

Short Histories

Use this fact sheet to learn more about St Mary's Cathedral after your visit.

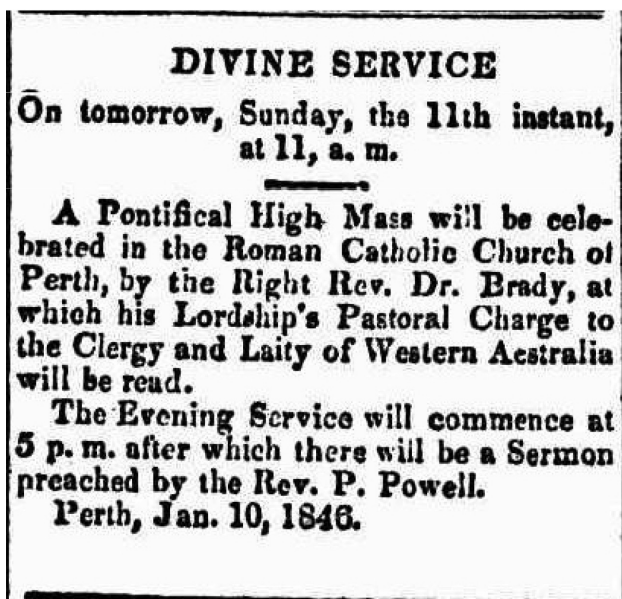
Faith and Worship

In the 1830s, the first Catholics arrived at Swan River Colony, where most early settlers were of the Protestant faith and were served by Anglican and Wesleyan ministers. In 1841, the Catholics of Perth requested a priest be sent to minister to their spiritual needs. In December 1843, Father John Brady arrived in Perth with two catechists and held the first Mass.

In 1844–46, the Church of St John the Evangelist (St John's Pro-Cathedral) was built. It became central to the spiritual life of the Catholic community, who worshipped there regularly in accordance with their faith. In 1844–45, Fr Joostens celebrated the first marriages at St John's, as Brady was overseas. In January 1846, Brady returned to Perth, having been appointed the first bishop in 1845, and celebrated the first Pontifical High Mass at St John's and delivered his pastoral charge to the clergy and laity of the colony; the first religious profession (by Ignatia de la Hoyde) was celebrated; and the first Requiem Mass was held, for Fr M. Bouchet. In 1849, catechist Timothy Donovan (arr. 1846) was ordained priest—the first ordination in Perth. Baptisms and confirmations were significant witnesses in the colony to faith.

Catholics came from far and near to worship at the two morning services on Sunday, and some living nearby attended Mass daily. In 1862, 450 of 650 Catholics in Perth and district, including Subiaco, Freshwater Bay and Guildford, attended Mass each Sunday. The new Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1865) accommodated 300 people. After additions (in 1905, 1930, 2009), St Mary's (as it is called) was enlarged to seat 900 to 1,000 people, and at special services such as Easter and Christmas it is filled to overflowing.

Changes following Vatican II have included repositioning the altar for Mass to enable the presiding priest to face the congregation, replacing Latin with the local vernacular (i.e., English) language, and more active participation by the laity, including the proclamation of readings. Most services now are in English, but, reflecting our multicultural society, sometimes in other languages, including Noongar (an Aboriginal language), Chinese, Indonesian and Filipino. St Mary's Cathedral continues to be the heart of the Archdiocese and, as a parish church, it, like other parish churches, is where all Catholics can nurture their faith and worship together.



Perth Gazette, 10 January 1846.



Re-opening of St Mary's Cathedral in December 2009 following the extensive restoration work. Brett Mendez and Ron Tan, Archdiocese of Perth



The altar of St Mary's Cathedral at the Laying of the Foundation Stone for the new sanctuary on 24 April 1926.

Archives Office, photograph ALB 29_79



Dedication of the addition to St Mary's Cathedral on 4 May 1930 designed by Michael Cavanagh and commissioned by Archbishop Patrick Clune.

Archives Office, photograph ALB 7 Coll BOU_50



Multicultural Mass, St Mary's Cathedral, on 11 November 2016.

Brett Mendez and Ron Tan