

The Story of St Joseph's Catholic Parish, Murgon

First Murgon Church

The first Masses in the Murgon region were held in private homes until the first Church was built and blessed on 4 August 1918 by Father M. O'Flynn, for Archbishop Duhig.

Murgon Parish Established

Murgon Parish was later annexed from Our Lady Help of Christians Parish, Nanango on 19 March 1927 (the Feast of St. Joseph); it consisted of seven Mass Centres when it was inaugurated. Four of these (St. Peter Claver, Cherbourg; St. Kevin's, Goomeri; Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Proston; St. John the Baptist, Wondai) still remain associated with St. Joseph's Parish. A sixth Mass Centre was established in Durong in 1966 and the Church was dedicated to the Sacred Heart. Two other Mass Centres were transferred to St. Patrick's Parish, Gympie; they were St. Francis Xavier's, Woolooga (1942), and St. Kevin's, Kilkivan (1947).

Masses were celebrated in private homes in the Cloyna and Durong districts when the Parish was first established in 1927. It is not known when home Masses ceased in the Cloyna district, but home Masses ceased in 1966 when the Catholic families of Durong area, self-funded and erected a Church in Durong using volunteer labour. Crystal cruet sets, candelabras, and altar cloths still remain treasured memorabilia by the pioneering families of Neal and Kathy Duff of 'Duffield' Station.

Murgon Presbytery

The Parish Presbytery was erected when Murgon was attached to Nanango Parish, and it was enlarged and reopened on 16 December 1928.

Parish Clergy

The inaugural Parish Priest was Father Patrick Costello (1927 - 1934). Father Costello was assisted by two Curates, Fathers James Cullen (1928 - 1930) and James Cahill (1930 - 1934). Other Parish Priests, Curates and Deacons were:

Father James Cullen	Parish Priest
Father John Isaac	Parish Priest
Father Tomasi	Parish Priest
Father Brian Lee	Parish Priest
Father Patrick Stratford	Parish Priest
Father Frank O'Dea	Curate

Father Peter Conroy	Curate
Father Leo Wright	
Father John O'Halloran	Parish Priest
Father Cleary	Parish Priest
Father Joseph McGeehan	Parish Priest
Father Frank O'Dea	Parish Priest Commenced Dec- 1985
Reverend Paul Crealy	Deacon May-1985 to Dec-1986
Father Ellis Clifford	Parish Priest
Father Mark Franklin	Parish Priest 1997 - /1/2003
Reverend Daniel Redhead	Deacon 8/12/2002 – 31/12/2002
Father Paul Kelly	Parish Priest Jan-2003 – 31/12/2004
Father Daniel Redhead	Parish Priest 1/1/2005 - 29/1/2010
Father Henry Maduka	Parish Administrator 30/1/2010 – 9/1/2011
Father Michael Carroll	Parish Priest 9/1/2011 – 30/12/2016
Edward Ekari	Seminarian Aug-2011 – Aug-2012
Nicholas Okafor	Seminarian Jan-2013 – Dec-2014
Matthew Hosking	Seminarian 23/1/2016 – 30/12/2016
Father Subin Thomas	Parish Administrator 31/12/2016 – 4/8/2019
Father Bryan Pipins	Parish Priest 14/8/2019 – 26/12/2022
Father John Fowles	Parish Administrator 26/12/2022 – 20/2/2025
Father Geo Francis	Parish Administrator 4/2/2025 –
Father Mikhael Loke	Parish Priest 21/4/2025 –

Summer School

An annual residential sacramental programme operated in Murgon from 1956. Each year, eligible children from within the Parish would attend a two week sacramental programme in December and at the end of that year's programme would make their First Reconciliation, First Holy Communion or were confirmed. It was a great Parish enterprise with many willing women parishioners assisting with meal preparation and supervision. The Parish Priest of the day would be assisted by a group of Presentation Sisters who came to Murgon each year to teach and help at the Summer School. In addition, Seminarians who studying at Pius XII Provincial Seminary, Banyo (now, Holy Spirit Provincial Seminary), who were just commencing their summer vacation. The final Summer School was held in 1997. The closure of Summer School was due to a permanent change in the Seminarian's training which afforded Seminarians more pastoral experience by being placed each year (from 1998) in parishes within their home dioceses for the entire Advent Season.

