

MARY MACKILLOP CATHOLIC PARISH

BIRKDALE - THORNESIDE - WELLINGTON POINT

New saint's first church

The first new church to be completed in Australia bearing the name of Blessed Mary MacKillop, after her Beatification, was opened and dedicated on Friday 31 March.

It is for Birkdale, Thorneside, Wellington Point parish, centred at Birkdale, on Brisbane's southern bay-side.

Archbishop John Bathersby performed the ceremonies.

The excitement of parishioners of the young parish increased with the sudden appearance of the shell of their new church building earlier this year.

The walls arose by means of the modern industrial "tilt-up" construction techniques, with the striking

roof lines sparking great interest of people in the surrounding district.

The site and adjacent presbytery, on the corner of Birdwood and Hardy Roads, were blessed late last year by Auxiliary Bishop James Cuskelly, MSC.

Fr Luke Reed, Mary MacKillop Parish Priest, said the new church provided tremendous inspiration to a flourishing parish community.

The church would seat 400 in the main body of the building with a further 32 seats in the choir and the Eucharistic Chapel.

On special occasions the seating capacity was capable of being expanded by a further 308 to take a total capacity of 740.

It was built by Rohrig Constructions Pty Limited of Chandler at a total cost of approximately \$880,000.

Fr Reed endorsed the comments of Mr Roger Heathwood, the principal architect for the project, who said the new church was designed to be, like Blessed Mary MacKillop, "strong, down-to-earth, honest and unpretentious, open and hospitable".

He said the prominent raking parapets seen against the sky would be a strong symbol of the church in the community.

The ribbed or corrugated effect on the external walls was designed to be reminiscent of the corrugated iron buildings and sheds which dotted the surrounding farmlands in previous years.

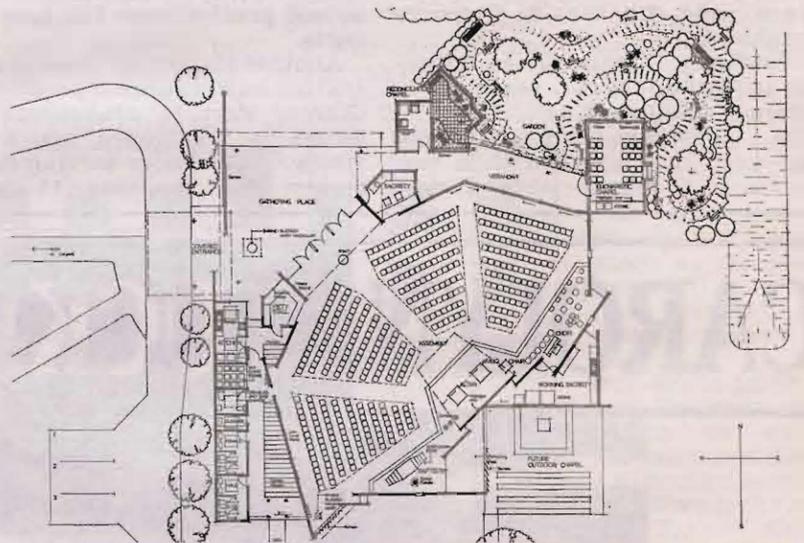
"We wanted to carry forward some of that pioneering flavour into the present day, again in keeping with the pioneering spirit of Mary MacKillop," Mr Heathwood said.

"The natural concrete walls provide a strong and pleasing contrast with the carpet and polished timber finishes in the interior."

Mr Heathwood said the extensive use of natural light entering the church from windows and skylights created a soft but bright atmosphere within the building.



The first Australian church to bear the name of the Blessed Mary MacKillop in its construction stage . . . designed to be like Mary: "strong, down-to-earth, honest and unpretentious, open and hospitable".



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Designed for the liturgy

Although it was a multipurpose space, the prime aim of the design of the new church was to "wrap a building around the liturgy and, in this sense, to make it truly functional".

Mr Roger Heathwood of the architects Heathwood Cardillo Wilson Pty Ltd said the church was "one of the most interesting" commissions the firm had received in 38 years of practice.

"As architects known for buildings serving education, health and science we were newcomers to church design and welcomed the opportunity to engage our building design and technical skills in this new challenge," he said.

"Armed with enthusiasm and a fair degree of ignorance, we relied entirely on the Church for liturgical advice and for determining the particular needs of the parish.

