St Paul's Ginninderra – A Pioneer Spirit

On 4 July 1838, Reverend Edward Smith was licensed to officiate in the Queanbeyan district. This included services at Ginninderra on the third Sunday of each month, which continued until 1850. From 1850 until1902 the rectors of St John the Baptist had oversight. Two hundred acres for a church and glebe were donated by Charles Campbell in 1841.

The original St Paul's Ginninderra was built in 1861 atop the hill, not far from the present Rectory in Sharwood Crescent, Evatt. St Paul's was also used as a school until replaced in 1874 by the Ginninderra school-house. St Paul's had a two acre graveyard. At least eighteen pioneers from various denominations known to be buried there are commemorated on a plaque and the cemetery has been listed as an historic site. The last service was held in 1902.

Evatt Pioneer Cemetery Plaque

In 1916 the Church and Glebe property was purchased by the Commonwealth, the graveyard was fenced and the Church used as a stable. The building fell into disrepair as did the graveyard. The land known as the Glebe property, which had been farmed by the Gribble family for many years, was resumed for development in the late 1960's.

At 9.30am on 4 March 1973 the first service of the Co-operating Churches of Belconnen D took place at Melba Primary School. Services have been held continuously since then. The Co-operating congregation (Anglican and what is now the Uniting Church) represented many denominations with many and varied backgrounds of worship and church experience. Little did those few worshippers realise that this experience would deeply influence the life and development of St Paul's.

Reverend Brian Carter, the first Rector, preached at his first service on 2 February 1974, with 25 communicants. The sermon was based on Matthew 8:23-34 (recognising Jesus as Lord) and Hebrews 4: 14-15 (having boldness to approach God). From 1974 to 1978 the Anglican and Uniting congregations developed in close cooperation as one parish covering the suburbs of Melba, Evatt, Spence, Charnwood, Flynn and Fraser. A common purse pooled all finance; mutual fellowship was maintained by totally combined Sunday School, youth ministry, fetes, study groups, weekend camps and social activities.

Many early meetings were held to discuss the future direction of the church, arriving at two ensuing thrusts: - to organise Parish Life; and to reach out to the community in Christian Fellowship. The minutes of the 1974 meetings demonstrate the early organisational concerns of 'bread versus wafers'

and ‘traditional versus modern’ services. Much discussion with regard to the place of Anglican tradition in a new suburban area accompanied these earliest decisions. It can be said, that St Paul’s has developed through a democratic process, but the lack of a few traditional elements has been an important concern to some. However, these concerns have not been used to place roadblocks or burdens on the development of the parish. This openness to change is a fundamental strength of St Paul’s.

In 1979, a second (8.00am) congregation formed at Melba and a new congregation at the Fraser Primary, increased options for geographical proximity to people's homes. In 1980, the suburbs of Flynn, Fraser and Charnwood were excised off from St Paul’s to form what is now St Barnabas. Belconnen D continued until 15 February 1981 when Bishop Warren announced the ‘new’ name **of St. Paul’s Ginninderra,** covering Melba, Evatt, Spence, McKellar and part of Florey. The name pays tribute to the pioneer work. In 1982 the church moved to larger space at Copland College. This move required abandoning the combined cooperating Sunday School. This meant the final dissolution of formal cooperation and St Paul's became a self-contained parish.

The routine of parish life continued steadily throughout 1982-1986. A part-time pastoral worker (Ruth Mills, later to be ordained deacon) came to the parish in 1984. The population of the area continued to grow with the development of McKellar and Florey. During this period there was consistent evangelism and a growing lay ministry. During this period St Paul's functioned as a ‘pastoral’ church. The rector was present at every service, largely assimilating new members by himself. As growth continued it became apparent that the parish structures and the rector were working at their maximum capacity for growth and missionary outreach. The way forward was increased lay-led ministry.

By 1986 the Copland 9.30am congregation had grown to where further expansion growth there was unlikely. The decision was made to make yet another attempt at extension growth. In September 1986 several families planted another congregation at Spence Primary School. This depleted energy at Copland. In 1987 the Spence congregation gave active missionary outreach to its own suburb and grew a vibrant semi-autonomous lay-led worship style.