Holy Spirit Provincial Seminary Association

In 2001, Seminarian Daniel Redhead was appointed to St. Joseph's Parish, Murgon, in order to complete his practical training. Father Mark Franklin was his principal supervisor. Seminarian Redhead was ordained to the Order of Deacons, in St. Joseph's Church on 8 December 2002, by Bishop John Gerry, Auxiliary Bishop of Brisbane.

In 2002, 6 First-Year Seminarians studied and lived in the Murgon Parish for a period of 3 months; it was referred to as an 'Immersion experience'.

St. Joseph's Primary School, Murgon

The Parish Primary School was established in 1937 and administrated and staffed by the Presentation Sisters. The Sisters lived in the new Convent building which was constructed by the Parish after it was officially opened on 10 January 1937, in time for the commencement of the 1937 school year. The Presentation Sisters have maintained an uninterrupted presence in the Parish of Murgon.

It was in 1987 that lay administration of St. Joseph's Primary School began, ending 50 consecutive years of Presentation Sisters of day-to-day administration of the School.

The School was expanded progressively as the Parish could afford with building additions being blessed and opened by Monsignor Vince Cleary (21/10/1962) and Father Harry Bliss, North Country Dean (7/7/1996).

St. Joseph's Pre-School, Murgon

A Pre-School was erected on a parcel of land reserved by the Parish for a future Presbytery in 2001. The building was blessed and opened by Father Harry Bliss, North Country Dean (2/2/2002). The building operated on a full-day basis until the end of 2006; the last year when Pre-Schools in Queensland were operated. Miss Emma Farry was the inaugural Teacher-In-Charge of the Pre-School; she served as Teacher-in-Charge for the School's 5 years of operation.

Rosary College, Murgon

In 1942, during the Second World War, boarders from St. Rita's College (a Presentation Sisters based in the Brisbane suburb of Clayfield) were evacuated 300 kilometres north-west of Brisbane in Murgon. The students were absorbed into St. Joseph's Primary School for one year. Then in October, 1943, Rosary College (a Secondary Department) was established by the Presentation Sisters. Rosary College eventually closed in December 1970.

St. John the Baptist Primary School, Wondai

A second Presentation Sisters Convent was opened in Wondai in 1954, and they taught Primary School in that town until the Convent and School closed in 1969.

When the School was first opened, three Sisters were appointed to the School to teach, as follows:

- a) Preparation; Grades 1 and 2;
- b) Grades 3, 4 and 5;
- c) Grades 6, 7 and 8.

In addition, children were prepared for scholarship. Music, Art of Speech, and Commercial classes (such as Bookkeeping and Typewriting) were also taught. Mother Damian Fadien guided the Community.

In 1957, mention is made of the Sisters going to Proston with the Parish Priest every First Sunday of the Month, in order to take the children for instruction after the 10:00am Mass.

From 1954 to 1960, three Sisters lived in Community. Mother Francesca was a member of this Community when she died on August 27, 1960. Another Sister came to the Community, so its numbers remained constant at three.

In 1961, three sisters were present at the beginning of the School year, but when one Sister became ill and had to be repatriated to Brisbane for treatment, and was unable to return, the Community was reduced to two. From the Wondai Annals, a historical

record maintained by the Presentation Sisters, it was noted, "Our General Council decided that the school attendance did not warrant the services of a third Sister." Therefore, the Community remained at two Sisters. Art of Speech and Music continued to be taught, but there was no mention of Commercial subjects being taught.

From that time to 1965 inclusive, two Sisters lived in the Wondai Community.

In 1964 and 1965, one of the Murgon Presentation Sisters Community travelled to Wondai each Saturday for those pupils who wished to take music lessons. Art of Speech continued to be taught by one of the Wondai Community Sisters.

The 1966 School year began with three Sisters living in Community. Unfortunately, due to ill health, one Sister retired to Brisbane during the second School term. Art of Speech and Music continued to be taught by one of the Sisters in the Wondai Community.