"Fortunately we were blessed with a wise, patient and tolerant parish building committee, whose advice and good judgment were always readily available.

"Liturgical direction was provided by Fr Tom Elich of the Liturgical Commission and Parish Priest, Fr Luke Reed.

"In addition, valuable assistance was received from the Archdiocesan Building Committee."

Aiming at the multipurpose space wrapped around the liturgy, "we also wanted the building design to grow directly from the parish community as expressed through its building committee.

"This involved the whole committee, particularly in the design phase, in many long but fruitful hours of discussion of each function and of each space slowly evolving the design that has now been built."

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The Cross of sheoaks

The landscape design of the new church incorporates dense stands of forest sheoaks planted in lines to form a Cross.

It is envisaged that these stands will "sequentially block and accentuate vistas to the church as one moves around it on the roads or footpaths."

"The experience should be one of appearing and disappearing as the sheoaks 'rotate' around it," say the landscape architects, Greenspace, in their "design philosophy" for the church.

"You may also be familiar with the sigh and hush produced by the wind as it moves through this finely textured tree as well as the myriad diamonds which cling to its needles following rain."

"A further useful characteristic of this tree is that it is self-mulching as it sheds a thick carpet of fine needles throughout the year."

The firm said its principal objectives in designing the landscape setting for Mary MacKillop church have been to complement Heathwood Cardillo Wilson's dramatic architectural design and enhance the church's role as the spiritual focus of the parish's Catholic community.

"It seems appropriate that the landscape should not seek to compete with the architecture but rather should influence how the church is viewed by providing backdrops, opening and closing vistas to the church and enhancing the drama already present in the architectural forms."

"In honour of Australia's first saint, it was decided to use all Australian native plants."



Archbishop Bathersby holds the lectionary after blessing the Ambo. Fr John FitzHerbert holds the microphone with Sophie Wood, Helen Morley and Ron Weightman joining in the ceremony.

In addition to the dense stands of sheoaks making a sign of the Cross, the landscape design incorporated the following elements to achieve the objectives:

- "Shade planting to the car park features the majestic Queensland Blue Gum, a tall and striking tree which is a koala food tree. Our intention in

the use of this species is to provide a tall backdrop to the church as viewed from the corner of Birdwood and Hardy Roads, which is the main approach to the site.

- "The church is comfortably nestled in low,

tufting Flax Lilies, which produce fine racemes of blue flowers followed by bright blue berries. The design also features the use of the Illawarra Flame Tree in an open parkland setting of easily maintained slashed grass."

Friendly neighbours

The Redlands "continues to be encouraged by your vibrant faith" said neighbouring parish of St Luke's, Capalaba, in a greeting to Mary MacKillop parishioners on the occasion.

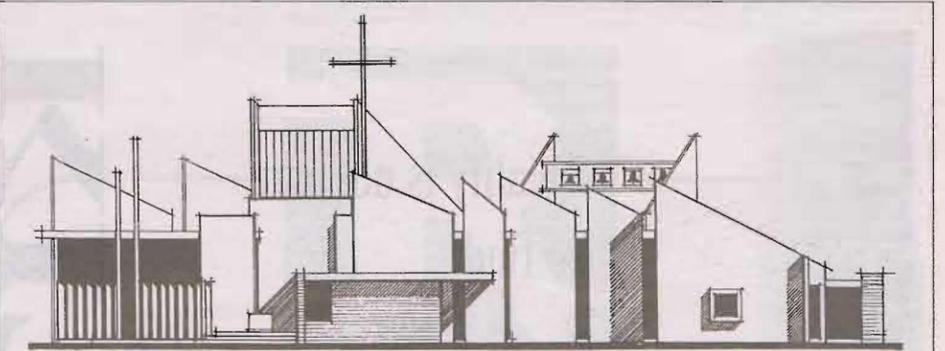
"The Catholic Community of St Luke's sends greetings and good wishes to the Catholic Community of Blessed Mary MacKillop. We will further be enriched with the dedication of your place of worship."

"We pray that the Spirit that inspired Mary MacKillop with energy and perseverance for proclaiming the Gospel in a uniquely Australian way will continue to invigorate your community," the message said.

"We ask that you accept a gift as our sharing in your good work. May God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ send you Grace, peace and much happiness."



