

**St Therese Catholic Church and School** Chamberlain Road  
(More history and photographs available at <http://www.StTherese.Net>)

The beginnings of a Catholic Church in Padstow, can be traced to a small wooden chapel at One Tree Point, which was part of "Lisieux" Theresian Home for Needy Children. The home and chapel were in Dilke Road, between today's Braye Place and Valley Road. (A 1949 aerial photo is included in a feature on "Lisieux" in "Out the Back": A brief history of Padstow Heights chapter).

The refuge for children from underprivileged areas of the city was opened on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1938 by the Sisters of Charity. Mr Phil Maher of Petersham became interested in the home when he was transporting children to Padstow for picnics during the years 1944-1947.

"He eventually acquired an army Nissan hut, which he transported to the grounds alongside the Home at Padstow, and with the help of the Lewisham St Vincent de Paul members spent many weekends converting the hut into a chapel for the Theresian Home. Named St Therese's Chapel of Ease, its first Mass was said by Sister Therese's cousin, Fr Stanislaus Tyler, MSC then in advanced years. The cedar altar used in the chapel came from the first Australian convent of the Sisters of Charity at Parramatta." (Farland 1998 p 60-61) Mr Ross Moore remembers "Phil Maher used to drive around looking for available Priests to come and celebrate Mass each week."

The Padstow area was originally part of the Bankstown Parish, but in 1949, the area fell within the newly created Revesby Parish. It was in this period, that the residential development of Padstow was underway. New settlers to Padstow who lived a fair distance from St Lukes, Revesby began to ask permission to attend Mass in the holiday home's chapel.

Mr Joe Tax whose family lived on Davies Road recalls walking up through the bush tracks, past the water tower to attend the small wooden and tiled chapel that seated about twenty people on its half dozen rows of timber pews. He said "Many of the people who did not have cars found the service more convenient than travelling to Revesby."

Brother Tony Moore remembers "The chapel fitted twenty people in comfort, but I remember maybe 40 or 50 people squeezing in. The children would sit on the floor all around the altar, even behind the Priest to make room. I can still picture how there would be even more people waiting on the steps outside, trying to hear the sermon. These people would make sure that they were not late next week!"

Mrs Betty Moore remembers "The gaps between the floor boards, which had shrunken over the years were nearly an inch wide. One would have to be careful where they sat in winter, or they would get the worst breeze." Mr Bill Kelly recalled "When we held a fundraising BBQ up there, a child climbed under the floorboards. When I crawled under to get the child, I must have found about 15 pairs of Rosary beads."

*St Luke Revesby 50 Years* book (1999 p 22) records "In March 1953, Cardinal Gilroy gave Father Carr permission to erect Stations of the Cross at the Theresian Home and Mass was celebrated there every Sunday." It had been a Mass centre for several years.

In the 1950s, Mass was said by alternating Priests. These included Father Carr and Father Gallagher from St Lukes, Revesby and Father Meares from the Catholic Education Office at Strathfield. Mr Bill Kelly remembers "George Hughes, who lived in Courtney Road would drive and pick Father Carr up some Sunday mornings." "Confessions were held once a week on Saturday afternoons." Mr Kelly added.

Mr Kelly compiled a list of Parishioners who regularly attended Mass at the chapel. Jock and Kath Montague, Bert Coleman, Denis and Moira Roche, Jack and Norma Troy, Stan and June Jeffries, Frank and Shirley Harris, Jack and Shirley McCormack, Kevin and Betty Lawler, George and June Hughes, Barbara Neasby, Margaret Unsworth (Mrs Barry Unsworth), Pat and Neville Audsley, Mr and Mrs Des Forsythe, Tom and Patty Ford, Beryl and Bill Kelly, Ernie and Monica Gladman, Bill and Isabel Farrell, Ian and Joan Campbell, Beryl Lodge.

Mr Tax recalls "The men in the St Vincent de Paul conference which included Terry Bard, John Maguire and Bernie Blackstock bought meat from a local butcher and cut up meat for the children in the home. They also made food parcels for the local poor, using the chapel as their base."

