful in form"*. Indeed, the Archbishop regarded the building of churches – and, therefore, this particular extension - as *"our most telling reply to the challenge of the godlessness and neo-paganism of the present day"*. (*"The Record"*, 9 February 1939 – page 13)

By 1912, St Francis Xavier Church had been incorporated into the Victoria Park Parish with Fr Patrick Brennan (also the editor of "The Record" at that time) serving the Armadale community and taking over this responsibility from Fr Fagan. In 1922, Armadale was transferred to the newly established Queen's Park Parish. Masses were celebrated monthly with Fr Peter Finnegan travelling south by horse and trap and, later, by car. Eventually there was a fortnightly Mass in Armadale, on the second and fourth Sundays, which alternated with Gosnells; for those who could travel to Gosnells, it was possible to attend Mass weekly.

During these years the life of the Armadale Catholic community included

- the annual Catholic Ball which was a debutante Ball – often with the Bishop receiving the debutantes;
- Catechism lessons being held for young children every second Sunday - these would later become Sunday School conducted on Saturday afternoon by the Sisters of Mercy who would come from Queens Park;
- the establishment of the Legion of Mary and the Holy Name Society in the 1920s.

It would be in the 1940s that a Sacred Heart Sodality and Children of Mary were formed. While distant from Perth, the Armadale community seemed to lack none of the activities and groups which were typical of Catholic life of that era.

By 1934 there was a clear desire to establish a Catholic school in Armadale – this commitment to have a school and to support a school would be a significant feature of the parish identity, its life and history - and intrinsic to decisions which would be made well into the future. On 1 February 1934, Fr Finnegan chaired *"the initial meeting of parishioners in connection with the proposed Convent school at Armadale"* (*Minute Book, Armadale Catholic Church*). From this meeting, and those that followed, emerged various fundraising initiatives: collecting donations from parishioners, organising fundraising events ... card parties, bus trips to Araluen, dances.

In 1938 the much longed-for St Francis Xavier School was opened: two classrooms, a music room, a small kitchen, a verandah and two outside toilets. The cost - £700. It would be staffed by the Sisters of Mercy until 1970 when the Loreto Sisters would take charge; in 1980 the Sisters would withdraw from the school to be followed by the school's the first lay Principal.

Sadly, Fr Finnegan did not live to see the dream of a school become reality; he had died in 1937. Fr J Doyle, described as being highly energetic, became responsible for the Armadale section of the Queens Park Parish. Over the years, renovations and extensions to the school as well as its life would be a significant part of the parish agenda.

The publication, *St Francis Xavier School 1938-1998*, which marked the school's 60th anniversary, captured the flavour of the area: *In these years, the Armadale district was predominantly a horticultural area surrounded by vineyards, orchards, market gardens and farms. The town moved at a slow country-style pace: horse and cart and bicycles were the modes of transport while the*

steam train provided the link to Perth and Fremantle. Pioneer parishioner Betty Knight, who moved to Armadale with her parents in 1929, vividly remembered Forrest Road as *“a plank road running through to Fremantle”*.

In 1945 the parish of St Francis Xavier Armadale was established with Fr John McGillicuddy appointed as Parish Priest; he resided at the Narrogin Inne until 1948 when a timber and asbestos house on South Western Highway, near to the church, was purchased from the Carrigg Family: the cost - £1,500. This house served as the presbytery until 1966 when the property at 8 Third Road was purchased for this purpose from the Education Department. This was one of the district's oldest houses and formerly the home provided for the headmaster of the local primary school.

At this time, 1945, the parish northern boundaries included the districts of Gosnells, Kelmscott and Roleystone and Mundijong/Serpentine to the south. It would be in 1949 and 1963 respectively that the Parishes of Gosnells and Kelmscott were founded, with Roleystone included within the boundaries of the latter. The Armadale Parish was further altered in 1949 with Jarrahdale being transferred to its care; in 1963 the Parish became responsible for monthly Masses at the newly-opened Karnet Prison.

During the 1950s various improvements were made to the church and its surrounds, largely through volunteer labour: grounds were levelled and sealed, fencing installed along Thomas Street and Third Road, side altars installed in the church, a crucifix and statues were donated, a bookstand installed for Catholic pamphlets. In addition, Missions were conducted annually by the Redemptorists and the Oblates.

