

I was not a stranger to Sydney. I had studied at St Paul's Seminary, Kensington, and was ordained priest in 1973 in St Mary's Cathedral.

I knew the great division that existed in the community, a division that needed long time, hard work and serious prayer so as to be healed.

From the moment I took over my appointment, I worked in this direction.

On December 5th, Father Ouzounian was invited to say Mass for our community. All the community was invited and a public apology was read. By then, some changes had taken place in the Church. A sanctuary was built and a middle isle created in the church, where before, there were two side isles only.

January 1983 saw the publication of the First number of "OUR PARISH".

In February 1983, we commenced Saturday School, teaching Armenian language to children in the Western region.

This received great acceptance in the community. Different persons offered their help. Help came in the form of persons who were eager to come and teach, others helped with the transport of the children. By then the need for a daily school was evident.

Our Saturday School ran for 3 years.

The decision to start an Armenian day school grew gradually. In the hope of starting the school at Lidcombe, an adjacent piece of land (1200 sq. m.) was bought for \$117,000. We had to borrow from a friend \$30,000 and \$90,000 from the bank.

A committee was formed, it represented the different sectors of our community. The response was overwhelming. There was abundant proof that this project was fulfilling a deep rooted need in the community.

A date was set for the commencement of the school: January 29, 1985. A name was given: ST GREGORY'S.

At the beginning we were told that it will be part of the Catholic Education System. Later on, they decided that 1985 was too early for us, we should wait few more years.

While the necessary applications were filled, there was a need to receive permission from my religious superiors. To obtain these, I had to go to Rome and to Beirut. I received the necessary permission. I received a promise of \$US100,000 that needs to be fulfilled yet!

We commenced the school with 20 students in the Church Hall. The demountables came 2 weeks later. We had permission to operate at Lidcombe 2 years only, whilst looking for a permanent location.

The Department of Education insists that a primary school with 201 students should have a minimum of 2.8 hectare land (or 7 acres), and a high school should have 7 hectares (or 17 acres).

We began looking for a land. Mr Garo Armen spent many days driving around looking for a suitable site in the Rouse Hill area. The Department of Education had pointed out that this was the next development area. Mr Armen found the present site at Rouse Hill. It was 25 acres (10 hectare) for \$275,000. We paid 10% deposit, and commenced to organize finance with ANZ Bank. The manager was very promising, but at the last moment, the answer was: NO.

We had less than a week to find \$245,000. When I saw the Solicitor in Church on Sunday, I was worried. He asked if different parishioners could lend \$10,000 each. No, no one was interested.

Some said: "Father, you made a mistake, forget about the 10% deposit, our community cannot afford a school".

Searching around we found Mr Aris Evarian who was willing to lend us \$100,000 at 22%. We were grateful. The Ghougassian family came to our rescue. Each brother gave \$40,000. This was the money they had saved, and now they were looking for houses to buy. (I did not know that it was going to take us more than 3 years to repay them). They would not accept any interest on their loan. We bought the land. Land price around Rouse Hill went up considerably, because of the North-Western Development project. According to this project 300,000 people will be living in the Rouse Hill area in the next 25 years.

We commenced the second year with 67 students. This showed that some parents who had doubts about the school, now they were looking more positively to the school and to its future.

We wanted to plan our development on the site. With this in mind, we asked Mr Vartan Inghilizian to come from Abou Dhabi and do the planning.

Our first stage was supposed to be a temporary one. We wanted to use the demountable classrooms at Lidcombe and we were thinking of buying or renting similar classrooms.

The Baulkham Hills Shire Council would not ratify our Development Application. Amongst the objections, they referred to the demountable classrooms as being unacceptable.

We were forced to go to the Environment Court and we were forced to redesign the first stage. This court process and the redesigning increased the cost of the building. It was a very hard battle. Against very high odds, we were able to win. And we will always win.

The community was always willing to bring its contribution. Now it was more eager to participate, because the result of their efforts were there.

The Department of Education was willing to help us with the cost of the new buildings. They wanted us to wait two years. We had outgrown our site at Lidcombe. We no longer had permission to stay there. It was