The Catholic Weekly (11 November 1987 p 10) reports that "In 1952 Father Carr bought land at Padstow and because he could not get enough money had to be content with the narrow block instead of the large block into Alma Road."

The *St Luke Revesby 50 Years* book (1999 p 23) records that Father Carr purchased the land for £1750. "Father Carr had been offered land by Sister Therese, who was in charge of the home but he felt that its location at Dilke Road, Padstow Heights was too far away from the main transport routes in the district."

Mr Kelly recalls "On Anniversary Sunday, late January 1956, Father "Paddy" Carr from St Lukes, Revesby gathered a small number of local Catholic families at the small wooden chapel in Dilke Road to discuss fundraising to build a Church and School on the block of land the Church owned in Chamberlain Road. A target of around £1000 was set by the end of the year." *St Luke Revesby 50 Years* book (1999 p 23) states that the building of the Church and School had an estimated cost of £5500.

"The local Catholic community held a fete on the vacant lot which raised nearly £300. This included a gambling table on which one unlucky punter alone lost £100. When the organisers did some counting and realised they were ahead, the lights went out! Later, this year on a wet and windy night a sausage sizzle was held at the Theresian Home which raised about £100. Early in 1957 a series of home parties were held which included games and activities to raise money. Some of the homes included those of the Hughes, Montague, Gladman and Roach families." Belly Kelly continued.

Mr Bill Kelly recalled that before that first fete, he and Tom Ford cleared ti tree which had spasmodically grown on the block. Mr Ray Parker recalled the block was never fenced, and at some in the 1930s somebody took all the topsoil of the whole section, stripping it to the bare clay. Mrs Eileen Dobson referred to this section as the gravel paddock.

The School and Church building commenced in late September 1959 with the help of voluntary labour from Parishioners. Mr Kelly said "The volunteers included Bill Farrell, Denis Roach, Jock Montague, Jim O'Shea, Alf Curryer, Tommy Ford, Jack O'Brien, Jack Troy, Kevin Lawler, Frank Harris, Stan Jeffries, Neville Audsley, Frank Donnelly, Pat O'Shea, George Hughes, Ernie Gladman, Bernie McInnery, Ian Campbell, Ross Moore, Jim Sutton, Jack McCormack and others. One week they would work on the Church and next week something would be done with the School." The names of Chris McGing and Jack Braiding were added to this list by Mr John McGrath. Other workers included Maureen Sutton, Ted and Maureen Crowe.

"There were some Parishioners from Revesby who did the laying of cement for the church, altar and sanctuary. They included Jim Tosi, Frank Narvo and six others." Mr Kelly continued.

"Much of the voluntary labour of Parishioners was used in the digging of the trenches. Bill Farrell and Tommy Ford took time off their respective employment to supervise the pouring of cement into the foundations." Mr Tax said.

"The ladies would bring morning and afternoon tea – Mrs Ford, Mrs Jeffries, Mrs Cocharane, Mrs Connors, Mrs Audsley." Mr Kelly recalled. "The same can be said of Isabel Farrell, June Hughes, Beryl Kelly, Patti Ford, for their beautiful home made soups at the end of work."

"Father Paddy Carr played a 'hands-on' role in overseeing the construction. He was friends with Mark McMahon from Marrs Constructions who donated the use of their crane services to fit the girders on Good Friday 1960." Mr Kelly continued.

"When a new Priest replaced Father Gallagher at Revesby, Father Carr called him up on the telephone and said 'Get some work clothes on and get over to Padstow! You're pouring cement like the rest of us!'" Mr Kelly recalled. "Father Carr was himself an advisor to the Archdiocese of Sydney on building matters."

Mr John McGrath who was also a volunteer worker said "Father Carr was always on the site, in the most difficult area. He was indistinguishable as the Priest in his navy singlet and gumboots digging the trenches and always full of good humour."