It was in 1955 that Fr McGillicuddy formed a Church Committee from local parishioners. Records show that this Committee, a forerunner of the contemporary Parish Council, functioned until 1964. Minutes of its inaugural meeting on 4 January 1955 indicate that the focus of the Committee was raising funds through staging various regular events: monthly cake stalls on Saturday mornings, St Patrick's Dance, fetes and the September Ball which, in 1955, made a handsome profit of £70.10.00. In addition, a Planned Giving program was mapped out. The Minutes of the Committee's July meeting reveal the parish's difficult financial situation: Fr McGillicuddy reported that the parish *“did not pay its way over the last financial year”* and, in July 1955, it had a *“present bank overdraft of £2,839.19.10”*. Little wonder that the parish priest and the parish community were so energetically focussed on fundraising!

In 1957, Fr Phillip Farrelly was appointed Parish Priest, replacing Fr McGillicuddy. Fr Farrelly proved to be an innovative fundraiser – sourcing cauliflowers from Jarrahdale which he would then “hawk” around the Armadale Parish.

Fr Brian Harris was appointed Parish Priest in 1967. He ushered in the many changes which came in the wake of the Second Vatican Council: Masses celebrated in English, the altar turned to face the people, the altar rails removed and, in 1971, he convened the first Parish Council. In addition, numbers in the parish were steadily increasing; in 1970 a Sunday evening Mass was introduced – the parish now had three Masses every Sunday.

The 1970s were a decade of great change and, unwittingly, the start of futureproofing the parish. Starting in 1973, the parish began an informal program of purchasing various properties that were offered for sale in Thomas Street and Third Road. This sometimes with funds loaned to the parish by parishioners. The houses, on the northern side of Thomas Street, were transferred to the school, demolished and the land used either to extend classrooms etc or to provide extra play space. The property at 10 Third Road would be used as office space while 12 Third Road was converted to a

Parish Centre suitable for group meetings, small functions, hosting visiting speakers – and the parish playgroup.

The appointment of Fr John Lisle as Parish Priest in 1973 brought another significant change. Fr Lisle – and his successor as Parish Priest in 1974, Fr Geoffrey Beyer – had been priests in the Anglican Church. They came to the Catholic Church where they would continue their priestly ministry. Both were married and brought their wives and children to the presbytery at 8 Third Road. Armadale was the first parish to have not one, but two married priests; needless to say, both men and their families were warmly embraced by the parishioners.

By 1974, it was becoming clear that the brick church on the corner was increasingly inadequate in accommodating the expansion in the Armadale area and the growing number of parishioners: 500-600 each weekend. Armadale itself was rapidly changing from a rural to a residential outer suburb. Fr Beyer observed *“The new church must be built – people are known to attend Mass elsewhere in order to get a seat.”* After many meetings, consultations and extensive planning, the site excavation for the new church, at the corner of South Western Highway and Third Road, was begun on 27 January 1976 – the day when the building contract for the new church was signed. The new church was designed by Mazak, Seagar & Associates of Dianella and built by WO Longmuir (WA) Pty Ltd of Osborne Park who submitted the successful tender of \$179,315.

The result was described by the author Daphne Popham as *“a simple construction on an elevated concrete raft over an undercroft, shaded by deep verandahs all around integrating harmoniously with the rural atmosphere. The architect’s commission to plan a church which had to be simple, dignified and inexpensive, resulted in this well-named ‘Homestead of God’.”* The architect, George Mazak, would later confirm that he sought to design *“a place where the parishioners can gather as a spiritual family”*. He also pointed out that the homestead-style roof – unusual for a church – had *“something of an oriental look when seen from a distance – also in keeping with the missionary life of (...) St Francis Xavier.”* (*St Francis Xavier Parish Bulletin, Vol. 3 No. 2, February 1979*)

The terrazzo slab from the altar of the old church was incorporated into the altar of the new while the tabernacle, candlesticks and – possibly – the sanctuary lamp were also moved to the new building. It was noted that the construction of the steel & wood pews as well as many of the furnishings were completed by volunteer labour. The new church was solemnly blessed and opened by Archbishop Goody on 8 August 1976. The old church was refurbished to serve as a Parish Hall but, eventually, became the school Library.

There were other innovations to the life of the parish: a comprehensive monthly newsletter was introduced in 1975 - it included notes from Fr Beyer’s homilies, profiles of parishioners, photos, notices, articles for information, education and reflection. Various groups were established to meet perceived needs in the parish including a local Conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society, Marthas, a youth group, a “Growth in Faith” group led by Sr Maureen Lavelle IBVM (Principal of St Francis Xavier School) while a Social Committee organised various parish events. In 1980, the Parish Centre/Office was established at 10 Third Road: staffed by volunteers during office hours, it served as the hub for the various groups and the point of contact for those who needed assistance in some way.

A major disruption to the flow of parish life came in November 1981 when fire caused \$40,000 damage to the church – a lighted candle had dropped on to the carpet. Fortunately, this occurred at a time when the church was empty ... the mishap quickly became the stuff of urban myth and legend; for a brief time, it seems that Masses were celebrated outdoors.