As the attendance at the Wondai Convent School had dropped considerably in 1966 and 1967, the members of the Presentation Sisters General Council considered the closure of the School, particularly as the Murgon Convent School (St. Joseph's) was only nine miles away. However, the Parish Priest and other members of the Catholic Education Board would not agree to the School's closure. Two Sisters still lived in the Wondai Community.

In January 1968, the General Councillors of the Presentation Sisters and the Parish Priest decided to purchase a small car in order to enable the two Wondai Sisters to reside with the Murgon Presentation Sisters Community, and to drive to and from their School, each day.

As 1969 sped by without any increase in enrolments at the St. John the Baptist Primary School, Mother General and her Councillors sought permission from the Archbishop of Brisbane and the Education Board to close the School and to arrange for the pupils of 1970 and the following years, to be transported to the Murgon Convent School. Eventually, permission was granted as the Parish Priest understood there was no point in keeping two Sisters engaged with numbers below thirty. The final Sisters to serve the School were Sisters Perpetua Gaffney and Gemma Moore.

Sisters to have lived and served at St. John the Baptist Primary School and Convent were:

Sister Leonie Argent

Sister Pamela Bright

Sister Mercia Foster

Sister Perpetua Gaffney

Sister Jean Marie Hodgkinson

Mother Damian Fadian

Sister Francesca McKenzie

Sister Gemma Moore

Religious Orders Associated with the Parish

There have been four different religious orders that have had direct and active involvement in Murgon Parish. The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Sisters (PBVM); Sisters of Charity (RSC); the Congregation of Christian Brothers (CFC); and the Marist Brothers of the Schools (FMS).

The Presentation Sisters (PVBM)

Father James Cullen PP, after unsuccessfully approaching other religious orders, extended an invitation to the Presentation Sisters to establish a Community in Murgon. He had consulted Mrs. Lanigan, of Nanango, whose daughter (Sister Mary Rose) had entered the Presentations in Longreach, some time before. Though he had no personal

knowledge of the Congregation, Father Cullen lost no time in contacting the Sisters at St. Rita's, Clayfield. His request was passed on to Mother Ursula, who promised to visit Murgon and view the situation.

Mother Ursula and Mother Patrick visited Murgon some weeks later. As Father Cullen drove them around the district, he pointed out that Murgon was the evident centre of a number of other well-developed towns in his Parish – Wondai, Proston, Goomeri, Kilkivan – and that the Sisters could be involved in travelling to these for Mass and catechetical instructions on Sundays. Mother Ursula was impressed with the need for apostolic work – a type of apostolate which appealed to her and in which, no doubt, she saw a possibility of gathering a spiritually neglected children as Nana Nagle (founder of the Presentation Order) did. Mother Ursula promised a Community of Sisters would be established in Murgon.

On January 10, 1937, St. Joseph's Convent, Murgon – built in readiness for the Sisters – was officially opened and blessed by Archbishop Duhig (Father Cullen's uncle). Sister Jarlath Treacy was appointed Superior of the group of four young Sisters, who were to be engaged in quite a demanding apostolate. Those with her were Sisters John Cormican, Rosario Dolan and Malachy Mountford. Not only was there the catechetical work on weekends, but boarders (children living away from home to attend school) were taken from the surrounding districts, for Murgon itself, being an old centre of German settlement, had

a relatively low percentage of Catholics in its town population. There were, however, many Catholic families scattered in the farming areas further out.

The Murgon Convent was later registered as a Secondary School under the title of Rosary College.

As was customary with Presentation foundations in country centres, commercial subjects were taught after school hours to young people of the town and district who wished to improve themselves. As these towns possessed no secondary schools, prior to the Sisters' coming, those unable to board had received only a primary education.

The opportunity for entering into an apostolate, new to the Presentation Sisters in Queensland, presented itself in Murgon. Near the town is the Cherbourg aboriginal reserve, administered by the Queensland Government. Over time, the Sisters came to know the local Aboriginals, the Wakka Wakka people, the first inhabitants in this area. The Sisters visited the Aboriginal reserve to offer what friendship and spiritual help they could. Aboriginal children attended both their primary and secondary schools in Murgon and enrolled in large numbers in the Summer Schools, held in later years, for catechetical instruction for children in the area unable to attend Catholic Schools. Aboriginal people, too, would visit the Convent, where they knew the Sisters had a sympathetic ear. Such an apostolate is not gauged in terms of some external yardstick of 'success' – it lies in the non-measurable quantities of understanding and compassion, which are at the core of the Gospel.

