

A Brief Account on the Church History of Perth Western Australia

The Forerunners

More than 1/2 a century ago, the Copts started to migrate to WA. Though few in number, but a worth mentioning story. One famous man who worked hard to establish the community was the late George Whaba (arrived to Perth 57) who assisted new migrants to settle down in their new home country.

The First Mass

Not before 9/2/1975, when Fr Yohanna Thabet (from Sydney) celebrated the 1st Mass at St Albans Anglican Church in Highgate.

The First Episcopal Visit

The 1st bishop visited Perth (1976) was HG Bishop Aghathon, Bishop of Ismailia and Sinai at that time.

In 1979 the families in Perth (~26), started to voice to HH for their need to have a regular service. HH delegated HG Bishop Antonios Markos, who used to visit Perth. Bishop Antonios gave all the support to this church in forming. He organized semi-regular monthly liturgies from the Eastern States.

In one of his visits (1980), Bishop Markos accompanied Fr Mina Kamel to be the 1st resident priest for the community. They together with the community leaders managed to have St Barnabas Anglican Church in Leederville as a temporary church for Sunday services. Before that, the community used to have their prayers and meetings at homes, halls or even libraries.

Few months later, Fr Mina returned to Sydney. Perth had to be served from the Eastern States once again.

Fr. Theodosios El-Anba Bishoy

In 87, HH Pope Shenouda III, delegated the late Fr. Theodosios El-Anba Bishoy (departed 17/4/94), to establish a church in WA. Fr. Theodosios laboured greatly until a permanent church "St Mary and Archangel Michael" was purchased in 1991. Early in 93, Fr Theodosios left to Egypt.

People who lived those days tell lots of stories that can fill a book about how God performed many miracles and wonders till the church was fully established.

The First Papal Visit

The visit of HH to Perth in Sept. 1993 though lasted for 2 days, crowned the achievement of establishing the church. Perth had the privilege that HH celebrated the only Mass in Australia in its church. The visit was greatly covered by the media, as it was one of the biggest events for the Copts in WA.

Fr Daniel El-Antony

From mid 93 to 4/1/97 Fr Daniel El-Antony who continued the hard work served the Church. He cared much for the youth and established good channels with other churches and ecumenical bodies. Our Church is one of the founders of The Conference of Churches of WA and The Association of The Heads of Churches of WA.

Fr Abram Abdelmalek

On his 25th Jubilee, (14/11/96), HH ordained the current priest for the Church of St. Mary and Archangel Michael.

Wide Scope of Service

From 26 families in the late 70's to almost 250 families by the end of the second millennium and is growing fast. In addition to spiritual and pastoral services to the Copts, the Church is committed to serve

also the Ethiopians (220 families), Eritrians (30), Armenians, and other Australians (Lebanese, Palestinians, Russian. etc). The church also extended her mission outside Australia.

Anba Abram Village

The church also established the “Anba Abram Village for new migrants”. The miraculous story behind this project is in a separate article.

Perth Under the Care of HG Bishop Suriel

It was on 14/11/99 when the Copts of WA were greatly rejoiced upon hearing the good news of calling HG Bishop Suriel, Bishop on Melbourne and affiliated regions, and that Perth is part of HG diocese.

Bishop Suriel & First Visit

We were exceedingly happy to receive His Grace Bishop Suriel, our shepherd, master and overseer on his first apostolic visit to Perth (14-21 /1/2000).

Establishing St Mark & St George’s Church

On his second & very short visit to Perth (16/3), and only after 3 months of his enthronement, HG Bishop Suriel signed an offer to acquire a land to build the 2nd church in Perth “St Mark & St George’s” to serve the congregations of the Northern Suburbs. This church is the first of so many churches that God is planning to rise on the blessed hands of HG. The story of this church is in a separate article. HG presented to his people in Perth the best gift to commemorate the Jubilee of the first Mass that was celebrated 25 years ago. May the Lord keep for us his high priesthood and put in his hands blessings over blessings to shepherd his flock in peace. Amen.

St Mark & St George Church, In Perth: A Divine Seal and A Gift for the Jubilee

The Beginning

More than 25 years ago the Copts in Perth celebrated their 1st Mass with Fr Yohana Thabet. They were less than 10 families at that time.

Their numbers increased tremendously, specially in the northern suburbs of Perth, the need arose for another church there.

The First Bible Study In the Northern Suburbs

Only 2 months after his arrival and to be exact on March 4, 1997, Fr Abram Abdelmalek started a Bible study every Tuesday evening in a community hall (Flinders Recreation Centre) in Hillarys. The centre was not adequate for the objective, as it needed lots of preparation that was why the venue was changed on 17/5/1997 to St Mary Magdalene Anglican Church in Heathridge.

The First Coptic Mass

A little more than a year later, and on Sept 30, 1998, Fr Abram Abdelmalek celebrated the first Coptic Mass in the same church. The mass then was celebrated on regular basis on Wednesdays

The Church was then called after St Mark & St George. The people rejoiced greatly on that day as they could see another church is being formulated in their city. In addition to the Bible study and the Mass, other activities were conducted there, like deacons meetings and choir practices, etc.

Looking for a Permanent Place

Several serious attempts to buy a church or a piece of land to build a church were taken, however God has kept for us a very suitable location for His Church and waited for His Man to establish it.

The Dream Comes True

Upon knowing that the people of Perth had found a suitable place for the dream church His Grace Bishop Suriel did not hesitate for a second to fly to Perth despite all his engagements and tight schedule. HG arrived to Perth 16/3, went to check the land that was proposed to him, but God lead him to the location He selected for His new church, that was the adjoining peace of land. Everything went so smooth and quick. You could feel the Hand of God behind the scenario. HG put an offer, the offer was accepted in the same moment, both parties signed the agreement.

