

# HISTORY

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## SACRED HEART PARISH, MILDURA

Saint Francis Xavier Church, Wentworth, was the first Catholic Church in the area. The Wentworth Parish played a significant role in the establishment and support of Mildura in the early days of settlement.

Mildura thrived and developed quickly with the arrival of George Chaffey in 1886 and his brother W B Chaffey soon after.

From 1889 onwards, Mildura was visited by Priests from Charlton, Ballarat, Wentworth and Wilcannia during which time Mass was celebrated in private homes.

The first public Mildura Mass was held in Langtree Hall and celebrated by Fr. Timothy O'Connell on 20th August 1892.

Regular church services were then held in the Anglican Church building, a lean to shanty on the block of land near the river end of Langtree Ave.

Early in 1894, Fr. Paul Zundolovich succeeded Fr. O'Connell as Parish Priest at Wentworth. Fr. Zundolovich was a Lithuanian Jew having arrived in Australia in 1892. Father's attitude to Mildura's future was the opposite to that of some of his predecessors and though, at the time local conditions were not at their best, he pictured a greater Mildura in which the Catholic Church must also be greater.

This man urged the people of Mildura to build their own Church on land on the corner of Pine Avenue and 10th Street which had been granted by the Chaffey brothers.

A committee was formed and Mildura's first Catholic Church was opened in 1896. It was of timber structure and cost 300 pounds.

In August 1895 a meeting was held in the Catholic Church in Pine Avenue to meet with Archbishop Carr of Melbourne and Bishop Higgins of Ballarat to discuss the formation of Mildura as a separate parish.

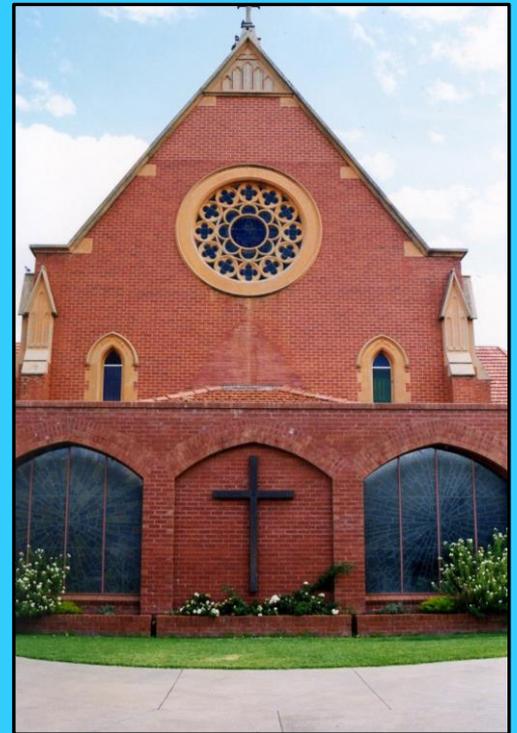
The first parish Priest Father Hurley arrived towards the end of 1905.

The Sisters of Mercy arrived to set up a Convent and school on December 5, 1905.

Bishop Foley blessed the foundation of the new Church on May 15, 1921.

The Church was completed and the first Mass celebrated by Bishop Foley on December 18, 1921 and children received the Sacrament of Confirmation.

The new Church was well reported in the local news. The following is an extract from the Sunraysia Daily of 13 May 1922.



"The Mildura church now holds its services in a 10,000 pound building in Eleventh Street. This structure, finished in November of last year, is the largest church in the district. It is of brick, the interior of buff stucco work, and has beautiful long leaded Gothic windows, a high stained hardwood ceiling, a spacious choir gallery, a tiled chancel, and chapels on either side of it. In each of the two side porches is a marble font and in one a large baptismal font artistically fashioned from Queensland marble. The larger front porch has two of the smaller fonts. The most notable part of the furnishings (which are not yet completed) is the altar. This, with the steps leading to it, is of fine Italian marble, with some sections of stone from Queensland. The altar itself cost 400 pounds and the steps 130 pounds. With the tabernacle and furnishings, the total cost was 600 pounds."

On September 22 1935 the Presbytery was opened.

The first Mass was celebrated at St Francis Xavier Church, Irymple, on February 19, 1941.

The Golden Jubilee of the parish was celebrated in 1956. Additions were completed to the Mildura Church which was renamed Sacred Heart Peace Memorial Church.

Sacred Heart Church again underwent refurbishments in 1999. The Church was closed for some weeks and Mass was held in the Sacred Heart Parish Hall.

Stained glass windows were installed in the nave of Sacred Heart Church to commemorate the Centenary of the Parish in 2006.

## **ST. FRANCIS XAVIER, IRYMPLE**



At Irymple there is a church that has been founded on the do-it-yourself basis. It was moved to Irymple from Towaninnie near Quambatook using voluntary labour and this seems to have formed the foundation of what has followed.