In 1984, Fr Jim Corcoran was appointed Parish Priest with Fr Beyer transferring to Karrinyup. At this time, records indicate an active parish which supported a burgeoning list of groups: among them a food distribution centre housed at 12 Third Road, a play group, several prayer groups, weekly Bingo, telephone prayer chain, Majellans, baby-sitting club, RCIA groups – with several more formed during Fr Jim's 10-year tenure. In turn, he introduced the beach picnics at Warnbro Beach on summer Sundays, after the 9:30am Mass. In essence, the parish was responding to the pastoral care needs of its community be they practical, social or spiritual. In time some of these groups would disband.

To assist with the pastoral dimension of parish life, Sr Francis Gibb OLM had been appointed as Pastoral Associate in 1982. A dynamic worker, she would be followed in the role by an equally tireless worker in Sr Ann Cullinane SJOG in 1993. The Schoenstatt Sisters established their community and shrine in Talus Drive, Mount Richon, in 1989. Apart from their own apostolate to families, the Sisters also assisted in the parish; their involvement with the Sunday Children's liturgy and after-school religious education classes (Chi Rho) was especially valuable. Fr Jim was also greatly supported by the appointment of an Assistant, Fr Zygmunt (Zyggie) Wloczek SDS in 1991-1993; Fr Gerard Beeson, a former Armadale parishioner, would serve in this role during 1994-1995.

Fr Vincent Conroy replaced Fr Corcoran as Parish Priest in 1994 but, in 1995, would leave the parish to become Chaplain to seafarers at Stella Maris in Fremantle. Fr Tony Pires was installed as Parish Priest in 1995. Scanning the weekly parish newsletters and reports from Parish AGMs it is clear that St Francis Xavier continued to be an active and ever-growing parish numerically. It also embraced several new pastoral initiatives including a focus on support for the bereaved, the Seniors' Christmas Party, parish weekends at Fairbridge and outreach to those in need via XavierCare. Records show that in 2000 there were 32 groups actively functioning in the parish.

The approaching new millennium brought to the fore the realisation that neither the school nor the church/parish plant could continue on the existing site. The school was in dire need of major work to the extent that building a new school seemed the only viable option; the church was also showing signs of wear and inadequacy – bulging at the seams, parking issues and the roof leaking copiously in winter. The Quo Vadis Committee was established in 1999 to explore the options and issues in relocation from the site bounded by Third Road, South Western Highway and Thomas Street. Using their extensive local knowledge, Committee members also scouted possible sites where a future school and church might be established. Consequently, in 2002, the Archdiocese acquired a 9-hectare site on Forrest Road, Brookdale (now Hilbert) for the proposed relocation of both school and church/parish plant: it had been made clear from both surveys of parishioners and extensive discussions that separating the school and church on to two sites, even with one remaining on the current site, was not an option. The construction of the new school began in 2004 with classes commencing in the new facilities in February 2005.

In June 2003, in the midst of this major phase of parish development, parishioners learned that Fr Tony had resigned as Parish Priest and was leaving the priesthood in order to marry. Needless to say, the news of his departure came as a shock but, with the support of the archdiocese, parish resilience prevailed and the local community again looked forward to its future which included launching its first website.

The arrival of Fr Kazimierz (Kaz) Stuglik as Parish Priest in 2005 brought to the parish practical experience in church-building as Fr Kaz had been involved in major building projects in his previous parish, Midland. Under

his supervision, the new church and parish offices – like the school - were designed by John Edgar of Edgar Idle Wade Architects and built by ZD Constructions; Archbishop Hickey blessed and dedicated the new St Francis Xavier Church on 24 June 2007.

In a nod to its past, the pews from the second St Francis Xavier Church were repaired, stripped and re-varnished by a team of hard-working parish volunteers and installed in the new church. This after a well-travelled parishioner had rated these as the most comfortable pews in Australia. Likewise the tabernacle was refurbished and installed in the new church along with several sculptures which had been fashioned by Gerard (Gerry) Darwin – parishioner and eminent sculptor who also created a relief of St Francis Xavier specifically for the new church. Despite the new church and parish centre being in full use, Fr Kaz resided in the old presbytery on Third Road until January 2008 when the new presbytery was completed by Don Russell Homes, adjacent to the new church on the Forrest Road site.

The vacated parish/school site – a considerable parcel of land in a desirable location – was sold to a developer during late-2006 at the height of a real estate boom, realising a good price for the parish. The proceeds from the sale, plus generous bequests made to the Armadale Parish by former parishioners, enabled minimal borrowing and lower debt levels for the parish in financing the building of both the new school and church/parish plant.

