

St Joseph's Lake Boga: Final Mass of Thanksgiving

On Sunday, January 20, parishioners, past and present, gathered at St Joseph's Lake Boga for a final Mass of Thanksgiving.

The Lake Boga Mass community had earlier made the decision to let go of the Church as it was becoming increasingly burdensome to upkeep. Looking forward, they will form a new Families and Faith group to continue supporting each other into the future.

After a few postponements due to COVID lockdowns, we were finally able to celebrate a special Mass of thanksgiving in the Church together with Bishop Paul Bird. Many current and former regulars of St Joseph's were able to join us for the Mass and shared lunch afterwards.



The text below is taken from a history prepared by Teresa O'Brien that was shared on the day.

St Joseph's Church Lake Boga 1898-2021

"Let us go forward on the road that has brought us to where we are"

Since 1865 when Lake Boga was first visited by a priest from the Inglewood Mission and then from the 1890's when it became one of the Mass centres in the area, the Catholic community has congregated to celebrate and is an integral part of the Swan Hill Parish and the broader community.

The original Catholic Church on the corner of Lalbert Rd and Tyrell St was opened in 1898 and the local congregation raised funds with a ball and other activities to furnish and improve the Church that was not only servicing the Lake Boga people, but also servicemen stationed at Lake Boga. However, unfortunately it was destroyed by fire in 1981. The town would not be without a Church for long, as the congregation rallied, and the former Presbyterian Church on Kunat St, built in 1912, was purchased and became St Joseph's Church. It was at this time that a couple of local men travelled to Robinvale to collect the pews, statues and Stations of the Cross that had been kindly donated after the building of a new Church in Robinvale. There were several working bees at the new site and the locals installed irrigation and planted trees on the adjoining block. Up to now the lawns and surrounds have been well kept by the locals.

There have been many changes within the Church and the local congregation has always risen to the challenges. After Vatican II the laity actively became involved in the Masses. There were Lay Led Liturgies held between Masses in the early 2000's and the congregation met every week. Music was provided and the Rosary was included. Home Masses were held frequently. In recent years there has only been one Mass each month with morning tea hosted after the Mass being a highlight, as it was an opportunity for chatter and a check on each other. In season local fruit is distributed to attendees. This is reminiscent of the early days when it is recorded that those from outer areas who came to Mass in Lake Boga brought their thermos and lunch to be had after Mass before their journeys home. Readers, musicians, collectors, presenters of gifts, cleaners and groundsman are all part of the Mass and there have always been volunteers to undertake these activities at Lake Boga.



The members of the congregation have worked tirelessly to maintain the Lake Boga Catholic group for decades. The parents had indicated in the 60's and 70's that Religious Instruction (RI) for their children was very important and they would gather their children from neighbouring schools to have RI at Lake Boga, provided by a priest. Later with the priests being too busy to continue this, the Sisters of St Joseph commenced providing RI after Mass and the parents then transported the Sisters to their next session which was usually in Ultima. Then in the 90's catechists were involved and some Lake Boga parishioners trained to be catechists to provide RI locally.



The Lake Boga group has worked closely with the Parish in events, whilst maintaining their own group identity. The group has taken part in many activities including hosting a Parish Picnic and forming their own Country Women's Social Group. Representatives from Lake Boga have been on the Parish Pastoral Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council and there has been participation in the Parish Planned Giving program, RI, RCIA, Italian Festa, St Vincent de Paul Society, Lenten groups and sacramental programs. Both St Mary's Primary School and Mary MacKillop College have the local community support. The Church has had baptisms, weddings and funerals. The first wedding was in 1900 and the last in 2021. Within the

broader community there has been active participation in events such as World Day of Prayer, Shrove Tuesday and Ecumenical services. From the arrival of Italian immigrants in the 1930's and other nationalities up to the present day, as a congregation it has been recognised that connecting people into our group is important in building relationships

with them and their faith. There has been a unique spirit in the Lake Boga Catholic faith group from the early days and it has been carried through to the present time.

From the Redemptorist Missionary to being served by the priests from the Ballarat Diocese, there have been many priests involved with the Lake Boga Church. In recent years two of our priests became integral members of the local community, with both Fr Brendan Smith and Fr Lyle Young choosing to reside in our township. Everyone knew our two priests and they not only actively supported the Lake Boga Catholic Church in their retirement, but became important local identities. Fr Brendan received an Australia Day Award for his community involvement.



The integration into the broader Lake Boga community has been evident, we are a notable faith group both within the Swan Hill Parish as well as our local town. As St Joseph's Church is decommissioned we intend to stay together and will continue to celebrate Mass and chatter, as a local group, with three to four gatherings planned per year.

With the closure of our Church building we value our past and remember with gratitude the locals and Religious who have nurtured our identity and Ecumenical spirit over the decades. We trust that we too can continue our spiritual growth within the Parish, whilst maintaining our own strong identity, as we walk together with Christ.

"The future starts today, not tomorrow"

Timeline

The Buildings:

1898 first outer Church of the Catholic Parish built-Cnr Lalbert Road and Tyrrell Street

1912 present Church built by Presbyterian Community, Kunat Street

1981 original Catholic Church destroyed by fire

1982 former Presybterian Church purchased and became St Josephs- Kunat Street

2021 Closure of St Joseph's Church, Kunat Street

The People:

1890's-2021 People with faith, courage, willingness, strength, belief, respect, love, acceptance

2021 Commissioning of Lake Boga family group

"Those who walk with God always reach their destination"

Fr James Kerr – Parish Priest

