

MEDIA RELEASE

Mass of Thanksgiving on the Occasion of the Sesquicentenary of Marist Education in Australia

On Friday April 8th 1872 the first Marist Brothers' school in Australia was opened at Saint Patrick's at the Rocks in Sydney. Four Brothers formed the staff: a Frenchman, Br Ludovic, 29 was leader; an Irishman, Br Jarlat, 25, was his assistant; a 21 year old Scotsman, Br Augustine, was teacher of the top class; and another Irishman, Br Peter, 25, was the cook. In 1962, the school was relocated to Kirby Street, Dundas, where it is now known as St Patrick's Marist College.

The Marist presence in Australia began in 1837 with the arrival of the first missionaries to Oceania from France. Over the coming decades Archbishop Polding, senior clergy, and committed lay leaders were unwavering in their efforts to ensure families and the growing number of children in the colony were afforded the choice of a quality Catholic education. After some years of negotiation and advocacy by the Marist Fathers and the esteemed Archdeacon John McEncroe, the first Australian Marist school became a reality.

150 years later to the very day, after midday Mass, the Marist Fathers marked this historic moment in Catholic education in Australia, unveiling a sculpture commissioned to honour the contribution of the Marist Brothers and all associated with their schools. Within metres of the site of the very first Marist school, the image of Brother Ludovic, now gazes across the courtyard of Saint Patrick's Church.

Later that evening, Archbishop of Sydney, Most Reverend Anthony Fisher OP celebrated Mass at Saint Mary's Cathedral together with the Archbishop of Melbourne, Bishops of Paramatta and Wagga Wagga as well as Auxiliary Bishops, and Priests from around the country, many of whom were educated in Marist schools. They were joined in person and online by Marists and their partners in Catholic education from 19 Dioceses throughout Australia, to give thanks to God for the many successes achieved over the years with the constant support and protection of Mary our Good Mother.

In marking the sesquicentenary of the Marist Brothers in Australia it is important to reflect with honesty on the tragic abuse of children that is an inescapable part of the Marist history. It is openly acknowledged that religious as well as lay have committed crimes against children which have caused enormous pain and often lifelong effects. The Marists have apologised for these actions both privately and publicly. This apology is enduring and is given unreservedly.

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