

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CATHOLIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE PARISH OF  
TAKAPUNA.

by  
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An assignment presented to Marie Foale.

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To discuss Catholic development in the Takapuna parish and in particular the part played by the building now known as the St. Joseph's Charismatic Renewal Centre. I will begin with the historical and geographical context. Then I will describe the reasons for its beginnings. This will be followed by the changes and developments over the years. Finally I will try to draw some conclusions about people's perceptions of the parish today.

In the time before the Pakeha the main part of the Auckland isthmus had been fought over by many tribes of the indigenous people. The North Shore appears to have had its fair share of change. Apart from the Kawerau iwi, Ngati Tai occupied settlements in the Northcote and Birkenhead areas. Ngati Whatua and Ngapuhi made forays into the North Shore from the north. From the south the Ngati Paoa drove the Waiohua people from their land at Tamaki. The Waiohua fled to safety on the North Shore. Later the Ngati Paoa also settled there. The Kawerau people who lived in the Hato Petera area thought it was wise to align themselves with the Ngati Paoa. In approximately 1793, Ngapuhi attacked the Ngati Paoa and there was a siege that lasted for several months at North Head originally known as Takapuna. The besieged Ngati Paoa fled to Waiheke Island.

About 1835, a leading chief, Hetaraka Takapuna, returned to the North Shore with other remaining Kawerau people. In 1840, Hetaraka Takapuna was one of the signatories to the Treaty of Waitangi in Auckland. He re-established several of the original



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kainga; one on or near the site of St. Joseph's Church in Takapuna.

Bishop Pompallier brought the Roman Catholic Church to Takapuna in 1846. What is now known as the St. Joseph's Charismatic Renewal Centre in Takapuna was named St. Mary's Industrial School by Aotearoa/New Zealand's first Catholic bishop. The building began while he returned to Europe in search of priests and nuns to come to his diocese which then embraced all of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Bishop Pompallier returned with the Sisters of Mercy in 1850.

The year before, 1849, the school in Takapuna was opened. St. Mary's Industrial School purpose was to educate Maori and Pakeha boys. The school did have some limited success but the extension of Catholic schools in Auckland and its suburbs, the land wars and the depression which Aotearoa/New Zealand suffered in those years brought about the school's closure. In 1869, Bishop Pompallier, before returning to France, re-~~opened~~ opened St. Mary's as this country's first Catholic seminary.

① Brother Paul recounts an anecdote from his childhood at the orphanage; he remembers Sr. Hyacinth talking of the building being used as a seminary. Apparently the young men, while training for the priesthood also worked in the quarry. This is recorded in the records of the Waitemata County Council in the late 1890's when the then Mother Superior offered to sell them supplies of metal for their roads from her quarry. The first New Zealander to become a priest, Monseignor Mahoney, studied here for a short time.

② The Mercy Sisters and St Joseph's Takapuna pg. 39.



In 1893 the old building was handed over to the Mercy Sisters to establish an orphanage for orphaned and destitute boys. In January 1893, Sister M. Alphonsus and Sister M. Mildred rowed across the harbour with six boys and took possession of the building which was to be called St. Joseph's School for Boys. Imagine what an adventure it must have been for the little boys! The Waitemata Harbour would have seemed enormous; remember there was not any reclamation of land at this time. It seems impossible looking at the Rosmini College playing fields which back onto St. Joseph's to realize that this was swampy marshland before reclamation. Fred Thomas Drive did not exist. The Auckland Harbour Bridge had not been thought of; there were few roads and fewer buildings. How brave these Mercy sisters were! This journey was the beginning of a long apostolate of the Sisters of Mercy which ended with the departure of Sister Gemma from the school in 1989.

During the tribal unrest and land wars Thomas and Mary Poynton left Totara Point in the north and settled in Takapuna. This couple are often referred to as 'great Catholic pioneers'. So devout were they, that they sailed to Sydney to have their daughter baptised. It was at their urging that Bishop Pompallier came to Aotearoa/New Zealand to establish the Catholic Church. Eventually the land Poynton's settled on the shores of Lake Pupuke, was given by their daughter, Mrs Shea to the Sisters of Mercy. This is where the convent and Carmel College is in Shakespeare Rd. in Milford. Both Thomas and Mary Poynton were buried from St. Joseph's Church, Takapuna and lie



in the O'Neill's Point Cemetery. Their son-in-law Michael Shea is buried nearby.

In 1923 St. Joseph's Orphanage was partially destroyed by a fire. Sadly, a little of nine died. Because of being constructed of 3ft. stone walls, the historic structure was repaired and re-opened in 1924. The surviving orphans were placed elsewhere until they could return home.

Since 1894, the school's roll had come from the boys in the orphanage but 1930 started with exciting changes. Day pupils were enrolled causing the roll to rise from 41 to 79 and also girls were included at this time.

1939 saw the beginning of the Second World War which brought with it petrol rationing. This led to a rather quaint ritual at Sunday Mass. In order for people to save their petrol ration they used to bus into St. Joseph's. If Father's homily went on too long and Mass was not finished by the time the Bayswater bus had arrived a man would get up and strike the bell once and all the Bayswater people would quietly leave to catch their bus.

The forties saw the school grow into a full primary school. There were few orphans left at the orphanage. Now most of the children were coming from broken homes. Also in 1928 St. Peters College for Boys (now known as Hato Petera) has opened on the site of the old Sat of the Sea Convent. This school catered for Maori pupils at the secondary level. But the orphanage boys did not qualify for St. Peters so in 1945 it was decided that they



would travel by bus, ferry and tram to St. Peter's College in Epsom. This was not ideal but it did enable them to continue at a Catholic school while still living at St. Joseph's.

The Auckland Harbour Bridge which opened on May 30th 1959 had quite an impact on St. Joseph's. It made it easier for the boys going to St. Peter's in Epsom because the bus to town stopped outside the gate. This did not go on for too long because Rosmini College was being built at this time and the boys were transferred to there.

On December 9th 1963 the old church which had been in place for nearly 40 years was moved back to its present position to make way for the new St. Joseph's Church which is still in place serving the needs of the parish of Takapuna.

During the seventies the numbers had dropped at the orphanage which was now known as a Home for boys. This allowed girls to be accommodated which allowed for siblings to be kept together. By the end of 1985, numbers had fallen to such a level that the Home was closed and the children were transferred to St. Vincent's Family Centre. After this, the Home again became a seminary house established for first year seminarians from the Auckland diocese.

In 1988 the name of the Home was changed to St. Joseph's Charismatic Renewal Centre. It is used for seminars, meetings and retreats. St. Joseph's and the Parish of Takapuna has now completed its first century of Catholic development. Now it is a pre-dominantly white, older and middle class parish.



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Probably many of our parishioners, like me, are unaware of the exciting history the Church and the land hold as our heritage. Bishop Pompallier's roots are deeply embedded here, with his encouragement the Sisters of Mercy developed our history with nearly a century's selfless work.

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