Members of the local community on their way to the blessing and official opening of their new church.



MARY MACKILLOP CATHOLIC PARISH
BIRKDALE - THORNESIDE - WELLINGTON POINT

WEEKEND MASS TIMES

SATURDAY: 6PM

SUNDAY: 7AM & 9PM

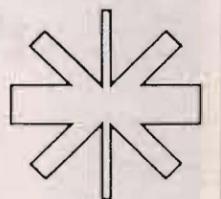
Parish Priest Fr Luke Reed

On the Corner of Birdwood & Hardy Roads,
Birkdale

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CHURCH

From
The Catholic Leader

MARY MACKILLOP CATHOLIC PARISH

BIRKDALE - THORNESIDE - WELLINGTON POINT

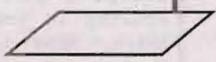
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Glen Rohig, from Rohig Constructions, the company which built the Mary MacKillop Church, hands over the keys to Archbishop Bathersby. Looking on are Fr Paul Rooney, parish priest of Alexandra Hills, and Fr Luke Reed, Birkdale's Parish Priest.

Precious communities

Archbishop John Bathersby told Mary MacKillop, Birkdale, parishioners of communities "precious" to him.

He said they were precious because of "the kindness they have shown me" and because they are communities of faith centred on Christ, communities of love that are a sign to the world around them of what life could be like if people lived together as caring and sharing people.

These communities were "signs of what the world could be like if people allowed the Kin-

dom of God to come in all its fullness", he said when blessing the young parish's first church.

Archbishop Bathersby said that, because this was his "deepest desire", those communities established for that purpose "are extremely important to me and very precious".

"The fundamental meaning of Church is *gathering*," he said. "Of all people, you here at Birkdale would not find that difficult to understand because you have been gathering now for three years and doing so without your own church."

Christ when He arrived certainly did not change the Jewish emphasis on community: "He gathered people into groups, wandering groups, as the Apostles were, or random groups, such as the publicans and prostitutes."

"These groups gathered not in magnificent templ. But Archbishop Bathersby said this did not indicate that buildings were unimportant. Gradually as the Christian community grew it became necessary to have larger buildings to house it. And it was "only fitting" that such buildings were "con-

structed in a beautiful manner so as to lift the minds and hearts of the people who gather in them for worship.

"Here in this marvelous new Church of Mary MacKillop we remember again that what is of fundamental importance is not so much the quality of the church, but the quality of the community that gathers in it. Those aspects are not necessarily exclusive and here in Birkdale I believe you have achieved both."

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Archbishop Bathersby blessed the baptismal font and water and then water was taken from the font by Fr Luke Reed for the Ambo and the blessing of the walls of the church and the congregation.

Reward for generosity

Mary MacKillop parish has been celebrating its Masses in Wellington Point State high school for more than three years.

At the start, monthly Masses were celebrated by Fr Charles Tomunasi for parishioners of St Anthony's, Alexandra Hills, who lived in the Birkdale, Thorneside and Wellington Point areas.

Later that year the Archbishop promulgated Mary MacKillop parish and Fr Joe McGeehan was appointed first Parish Priest.

Regular weekend Masses at the high school began in the middle of

March 1992, when Fr McGeehan arrived.

"All through this time the high school administration has been very welcoming and accommodating in providing a venue for the varied activities of our parish," Fr Luke Reed, the current Parish Priest, said.

On the last weekend at the school, 25-26 March, Fr Luke said the parish offered the school "our grateful thanks".

A small gift as a token of the parish's appreciation would be sent to the school, he said.

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Donations large and small

Parishes, Orders and individuals throughout Brisbane archdiocese gave donations, large and small, to help the building of Mary MacKillop parish church.

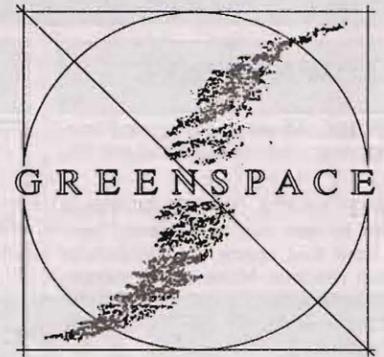
One, from the estate of Mrs Jessie McGregor, which helped to "put things in place sooner than was hoped", is remembered in the Jessie McGregor Garden.

