

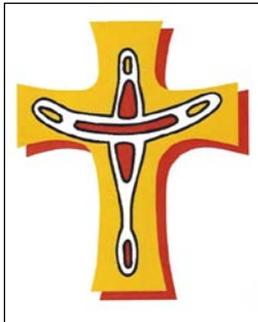
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*"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)*

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item 424

## 50 years of diverse historical culture – Diocese of Broome WA



The history of the Catholic Church in the Kimberley region of Western Australia began in the late 1800s when the spread of cattle and the growth of the pearling industry attracted an influx of Europeans and Asians.

In the 1870s the Bishop of Perth, Martin Griver, campaigned for a missionary foundation in the north. It was not until 1884, at the invitation of Bishop Griver, that **Fr Duncan McNab** – a Scotsman [and cousin of Australian saint, Mary Mackillop] – finally arrived in the Kimberley to serve the Catholics and to establish contact with local Aboriginal people.

Keen to build on the work of his predecessor, Bishop Gibney negotiated for the establishment of an Aboriginal mission in the Dampier land area. A site was selected a few kilometres inland from **Beagle Bay** (*Nyul Nyul* country) which was a popular lay-up base for pearling luggers. The Catholic Church established the Vicariate Apostolic of Kimberley in 1887. In 1890, Trappist (Cistercian) monks from Sept Fons in France founded a mission at Beagle Bay. Their activities extended into the growing metropolis of Broome in 1895.

In 1901, Pallottines from Germany took over Beagle Bay mission with two priests and four brothers and, in 1907, were joined by Sisters of St John of God from Ireland. The Sisters continued to assist the priests and brothers in evangelising the coastal and desert areas of the vast Kimberley.

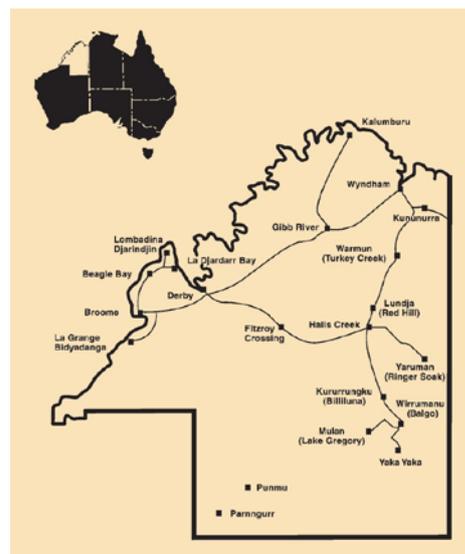
In 1895, a mission station was established in the Broome area with Trappist, Fr Nicholas Emo, in charge. The population of approximately 500 consisted of about 50 'white' residents with the remainder a mix of Japanese, Chinese, Malays, Koepangers, Ambonese and Manillamen (Filipinos).

In 1897, the parish of Broome was established. A small church and school for Aboriginal children were built behind Streeter's General Store with the help of local Manillamen. The church became known as Our Lady Queen of Peace. Unfortunately, only a short time later, it was burned down.

In 1899, a timber and iron church was built, again with help from Filipino pearl divers; the tower and alterations were completed by April 1904.

During World War I, the German Pallottine missionaries were interned, and Fr John Creagh, a Redemptorist, temporarily took charge of the newly established Vicariate. Bishop Ernest Coppo, a Salesian, administered the Vicariate from 1922 to 1928. In 1929, Fr Otto Raible sac took over and was consecrated Bishop in 1935.

During World War II, the German Pallottines were again interned. Most of Broome was evacuated to Beagle Bay and Lombadina missions after the bombing of Broome by the Japanese air force. Bishop Raible, Vicar Apostolic of the Kimberley, resigned in August 1958. In January 1959, Fr John Jobst sac was appointed Vicar Apostolic of the Kimberley and, on 19 March 1959, he was consecrated Bishop. The Vicariate was raised to the status of Diocese in 1966. Bishop Jobst's episcopate was marked by a period of building and organisation that enabled the Church to keep up with the rapid growth of the North West.