The Murgon Convent, at father Cullen's invitation, became quite a popular place for Sisters from other presentation Convents to spend the long Christmas vacation. Not only did this town, with its picturesque setting and rich farmland, provide a change from city and coast, but Father Cullen's own generosity left the Presentation Sisters lastingly grateful to him.

Sisters Vianney and Carmel now reside in a smaller Convent at 16 Tiernan Terrace. The Sisters moved into their new Convent in 2001.

Sisters to have lived and served at St. Joseph's Primary School and Convent were:

Sister Teresita Ahearn

Sister Anthony Bohl

Sister Carmel Boyle (Joan)

Sister Antonia Bremer

Sister Dominic Burke

Sister Denise Candy

Sister James Cavanagh

Sister Emmanuel Connelly

Sister Celsus Conroy

Sister Berchmans Conway (Margaret)

Sister Marie Therese Corcoran

Sister John Cormicon

Sister Canice Creede

Sister Joan Cusack (Aquinas)

Sister Rita Cusack (Chanel)

Sister Zita Darch (Patricia)

Sister Vivienne Desailly

Sister Peter Doherty

Sister Rosario Dolan

Sister Dolores Dwyer

Sister Florette Dwyer (Marie Therese)

Sister Edward Fanton

Sister Agatha Freeman

Sister Loreto Gregory

Sister Bernadette Hayman

Sister Paul Healy

Sister Kevin Hearn

Sister Carmel Hodgkinson (Jean Marie)

Sister Julianne Hoffman

Sister Alphonsus Hogan

Sister Carla Jeffries

Sister Maria Joyner

Sister Philomena Kennedy

Sister Josephine Murphy

Sister Rose Lanigan

Sister Baptist Lawson

Sister Ita Lyman

Sister Conleth Mannion

Sister Monica Mannion

Sister Rita Martin

Sister Kieran McNamara

Sister Pauline McSweeney

Sister Maria Joseph Mooney

Sister Malachy Mountford

Sister Celine Murphy

Sister Christine Murphy

Sister Angela Murtagh

Sister Assumpta O'Flynn

Sister Leo Perry

Sister Zita Power

Sister Consilia Ring

Sister Winifred Ryan

Sister Marie Louise Rynne

Sister Philippa Rynne

Sister Gabrielle Shears

Sister Philomena Spargo

Sister Leonard Stewart (Theresa)

Sister Madonna Joseph Stewart

Sister Pius Stubberfield

Sister Vianney Surawski

Sister Jarlath Treacy.

The Sisters of Charity (RSC)

Before the arrival of the Holy Spirit Sisters, The Presentation Sisters Community in Murgon went to Cherbourg on a weekly basis to take the indigenous children for religious instruction. When the Sisters of Charity did arrive, they lived and worked with the indigenous community of Cherbourg. This Order was to be the last to live in Cherbourg in the quarters constructed and attached to the rear of the St Peter Claver Chapel.

The Marist Brothers (FMS)

Brother Cletus Drew served as Principal of St Joseph's Primary School from January 1987 to October 1994. He then relieved as Principal of St Joseph's Primary, Gayndah until the end of 1994. Br Cletus returned to Murgon as Principal from January 1995 to February 1998.

With the retirement of Brother Cletus, the Marist Brothers left the Murgon region, however, the spirituality of St Marcellin lingered on after the Marist Brothers left the area. The Brothers purchased a residence at 27 Lamb Street, Murgon, as their Monastery. With their departure, the Parish purchased this property from the Brothers.

The Marist Brothers association with Murgon was restored in 2007 when another Brother, Brother Daniel Hollamby was appointed as Principal of St Joseph's Primary. Brother John O'Brien accompanied Brother Hollamby to Murgon and together, they live in their current Monastery which is located at 4 Tiernan Terrace, Murgon.