The size of the land is 5 acres (20,000 m²) with a house on it and 3 big sheds; one of them is used as horse stable. The 1st shed could be used straight ahead with few modifications as a temporary church, the middle one can be used as offices and stores and the 3rd one for camps or overnight accommodation. The suburb is a rural and very quite one with lots of future potential.

After the inspection of the land, HG went to the St Mary and Archangel Michael Church where he prayed the “Thanks-Giving Prayer” and met with the people to proclaim the good news to them who were exceedingly glad and you could hear their sounds of cheer and happiness. In that meeting HG formed the establishing committee and answered some questions. After that HG celebrated this great event with the people in the Church’s hall, and met with the new committee afterwards.

This church is the first of so many churches that God is planning to rise on the blessed hands of HG. The City of Perth should be very proud that the first church founded by HG is in its skirts. This church is also a special gift from God to His people in Perth in their celebration of their Jubilee of the 1st Mass. It is a

Divine Seal and a Gift. May the Lord keep for us his high priesthood and put in his hands blessings over blessings to shepherd his flock in peace. Amen.

The Rev Fr Polycarbos Elbaramousy now is serving the Church.

Anba Abram Village in Perth

Different Place Different Plan

Before buying the St Mary & Archangel Michael Church, the community acquired a parcel of land in the suburb of Beechboro in order to build a church on it. However, God had a different place for the church and a different plan for the land. His plan was to have the church where it is now and to build a huge project on that land to serve the new migrants and to be a solid asset to the church in the future. That project is the “Anba Abram Village for New Migrants”

Let's start the story from the beginning. In 1989 the Church acquired that piece of land (2737 m²) from HOMESWEST, which is a semi- governmental company for housing at a nominal price of \$45,000 to build a church on. A bounding sale condition was that they had to build the church over two years of time or else they had to relinquish it at the same price.

As the service in Perth was not settled for long time, and the late Fr Theodosios had to buy the current church out of an urgent need, they could not utilize the land till Fr Abram Abdelmalek has arrived in 1997, i.e. for 8 years.

Early in 1997, the church started to renegotiate the situation with the company on how to make use of the land, especially that we discovered a clause in the contract says that we can use the land “...for any church purpose”.

Risk of Loosing the Land

The negotiation took almost 2 years, and took very hard paths at some stages, particularly because one of the local churches in the area (Church of Christ) showed interest in the land. They agitated the media and the parliament against us claiming that we should have handed the land back to the company for the community use and we were found in breach of the contract.

They manage to get a ministerial order obliging us to either relinquish it or sell it to that church at the price of purchase. (The market value of the land at that time was well above \$400,000)

Power of Prayers & Fasting

Everybody in the church fasted and prayed for this issue, and God, blessed be His Holy Name, changed every thing for the sake of His chosen church.

- ❖ The company convinced the Minister of Housing to change his decision.
- ❖ The parliamentarians, who had opposed us, had a hundred and eighty degree flip in their position and supported us.
- ❖ The Church of Christ minimized their activities in the area and their priest had to leave the church.
- ❖ We signed a contract with the company to build residential units for the newly migrated families on part of the land (Stage 1).

Anba Abram Village - Stage 1

- ◆ The contract was signed on 18/3/1999 to build 4 residential units on a total area of 1800 m². Each unit is around a 100m² on 450m² piece of land. Each unit is composed of 3 bedrooms, lounge and dining, kitchen, bathroom and toilet, a garage and a store.
- ◆ Each unit will be given the name of one of the four gospel writers.
- ◆ The duration of the project is for 25 years and at the end of this period, the project will be re-evaluated taking in consideration that the value of land appreciates while that of the buildings depreciates. The two bodies then will have to renew the contract for any period of time with the new shares and at the end of the second contract any of the parties can buy the share of the other out or renew the project for a third period and so on.

- ◆ The current share of the church at this stage is around 24% and it is expected to be over 90% by the end of the first contractual period.

God Has Different Ways In calculations

- ◆ The initial total cost of the project is \$661,000 distributed as follows:
 - \$45,000 Value of the land (paid by the church 10 years ago)
 - \$40,000 paid by the church as a nominal contribution towards the construction costs (\$10,000 per unit)
 - \$271,000 paid by Homeswest that is the rest of the construction costs.
 - **\$305,000 is the difference in land nominal and market values (paid by the Lord in a miraculous way, this portion is not considered as part of the cost of the project now, but will be counted for at the end of the project)**

Another Miracle

- ◆ At the beginning the company was insisting in receiving the \$40,000 before commencing the project, the church could not afford that especially She would pay the mortgage without receiving any rent and for a longer period. God again intervened, and the company has agreed to receive the money after they finish the units and hand over the keys to us. Meanwhile they elevated the caveat to enable us to borrow these \$40.00. Complete management and administration of the project is for the Coptic Orthodox Church.
- ◆ Priority of residence is for those of our community.
- ◆ All expenditure should be covered by the rent, including the mortgage. The rest of income should be kept in a trust account till the end of the project, then either distributed according to the shares or use it in any other joint project.

Stage I of the Project was honoured by the blessings of HG Bishop Suriel who officially opened it in his first visit to Perth on January 18,2000. The opening ceremony that was attended by some government officials, representatives from Homeswest, many of the Copts and the builder and contractors were very impressive and memorable.

Some Coptic and Ethiopian families currently occupy the units.

Anba Abram Village - Stage 1I

Is to build 2 new units on the rest of the land (937m2). The submission for approval was posted to Homeswest late last year (2001) and waiting for their decision May the Lord keep for us his high priesthood and put in his hands blessings over blessings to shepherd his flock in peace. Amen