Subsequent to the relocation, the empty school, church and parish buildings were thoroughly vandalised and reduced to an eyesore which begged demolition; the cleared site would lie vacant for some years. In 2018, the State Government announced that Armadale's new Justice and Police complex would be built on the site – construction to begin in 2019. Investigations had been made into the feasibility of relocating the original church to the Forrest Road site after some parishioners expressed concern regarding its fate. It was found that the cost of doing this was prohibitive; the church is on the local council heritage register and protected from demolition with regulations also in place with respect to modifications which future owners may wish to make to the building.

Since its relocation to Hilbert in 2007, St Francis Xavier Parish has continued to be an active entity on its new site. It has supported young people attending World Youth Day, it has welcomed those wishing to become Catholics through the RCIA process, it supports young people preparing to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation, it celebrates milestones – an example being in March 2013 when the centenary of St Francis Xavier Church in Armadale was celebrated, it generously supports annual Appeals like Project Compassion and LifeLink and offers ongoing opportunities to continue the process of building community – the list is long ... it has continued to function through the generous support of volunteers who are willing to become involved and willing to take on responsibilities within the parish – a legacy of both Fr Beyer and Fr Corcoran. The parish has also become much more diverse, reflecting the multicultural nature of Australian society.

After several years of largely undisturbed routine, punctuated by the visit of the First Class relic of St Francis Xavier in 2012 and the foundation within the parish boundaries in 2015 of John Bosco College (Piara Waters) and Salvado Catholic College (Byford) in 2016, there came a major change in the parish in January 2018 with Fr Kaz transferred to the Floreat/Wembley Parish and Fr Joseph Tran appointed Parish Priest. In addition, the newly-ordained Fr Anthony Vu was appointed his Assistant.

The Parish Team also included Deacon Patrick Moore: a long-standing parishioner, Patrick had been ordained to the Permanent Diaconate for the Perth Archdiocese in 2006 and served the Armadale

Parish from that time as well as ministering as Chaplain to the Stella Maris Seafarers' Centre in Fremantle.

Fr Joseph was well-known to many at St Francis Xavier. In 1999, while a Deacon and preparing for ordination, he had spent several months in the parish, learning and experiencing the demands and practicalities of daily parish life. After his ordination on 13 December 1999, he celebrated his first Mass in St Francis Xavier Church.

Not one to stay still for long, the charismatic Fr Joseph quickly made his mark in the parish during 2018: he implemented various changes to parish organisation and brought his own style, complete with corny jokes, to celebrating the Eucharist on weekends. Few were unaffected by his presence, his energy, his generosity and his spirituality. His sudden death on 21 March 2019 devastated the parish community especially as the circumstances of his passing invoked a frenzy in some media outlets and on social media and brought to light allegations never before experienced nor anticipated in the parish.

This was a deeply sad and challenging time on many levels for the parish as it endeavoured to understand and to come to terms with prevailing circumstances. In April, Mgr Tim Corcoran was appointed Parish Administrator, taking charge of the parish community until July 24 when Fr Mark Baumgarten would transfer from the North Beach Parish to assume the leadership of the Armadale Parish as Parish Administrator and, in terms of the process of healing and re-establishing parish life, *"doing what I can to help there"*. He would be appointed Parish Priest in December 2020 – fittingly, on the feast of St Francis Xavier. In March 2020, Fr Mark would write of being *"impressed by the resilience of our parish which speaks to the wonderful community foundation that is present here."* By the end of 2019, Fr Anthony Vu had been transferred to the Willetton Parish with the newly-ordained Fr Matteo Verdi appointed Assistant Priest at St Francis Xavier.

The 75th anniversary of the Armadale Parish in 2020 slipped by largely unnoticed, overshadowed as it was by the pandemic that was COVID-19. As with every aspect of society, the Armadale Parish was not immune to the impact of the corona virus which unleashed itself throughout the world during 2020. In line with restrictions imposed by the WA Government, parish life changed radically when, for the first time in its three-church history, the parish/church was effectively locked down for three months during March – June.

However, using the means afforded by the digital realm, parishioners were able to access regular messages from Fr Mark who kept in touch with reflections on Sunday readings, sharing links to various websites of interest including Masses online and making offers of practical assistance to those who found themselves impacted by the panic buying which had marked the onset of the virus in the Perth area. In the latter half of the year, again in line with WA Government guidelines, parish life gradually returned to normal albeit a new normal of social distancing, hand sanitiser in the foyer along with sign-in sheets and QR codes to be completed prior to entry into the church or parish offices.

Sources

St Francis Xavier Parish Archives

St Francis Xavier School 1938-1998

Daphne Popham: *First Stage South, Town of Armadale, 1980*

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