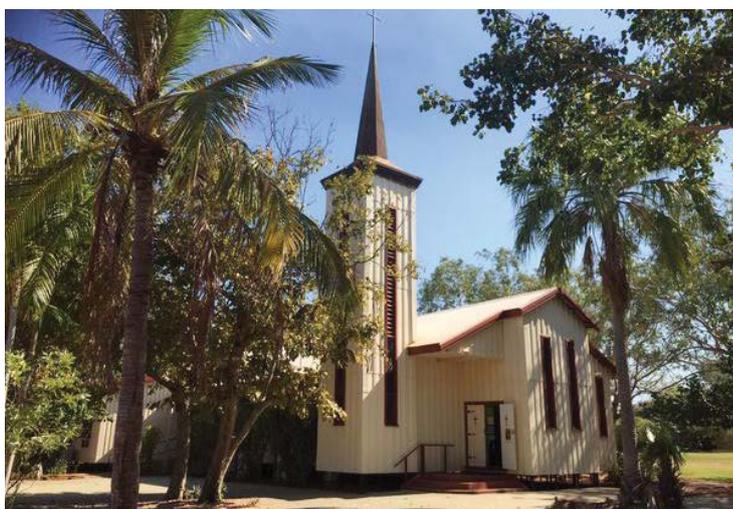
The post-war era saw extensive expansion of missionary activities, the influx of religious orders and the establishment of the Kimberley Lay Missionary Association. Priests and religious Brothers and Sisters starting moving into the east Kimberley at the invitation of the Bishop, and a network of parishes and schools spread throughout. There are now 9 parishes and 13 Catholic schools within the diocese.

Bishop Christopher Saunders is only the second Bishop of Broome and is in charge of one of Australia's most unique dioceses – 773,000 square kilometres with a total population of approximately 33,500 people. He travels enormous distances in his job as he ministers to and oversees the welfare of the 8,000 Catholics in his care. In the four decades that he has spent in the region, his love for the Aboriginal people and their culture, his knowledge of the Kimberley and its history, and his understanding of the region and its inhabitants, have grown with the years. He states: "I see the Church as having an important role in, and contribution to make to, the process of reconciliation between individuals and communities."

The nine parishes of the diocese, together with parishioners from diverse cultures and languages under the pastoral care of priests and religious from different nations, make the diocese truly representative of the universal Catholic Church.

### Broome (Our Lady Queen of Peace Cathedral)

The second church was built on the present site in 1899. By the early 1960s, the old timber and iron structure was in need of considerable attention. The poor condition of the 1899/1904 church, combined with the fact that the building was too small for the growing congregation, resulted in the planning of a new church for the town. A Perth-based builder was asked to design a new Broome church. Its construction, adjacent to the old one, commenced around April 1963 and continued until September 1963. Materials for the church were prefabricated then transported from Perth to Broome by ship. Our Lady Queen of Peace Church was dedicated on 8 September 1963. Current parishioners of Broome are again finding the Cathedral building inadequate to meet the needs of the growing community and have begun planning for a new Cathedral.



### Balgo-Kutjungka (St Theresa)

Balgo, or *Wirrimanu* in the local indigenous language, is one of Australian's most remote Aboriginal communities, located in the south-east Kimberley region of Western Australia. It lies on the northern edge of the Great Sandy Desert and on the western edge of the Tanami Desert.

### Beagle Bay, Dampier Peninsula (Sacred Heart)

The Sacred Heart Church, with its famous mother of pearl shell altar, was built during the first world war, entirely by hand, by the local Aborigines and Pallottine brothers: a remarkable achievement for those times when the only access to land was by sea. It took some 60,000 handmade bricks and, day after day, parties set off into the bush or to the coast to cut timber, cart sand, dig clay and gather tons of broken shells for lime. The interior of the church is decorated with shells, including mother of pearl, cowries, volutes and olives. While the mother of pearl has been



used to decorate the main altar, the side altars are inlaid with opercula, a rare stone taken from shellfish. Some of the decorations formed the tribal symbols of the *Nyul Nyul*, the *Nimanborr* and the *Bardi* people of the area, while others formed the lamb, the fish and shepherd's crook of the Christian faith.

