

Birkdale — the birth of a parish

Birkdale parish, Brisbane archdiocese's newest, came into existence last Sunday — with five gladioli-strewn hectares of vacant land and a rented house.

The parish was formally launched with Mass at St Anthony's, Alexandra Hills, the parish from which it has been carved.

Appropriately, three priests concelebrated: Fr Paul Rooney, parish priest at St Anthony's; Fr Charles Tommasi, who is retired and living at Alexandra Hills and has been celebrating a monthly Mass in the area that is now Birkdale parish; and Fr Joe McGeehan, the man who, with his parishioners, has the job in front of him.

Fr McGeehan is Birkdale's parish priest and last Sunday at St Anthony's he met his parishioners. The parishioners' feelings about Birkdale were summed up by Mrs Jacinta Bennett.

She has been secretary to an interim steering committee, set up last year by Fr Rooney "to get things moving". Her reaction, simply: "It's terrific to have our new parish at last."

Now comes the hard part, done by so many before them in the rapidly growing Brisbane archdiocese: Building a parish community and infrastructure from the ground up. The parish sprawls across Birkdale, Thornside and Wellington Point on southern Moreton Bay.

The rented house, at Wellington Point, is Fr McGeehan's presbytery for the time being. "And I've been well provided for," he said. "Friends and the parishioners got everything ready."

In addition to the older established suburbs, especially Thornside and Wellington Point, there is new development throughout the area, with the subdivision of farmland.

There are blocks for government and private homes, as well as medium density housing. Mrs Bennett said 1990 figures showed that more than 25 per cent of the population of the area was 15 or younger.



Fr Joe McGeehan, right, on the Birkdale parish land with parishioners Ray and Lena Bandiera '... Already a sense of community is growing.'

Fr McGeehan does not know how many Catholic households there are in the

parish, but said about 80 families had been attending the monthly Masses.

Today it will be different. Fr McGeehan will celebrate Mass with his parishioners in Wellington Point State High School. It will be the parish's first weekly Sunday Mass.

Its land, at Birkdale, has been earmarked for a church and school, but these are still some time off.

How do we go about it? said Fr McGeehan. "I want to be here for a few months first, listening to the people, and then deciding what should be done. There will be a parish

meeting soon. Not much can be done until it is held."

Mrs Bennett said the steering committee's aim had been to keep people informed and interested, as well as to organise the monthly Masses.

"Already a sense of community is growing," she said. "Even with many people away, and a lot of others over at St Anthony's, where they have friends, we still had 200 people at a Christmas Mass in the high school."

Fr McGeehan spent last year helping in Gympie parish. Previously he had coordi-

nated the archdiocesan Ministry to Priests Programme for five years.

Before taking up that post, he had been parish priest at Murgon for nine years, after serving as assistant priest in parishes across the archdiocese.

Appointments

Archbishop Bathersby has announced these appointments: Fathers John Scarrott to parish priest, Salisbury; Tom Carroll, administrator, St Lucia; Leo Coote, administrator, New Farm.

Brian Burdekin keynote speaker at ACRE, 1992

A keynote speaker of national standing, Human Rights Commissioner Mr Brian Burdekin, will be a highlight of this year's Annual Conference of Religious Education (ACRE) in Brisbane.

Mr Burdekin, who has inquired into

Mr Allan Clark, ACRE's coordinator, said there were also 20 new presenters for 67 workshops to be given during the conference, the theme of which was *In God's Image*.

Workshops will include prayer and liturgy with secondary youth; "capturing