The parishioners do the church cleaning and launder the church linen. They also maintain the garden and the church. Members of the congregation are actively involved in the liturgy.

This working together has formed a bond between our congregation which is multicultural. This has given us all a greater depth of faith and a feeling of community.

The people at Irymple save money through working bees and it gives them a sense of belonging. If you have not been to the Irymple Church, you are invited to come to the 8.30 a.m. Mass held there every Sunday.

## **OUR LADY OF LOURDES - WERRIMULL**

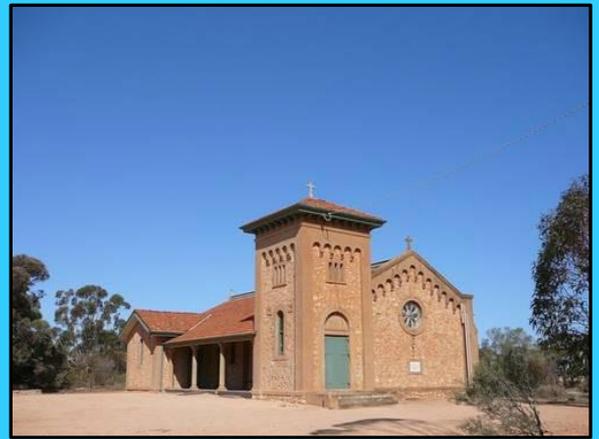
During the first few years of settlement in the Millewa, Catholics travelled to Mildura to attend Mass, but as early as 1927, Father Ryan, Parish Priest at Mildura, began to hold Masses at Merrinee School and at Bambill.

By 1928, Masses were also being said at the Werrimull Hall, the temporary hessian school at Meringur, and occasionally at the homes of parishioners.

In 1932, Werrimull became a parish, the first and only Parish Priest, being Father Leyden, previously a curate at Mildura.

By 1933, the construction of Our Lady of Lourdes, Werrimull, was under way, the builder being Arthur Zaetta of Merbein, the architect, J. Connell of Melbourne. The

completed church was opened and blessed by Father Scanlon on July 22nd, 1934. In a 'Sunraysia Daily' of the time, the church was described as the "finest structure in Werrimull".



The newly opened church was a credit to the skill and generosity of the builder, Arthur Zaetta, and his willing workers, both employed and voluntary. At the same time, work was progressing on the presbytery, with its distinctive combination of stone and log cabin. Until the presbytery was built, Father Leyden lived in a tent, having many of his meals at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Gatti.

In addition to the regular Masses during this period, missions were held at various places throughout the district. A mission was held at the height of one of the Millewa's worst mouse plagues, and the congregation had great difficulty kneeling and concentrating on prayer while the mice scampered over their legs.

Father Leyden was a unique character. He had little concept of money and its uses, and his material needs were few. All he needed was enough money to enable him to wander around the Mallee. He used to drive a Pontiac car, which served as transport and bedroom, as he often camped where he happened to be at nightfall.

With those who went to the trouble of understanding him, he was humble, retiring, yet warm-hearted; he had a spontaneous affection for children and his special concern was for the sick and aged.

Father Leyden continued as Parish Priest until 1948, saying regular Masses, and holding missions throughout the district. When, because of bad years and settlers leaving the district, it was no longer feasible for the Parish to be separate, Werrimull rejoined Mildura Parish and Father Leyden was transferred to Watchem.

In 1965, the Millewa became part of the new Parish of Merbein, with Father J.J. Russell as the first Parish Priest. With better roads and faster cars, people could travel further and Werrimull became the only centre where Mass was held.

The Golden Jubilee (50 years) of the opening of Our Lady of Lourdes Church, at Werrimull, was celebrated in 1984.

A succession of priests continued to carry out services to Our Lady Lourdes at Werrimull from Merbein.

In 1996, there was an extensive re-arrangement in the Diocese of Ballarat. As a result, Fr. Paul Ryan administered Merbein-Werrimull for six months and Fr. Frank Monaghan added Werrimull to his duties as Red Cliffs Parish Priest from the beginning of 1997.

After a period of being part of the combined Parish of Merbein and Werrimull administered by Sister Marion McDonald, Parish Leader, from the Merbein Parish House, Our Lady of Lourdes, Werrimull, now forms part of the Mildura Parish.

The church building is classified as a National Trust Heritage Building, and is lovingly cared for by a small congregation. It is an unusual sight for visitors, as it remains a poignant memorial to the expectations of an area soon to be depopulated by the decline of the wheat industry. Architecturally, despite its simplified treatment and squat tower it is a sustained attempt to evoke Lombardic Romanesque architecture, notably in the raking arcaded corbel table on the gable, the wheel window, the campanile and the Romanesque Corinthian capitals of the loggia. Classified: 24/06/1982 Revised: 24/08/1989

*Edited from a history compiled by Bernadette Wells of the Merbein District Historical Society and reproduced here with her permission*