From late-1986, the parish functioned deliberately as a ‘program’ parish, with each congregation needing an intentional ministry training program, especially since people could join the parish without receiving any direct ministry from the rector. Along with the conducting of these courses the rector had to deliberately encourage and make room for such a ministry. In 1989 he noted that ‘The future of the parish will see the clergy and parish staff move further away from doing the work of ministry and more to leading, enabling and supporting lay people in their ministry. The clearest example of this is that the new congregations of Spence and Florey are almost entirely an expression of lay ministry.’ From 155 communicant members in 1982 the parish grew to 240 in 1986 and 290 in 1989.

The developing suburb of Florey was geographically isolated from Copland and beyond the capacity of existing parish structures for evangelism and pastoral care and a new congregation was planted in the Florey Primary School when it opened in 1989. At this point the parish had four services, 8am and 9.30am at Copland and 9.30am at Spence and Florey. An assistant priest (Keith Groundwater) was appointed in March 1989 and a lay-led youth congregation started on Sunday evenings.

Brian Carter left in 1991. Reverend Keith Groundwater was locum until Reverend David Clark was appointed Rector in 1992. At this time St Paul’s had a large active and wide ranging ministry based in

the schools within the parish and a vision to keep growing new congregations in each new suburb.

Priestly oversight of the multiple concurrent services proved unsustainable. The Florey congregation was closed in 1993. The Spence congregation was also closed in 1996. The expectation was that these members would automatically transition to the central congregation at Copland College and support a move to build a multi-function church building. This represented a step away from strong lay-led ministry to a more traditional Anglican model. This was a painful time, the wounds of which are not yet all healed, and resulted in a scattering of talented people to other parishes, other denominations and establishment of a house church to continue ministry in Spence. These scattered members have remained active in the Kingdom leading key Christian ministries and continuing to work for mission. St Paul's proved talented and flexible at taking opportunities but much less able to effectively release or cease ministry activities.

On a number of occasions in the period 1980 to 1990 the parish seriously considered building a 'Church' building on the land set aside for the Anglican parish next to the Rectory. Each time, after long debate and prayerful consideration, the parish decided not to build but to use its financial resources for ministry and outreach, accepting that it would in the long term continue to operate out of rented premises in government schools. In 1992 the congregation moved from Copland back to Melba Primary, to the 'Blue Room,' and remained there until the opportunity to take a long-term lease on one module of the closed Spence Primary School, now called the Mount Rogers Community Centre, became available. Again after much prayerful debate the parish entered into a five year lease at an annual rental which was at a very concessional rate and provided the parish with full-time access to a 1200m^2 area much larger than it could possibly have built. The parish continues to occupy that space although the rent is now at not for profit commercial rates. A Community Coffee Corner was established and other parish groups made increasing use of the space. In 2003 Reverend Clark retired and was replaced in 2004 by Reverend Michael Bain. Breakfast Club has run at Mount Rogers Primary for many years and St Paul's provided space for Operation Christmas Child (OCC) until at 25,000 boxes they outgrew us and relocated to dedicated facilities in Downer. St Paul's remains a very active support parish for OCC.

In mid-2007 the parish realised that mission had been seriously eroded and that very few parishioners actually came from Spence where the congregation now was. A program of prayer walks and waiting on God provided a range of good ideas but no directly inspired revelation, just openness to something new. About six weeks later two parishioners put forward a proposal to setup a Food Pantry. In August 2007 Helping Hand Food Pantry was started. Reverend Bain retired in December 2008 and Reverend Doug Newman was appointed in June 2009.

In 2012, the pantry supports about 40 families a week with about 18 tonnes of low cost food and Coffee Corner serves over 2000 meals per year. These activities provide significant opportunities for mission, evangelism and transformation but in a challenging environment.

Other histories of St Paul's are contained in M. Ferret and J. Murdock *The history of the Anglican Church in Ginninderra 1821 – 1983* and Reverend Doctor Brian Carter *A parish in mission - St Paul's Ginninderra*. Both of these can be found on the Parish Website: www.stpaulsginninderra.org.au.

Additional information on the Evatt cemetery heritage site is available at:
http://www.environment.act.gov.au/heritage/heritage_register/register_by_suburb