Christian Brothers (CFC)

The Christian Brothers ministry in Murgon has been primarily directed toward indigenous Australians. Brother Michael Hanley teaches at St Joseph's Primary School.

Cherbourg Aboriginal Community

Originally, Cherbourg was known as Barambah. And it started life in 1904 as a Lutheran Missionary Station to indigenous Australians. One Hundred years ago the Cherbourg Reserve was set up by the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Queensland. Forty-seven Aboriginal tribes with different traditions and different rites were forced to live together in one place. These days, Cherbourg is a thriving community of 2,500 in the heart of Wakka Wakka country. The community recently had its 100-year anniversary.

Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters (SSpS)

In the early 1970s the Australian church became more aware of the call to be with the Indigenous people of this land. Up until this time for many decades several religious congregations of women has ministered to the Aboriginal people who lived within their area of apostolic work. In 1973, at the invitation of Fr Patrick Stratford, three Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters moved into the vacated convent at Wondai. Since they were to work in the town of Cherbourg itself, they needed and were granted a permit by the people of the town. They travelled daily to Cherbourg. The Presentation Sisters in Murgon understood and supported the small group in Cherbourg. This was different from the traditional involvement in healthcare and education.

The three Sisters were Sr Delores O'Sullivan, Sr Agnes Tolsdorf and Sr Bernhilda Driessen. Sr Bernhilda, whose health was frail, was the home sister. Both Delores and Agnes took time to come to know the people and to learn how to journey with them while respecting their culture. Perhaps the main and gentle aim of the Sisters was to respect and enable the human dignity of each person, and to encourage especially the women of Cherbourg to grow in self-confidence and self-respect. Delores, an avid student, gradually came to a deep appreciation of the spirituality of the Aboriginal people. In November 1975, the Holy Spirit Sisters were granted an administration house in Cherbourg where they were able to remain for some years at a rent of \$5.00 per week.

Since materials such as house paint were freely available to the people, Delores saw this as an opportunity to generate personal pride in the homes. Simple competitions in the town such as fence painting and garden competitions began to change the face of Cherbourg. At the same time, the government was building bitumen roads through the settlement.

Sr Agnes was an artist and a master in craft. She taught sewing to the women, but was always there to adjust a garment or prepare a special dress for a special occasion. In addition, she taught crafts, and

even joined the craft classes in Murgon to encourage some of the women to go with her and make use of these opportunities. Sr Regina continued the work of Sr Agnes and added cooking and budgeting guidance to what was available.

Religious instruction, which had been conducted by the Presentation Sisters, was continued. and tried to engender a relationship with the Church that had meaning for the local people. Even ecumenical efforts proved to be a struggle. The records mention several baptisms and one church wedding. Collaboration with the parish priest and the Sisters in Murgon resulted in increasing numbers of Catholic children in Cherbourg attending St Joseph's Convent School in Murgon. Efforts were also made to encourage more students to continue to High School.

Some of the Catholic residents together with the Sisters took a deep interest in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Catholic Council which had move from white facilitation to a movement owned and conducted by the people themselves.

Three Sisters who were registered nurses, and two of them qualified community health nurses worked at times in the hospital or in collaboration with the local hospital. Sr Noela Williamson taught for a time at the local pre-school.

In 1982 the administration house was no longer available for the Sisters, and as the people of Cherbourg indicated they wanted the Sisters to remain, the parish of Murgon generously added a small flat to the sacristy of the Church. This was the residence of the Sisters until, on account of lack of personnel, they withdrew in 1996. They had been in Cherbourg for twenty-three years.

Sisters who worked in Cherbourg were:

Sr Delores O'Sullivan

Sr Bernhilda Driessen

Sr Agnes Tolksdorf

Sr Mary Thorn (Registered Nurse)

Sr Agnes Cecilia Kusters (Registered Nurse and Community Health Worker)

Sr Regina Fenk

Sr Bernadine Thornthwaite (Social worker)

Sr Kathleen Kerwin (Registered Nurse and Community Health Worker)

Sr Bernice Heffernan (Social Worker)

Sr Noela Williamson

Sr Joseann Abdy