### Lombadina (Christ the King)



The bush church at Lombadina Mission was built in 1932. Timber for the Lombadina church was gathered from the surrounding bush by Fr Augustus Spangenberg sac and Aboriginal helpers, and then sawn by hand. The Lombadina church was blessed by Mons Otto Raible sac on the feast of Christ the King. Many changes have taken place over the years. Lombadina has formed into two separate side by

side communities – *Lombadina* and *Djarindjin*. Both have their own independent administrations. Djarindjin-Lombadina Catholic School serves both communities.

### Kalumburu (Our Lady of the Assumption)

*Kalumburu* Mission (also known as Drysdale River Mission until around 1950) provided dormitory-style residential care for Aboriginal boys and girls aged from infancy to around 16 years of age. Kalumburu began as an 'outstation' of the Drysdale River Mission in 1932 and became the main Mission Station in 1937. Kalumburu Mission was managed by the Benedictine Community of New Norcia until it was handed over to the Catholic Diocese of Broome in 1981.



### **La Grange-Bidyadanga (St John the Baptist)**

*A Piece of the Story*, the National Directory of Records of Catholic Organisations Caring for Children from Separated Families, reports that “in 1956, La Grange Mission, which had been a government rations depot, was transferred to the Catholic Church”. It is situated approximately 200 kilometres south of Broome.

### **Religious Congregations**

It merits to recall the part played by members of various religious congregations in the history of the diocese.

In 1890, Trappist (Cistercian) monks from France founded a mission at Beagle Bay, while Benedictine monks from New Norcia have had a pastoral presence at another site – Kalumburu – for many years.

In 1901, Pallottines from Germany took over Beagle Bay mission with two priests and four brothers and, in 1907, were joined by the Sisters of St John of God. Nine Sisters arrived, led by Sr Antonio O’Brien ssjg, to minister to Aboriginal women and children. They responded to whatever works needed to be done and so commenced teaching, nursing, training of the older girls and a wide range of domestic duties. They were soon accepted in Broome by all races and classes of people.

Over the remaining years the Sisters branched out, undertaking a number of ventures in Lombadina and Derby, then further afield to the desert community of Balgo Hills mission and later to the La Grange mission (now Bidyadanga Community) south of Broome. In 2007, the Sisters celebrated 100 years of ministry in the Kimberley. The missionary partnership of the Pallottines and the St John of God Sisters lasted up to recent times.

The Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, the order founded by St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, have long worked with Aboriginal people in the Kimberley, with the Catholic Church’s presence in the area dating back to the late 1800s and the vast parish of Broome established in 1897. Today they work in Balgo, Kununurra, Warnum-Turkey Creek and Halls Creek.



The Christian Brothers have a presence in Broome and the De La Salle Brothers, until recently, a community in Balgo, while a Sister of Mercy and a Good Samaritan Sister work in Gibb River and Broome, respectively.

So members of various congregations have contributed a centenary of missionary work in the Kimberley. They have been a gift to the Church, a fulfilment of their own vocations and, for the most part, are viewed positively by many people in the Kimberley today.

### **Educational Formation**

Together with its parish schools and St Mary’s Secondary College, the Catholic **University of Notre Dame** plays an important role in the life of the diocese with a well-established campus. Notre Dame’s Broome campus is a unique and multi-faceted research, education and training hub in the heart of the Kimberley, offering Vocational Education and Training, Tertiary Pathway Program, Professional Development, Higher degree and research opportunities. The University of Notre Dame Australia is committed to providing strong support for the process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. It provides a supportive environment for all students and an opportunity for non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people to come together and learn about Aboriginal history and culture.

**Frank Freeman sdb – Sydney – AUSTRALIA**  
**02.06.16**  
**courtesy *The Record* – Perth**

**you commented...**

**on #224** Greetings from Ntaba Maria Sisters! This is to thank you for the informative bulletin, which we hope will open our minds and connect us with other pallottine families. We will pray for the success of the General Chapter of the Pallottine Missionary Sisters.

**PN 13.06.16**