Fr Luke Reed, the Parish Priest, said one donation "will ensure that the word of God continues to be heard by Catholics in Birkdale". It bought sound equipment.

Donations came from the parishes of Maryborough, Surfers Paradise, Sunnybank, Loganholme, Upper Mount Gravatt, Alexandra Hills, Capalaba, Cleveland, Manly, Wynnum, Bulimba, Mount Carmel Coorparoo, St James's Coorparoo, Coorparoo Heights, Mount Gravatt, Camp Hill, Wishart and Carina. Retired Presentation Sisters at Manly, Carmelite Nuns and Oblate Fathers at Lindum, also gave.



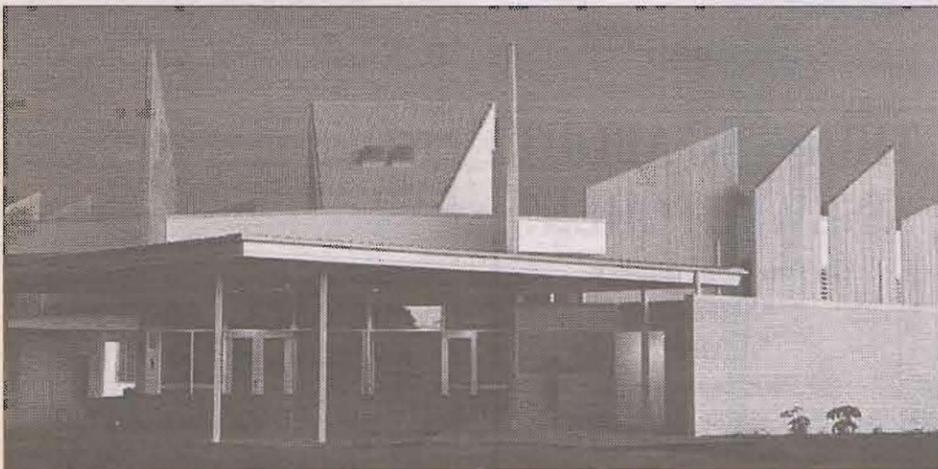
Ron Pokarier, Chairman of the Parish Building Committee expresses his thanks to everyone involved with the building of the church. Listening in are Fr Paul Rooney, Parish priest of Alexander Hills, Fr Joe McGeehan, founding parish priest of Birkdale and now at Gympie, and Archbishop John Bathersby.



Landscape Architects
for the new
Mary MacKillop
Church at Birkdale.

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The new Mary MacKillop Church as seen from the front.

Unified images

"Seen from a distance, the church presents a variety of images unified by a limited palette of materials and colours," according to Mr Roger Heathwood, the principal architect of the project.

It also presented "a strongly geometrical silhouette, culminating in the roof lantern 10.7m above the altar.

"From the north the building is shaded and open. Passers-by can see over a low mound clear into the main space.

"By contrast, the west is buffered, fortress-like against summer afternoon sun and cold winter winds. On the south and east, tall windows collect light to flood the interior."

Mr Heathwood said the external walls mirrored the roof sheeting against which the concrete walls were cast and recalled the agricultural buildings once common in the area.

Internally the walls had been grit-blasted to a rough texture, revealing the native stone and sand from which they were made.

"The assembly area is approached through wide portals leading from a generous, welcoming gathering place," Mr Heathwood said.

"On entering the main space the apparent complexity of the exterior is

resolved into a simple fan shape, focused on the altar, ambo (lectern) and presidential chair, brightly lit from above and from an unseen light source.

"To assist visual contact between priest and people, this area is raised two steps above the main floor."

Mr Heathwood said the altar space was set against an 18.45-tonne raw concrete background on which was mounted a plain timber Cross bearing a gold spiral ring at its centre.

"To the right of the altar is the baptistry and an alcove housing the Shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Left of the altar is the choir and musicians' space and behind that the working sacristy," he said.

"A wide veranda on the north links the Eucharistic Chapel and Reconciliation Chapel.

"West of the entrance is the vesting sacristy and service block housing stores, toilets and a kitchen which opens to the gathering place."

Mr Heathwood said that among the many pages of briefing were the words, *the guiding principle is genuineness*. This "provided a touchstone for assessing ideas throughout the project and a characteristic linking it with Blessed Mary MacKillop".

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We are delighted to have been selected as

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