Cardinal Gilroy laid the foundation stone on 10 July 1960 as the building began to rise. George Hughes supervised as they poured the concrete floors for the church and school on the October long weekend in 1960. "Most of this was done during near cyclonic weather, but the Parishioners pushed ahead and the next week the concrete had set like a cricket pitch." Mr Kelly said. "Mrs Mark McMahon arrived with a big pot of very hot soup which was very well appreciated by one and all of the sodden and cold workers."

"All volunteers who had worked on the Church and School were each invited to shovel a load of cement onto the raised area which became the Altar." Mr John McGrath recalled.

"The women met every fortnight in each others homes and undertook the purchasing of the material for vestments, communion rail etc. Their names were Mrs Montague, Roche, Kelly, Troy, Gladman, Farrell and Hughes. At least four of them were pregnant. The sowing of the vestments was supervised by Monica Gladman and Norma Troy who before marriage were employed as seamstresses." Mr Kelly said.

Farland (1998 p 61) writes "When a new church at Padstow was opened in 1962, it was named after St Therese, the patron saint of the Theresian Club." *St Luke Revesby 50 Years* book (1999 p 23) records "Cardinal Gilroy felt that 'St Therese' was an appropriate patron for the new parish as the Theresian Home had been such a vital part of the Catholic history in the district."

In 1965, "Lisieux" Theresian Home was closed. Farland (1998 p 66) reports "It was agreed that the statue of St Therese given to the chapel by Mary King in memory of her mother was to be given to the new Padstow church of St Therese." Mary King lived in Padstow, and she was the daughter of Mr Phil Maher.

The First Parish Priest appointed solely to St Therese, was Father Timothy O'Carroll. He lived in a sparsely furnished room at the Theresian home until the Harvey Avenue Presbytery was purchased. This has been renovated several times.

The first Baptism was on 16 July 1961, first Marriage on 10 November 1962, first Funeral on 24 October 1963. The first Confirmation was performed by Cardinal Freeman, who was then Auxillary Bishop of Sydney. This occurred on 2 May 1965.

Father O'Carroll, was followed by Father Kelly, then the long term Parish Priest Father Larry Corridon arrived in August 1966. He retired to Ireland in August 1992. Father Bell was present for several months. In November 1992, Father Stephen De Bono arrived as Administrator of the Parish. He was officially appointed Parish Priest on 10 June 1995.



"The Founding Fathers" from left to right, Rev. P. Landers, Rev. P. Carr, Rev. L. Corridon. This photo hangs in the hall at St Therese School.

## St Therese Catholic School

The St Therese School began with just years 3-6. This relieved the very large enrolment numbers at St Lukes, Revesby. 1963 saw the introduction of the first Kindergarten class. "The school began ... with Josephite Sisters Vianney and Malachy." (Catholic Weekly 11 November 1987 p 10). Mr Kelly recalls, "They also included Sister Monica and Sister Thomas. The Sisters of St Joseph travelled by car each day from the convent at Panania."

Mrs Betty Moore was the first President of the Parents and Friends and she recalls some of the fundraising activities "We had fetes with a big truck and a chocolate wheel. We had fancy hat days and dress up your scooter and bikes days."

Mr Kelly remembers when the Padstow RSL started its soccer teams, Sister Vianney was out in the playground encouraging the boys to sign up and start playing.

Mr Kelly also remembers in the late 1960s when St Therese had a good Rugby League team coached by Mr Jack Troy, a parent who had played for Australia in the early 1950s. Jack Troy and Mr Ted Crowe took the boys on a train to Wagga Wagga for a match. On the way back, the train was derailed in a tunnel at Mittagong. Nobody was hurt. Jack left Ted in charge of the boys, while Jack walked for miles in search of a telephone to phone his wife Norma. She in turn, told the parents, saving them a lot of worry, because shortly afterwards it was all over the news.

The first lay teacher, Robyn Kelly was appointed in the mid 1960s. In 1978, the sisters of St Joseph withdrew from Padstow altogether and the first lay Principal was appointed.

The original school building was connected to the Church and only continued to where the modern day office is located. In 1969, additional classrooms were added.



The building of St Therese Church and School. Photo: <http://www.StTherese.Net>