

Father Bill O'Shea, former Parish Priest St Patrick's Beenleigh: (written in 2021)

Early Days at Trinity

On one evening back in the early 1980s, when I had been parish priest of Beenleigh for just a couple of years, I received a surprising phone call from Fr Bernard (Barney) O'Shea, the Director of Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Brisbane. He rang to inform me that the decision had been made to establish a Catholic secondary (co-ed) college within the parish of Beenleigh. Initially, at least, it would be under the care of the Marist Brothers.

I was surprised because, although I knew a secondary school had been planned for the area, it was thought probable that the new school would be in the neighbouring parish of Daisy Hill. Beenleigh had done no "lobbying" at all.

As it turned out, Daisy Hill decided to go it alone, and, independently of the Catholic Education Office, established the ecumenical-Christian John Paul College, which has also proved to be a great success.

The Beenleigh Parish considered it to be a real honour to be chosen as the site of the new college. And it was not only Catholics, but the townspeople in general who considered the school would be a great asset to the town and district.

Late in 1981, the Marist Brothers arrived in Beenleigh, led by the late Brother John Mullins, who was to be Principal of the new college, along with Brothers Jeff Barrington and Paul Bailey. The Marists had a world-wide reputation as educationalists, and had charge of three leading Brisbane schools at Ashgrove, Rosalie and Enoggera.

While the new school building was under construction, the Brothers had not yet any permanent accommodation. They were starting from scratch. Their temporary accommodation was on the upper floor of the two-storey brick administration building. This building was indeed a multi-purpose facility. It was the residence of the two priests who were currently pastors of the parish, as well as providing facilities for St Joseph's primary school. The Brothers accommodation was rather make-shift and primitive.

But from the beginning, Beenleigh parishioners rallied to the support of the Brothers. People like Kevin Dillon, Barry Gordon and Vic and Val Rogers provided not one, but two caravans which served as "offices" for John Mullins and his team, as they prepared for the opening of the new college. These caravans were located behind the administration block.

In the meantime, the first stage of the school building had taken shape. It opened its doors to the first students in 1982. At the same time, a residence for the Brothers was built, enabling them to move from their cramped quarters in the old complex.

One of the reasons for the almost instant success of Trinity College was the great rapport between the Brothers and the Sisters of St Joseph, who had the care of the parish primary school. This good relationship was on both the professional and personal levels. Brother Paul Bailey, one of the originals, served as a member of the St Joseph's school teaching staff, and Josephite Sister, Cecilia Anning, was a valued member of the first Trinity College teaching faculty.

In subsequent years, I remember lovely meals and evenings with the Brothers in their new home, along with Sr Marie Dowling, then Principal of St Joseph's School, with Sister Cecilia Anning, the brothers of course, and other guests. John Mullins and the Brothers were great hosts.

I do not remember how or when the decision was taken to name the new school Trinity College. But 40 years on, largely as the result of the work of the first three Marist Brothers, Trinity has become one of Brisbane's leading Catholic colleges. I am proud to have played a small part in its beginnings. I just happened to be there at the time, but I am glad I was.

(Fr) Bill O'Shea