

Historical Reflection and Tribute on the 25th anniversary of the Salvatorian Ministry in Pymble, NSW and on the 65th anniversary of the Society of the Divine Saviour in Australia¹

By Fr Ireneusz Czech SDS

We gather today in gratitude to God not only for the Salvatorians' presence in Pymble for the last 25 years and for the 65 years of the Society's ministry in Australia but to reflect upon the rich history of our Sacred Heart Parish. We are here to give thanks to the Saviour for the many people whose faith, sacrifice, and vision have shaped the community we know and cherish today.

When we look around us now, it is easy to see a thriving parish, vibrant schools soon to become Siena College, and many great facilities.

Every stone, every building, every ministry, and every tradition rests upon the efforts of generations who came before us. For that reason, I cannot speak today only about the Salvatorians. I know our contribution has been appreciated, but it forms part of a much larger story—a story of many priests, religious sisters, and parishioners whose faith and hard work built the parish we know and love today. Our story begins long before there was a parish, a church, a township called Pymble or even the existence of the Salvatorian Community that was founded by Blessed Francis Jordan in 1881 in Rome.

Catholic life here began in the early 1850s when Fr Ignatius McLennan, an Irish Benedictine, travelled long distances from Ryde to celebrate home Mass for scattered families. In 1858, under the leadership of Fr Peter Powell, the first Catholic church and school were established on land generously donated by Richard Porter on what was then known as Porter's Hill, today's Pymble Hill. A modest wooden church dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul became the spiritual home of the local Catholic community. For twenty-five years that humble timber church served as the centre of Catholic worship on Sydney's upper North Shore.

As the population grew, Fr Joseph Dalton SJ laid the foundation stone of the Sacred Heart Church in 1883, and the new sandstone church was opened in 1884. This marked a turning point in the history of the North Shore Church. The Jesuits, entrusted with this vast mission, ministered with extraordinary dedication across great distances and difficult terrain. Alongside them, the Sisters of Mercy became pillars of Catholic education, forming and nurturing generations of young people. Their ministry expanded with the establishment of Mount St Bernard College and the development of Catholic schooling throughout the district.

The arrival of the railway in 1890 transformed Pymble from rural isolation into a growing suburb. With new families came renewed energy in parish life.

Among the shepherds of this community, Monsignor Patrick Crowley stands out for his remarkable 45 years of leadership, from 1930 until 1975. Under his guidance, the parish navigated wars, depression, and social change, and witnessed significant

¹ This talk was presented at the luncheon in Marian Hall, Pymble, on June 14, 2026

development, including the 1935 Spanish Mission-style church, (now the Ku-Ring-Gai Town Hall), that replaced the stone church. That building remains one of the most recognisable landmarks in the district and stands as a reminder of the parish's enduring presence in the community.

The late twentieth century brought a moment of courageous vision. Recognising the need to unify parish life, the community embarked on the consolidation of worship, education, and administration on a single campus. This required sacrifice, trust, and deep faith. With the support of the Sisters of Mercy and parish leadership under the guidance of Fr Harry Davis, a new chapter unfolded. The final Mass on Pymble Hill in 1989 and the procession to the Marian Hall was an emotional moment for many parishioners.

In 1991, Bishop Patrick Murphy consecrated the present Sacred Heart Church, establishing the spiritual home we now cherish.

Only a few years earlier, in 1986, another historic milestone had occurred with the establishment of the Diocese of Broken Bay. On 28 May the Apostolic Administrator Archbishop Anthony Randazzo presided at a beautiful 40th anniversary Mass at the Light of Christ Centre, Waitara.

The creation of the new diocese marked the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the Church across this region.

Today we are especially honoured to acknowledge the presence of His Grace Emeritus Bishop David Walker among us, whose leadership as the second Bishop of Broken Bay helped shape the young diocese during years of growth and development. Bishop's connection with this parish is both significant and enduring. Under his episcopal leadership, the parish continued to flourish. He was present for important milestones, including the tenth anniversary celebrations of the new church and the renaming of Mount St Bernard School as Sacred Heart Primary School, strengthening the unity between parish and school.

We thank you, Bishop David, for your faithful service to the people of Broken Bay and for the support and encouragement you have given to this parish over the years.

The arrival of the Salvatorians in 2001 marked yet another important chapter in the history of this parish. We came here through the discernment and invitation of Bishop David, and we remain deeply grateful for the trust he placed in the Salvatorian community. His confidence in our mission enabled us to become part of the rich story of faith and service that continues to unfold in Pymble. For a quarter of a century, Salvatorian priests have ministered to the people of this parish under the guidance of Bishop David, Bishop Peter Comensoli (now Archbishop of Melbourne), and the Apostolic Administrator Archbishop Anthony Randazzo. We, Salvatorians, are grateful to all of them for their support and encouragement.

The Salvatorian priests have served faithfully in every dimension of parish life—celebrating the sacraments, accompanying families, supporting schools, and strengthening the life of faith. Our ministry, based on blessed Francis Jordan's

charism and spirituality, has enriched parish life and ensures the continuation of the parish's mission in changing times.

We remember with gratitude: Fr Tadeusz Seremet, Fr George Kolodziej (now Bishop of Bunbury, WA), Fr Dariusz Basiaga, Fr Mariusz Adamczyk, Fr Zygmunt Wloczek, Fr Roman Wroblewski, Fr Robert Masternak, Fr Boguslaw Loska, Fr Greg Skulski (now Regional Superior), Fr Krzysztof Kowalczyk (now Superior General), Fr Paul Tran, Fr Lukasz Kleczka, and Fr Marek Paczka. We also look forward to welcoming a new assistant priest Fr Alex Sapel.

Yet, as I mentioned earlier, the history of Pymble Parish is greater than any single group. It is the story of many priests who journeyed on rough roads, religious sisters who shaped young hearts, teachers and catechists who gave their lives in service, and of course the parishioners whose generosity—often unseen—built churches, schools, and ministries. It is the story of families who sustained the parish through sacrifice, and of countless individuals whose faith may never be recorded in history books but is written in the heart of God.

As we look to the future, we do so with gratitude for the past, with confidence in God's continuing presence, and with hope for the generations yet to come. May our Parish remain a place where Christ is known and proclaimed. May it continue to be, as our mission statement declares, "a Christ-centred community of love and mercy."

Thank you for participating in our celebration, and may God bless you all.