

ST. HELIERS FIRST CHURCH BUILT 100 YEARS AGO

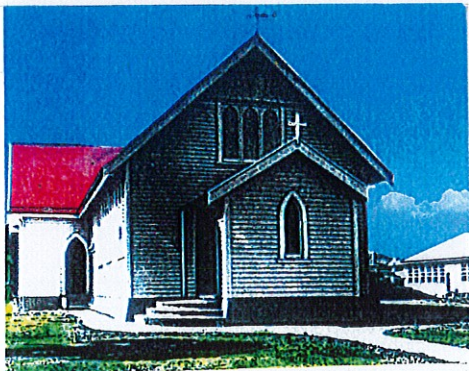


Starting at 5am Saturday November 26, 1921, enthusiastic volunteers built in a day the first Catholic Church in St Heliers. Foundations and other preparations had been made in advance and by nightfall the church was completed. The wives provided the tea and scones and painted the weatherboards.

The church seated 100 and cost 700 pounds. The site for the church on a hill overlooking the sea was chosen by Bishop Liston who had been made coadjutor Bishop of Auckland the previous year.

In 1920, 12 Catholic families in St. Heliers (called "The 12 Apostles") invited the priests from Remuera to come and say Mass in a private home. When the numbers became too big, a shed on the waterfront was used and a church building committee was formed and vigorous fund raising began.

The new church was named "St. Ignatius" after a patron saint of Father Doyle, the parish priest of Remuera. The first Mass was said on December 18, 1921 and the official opening by Bishop Liston was March 12, 1922.



In 1929 an entrance porch was added to the church.

In 1932 the Tamaki Drive water front road to the city was completed and access to the city was revolutionised. Huge housing developments took place in the Eastern suburbs and St. Ignatius became too small for the increasing congregation.



In 1937 a parishioner and another carpenter cut the church in half in two-and-half hours with hand saws. The halves were then pulled apart and a large transept built in between.

By the 1970s the church had become borer ridden and in need of a new roof. It did not make sense to spend thousands on repairing the old structure. However, there was great sentimental attachment to the old church by many parishioners who were opposed to a new build.



The church committee called a meeting so parishioners could vote on future action. The chairman laid on a large supply of beer for the meeting. By the time the meeting started late, the mood was one of contentment and goodwill. No one felt like opposing anything. A vote for building a new church was carried. A new brick church was opened in December 1978 on the same site beside the school.

After a large farewell party in the old St. Ignatius Church, it was burned to the ground by the local fire brigade.