

## Our Lady of Victories, Camberwell

### Parish School

The school started life as St John Berchman's School in the 1890s. Few references to the school can be found in the first decade of its existence. The Sisters of the Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ) administered the school from 1897 through to 1902, travelling daily by train from Vaucluse, in Richmond.

In 1904, the Josephite Sisters began their 75-year association with the school. They travelled daily by train from their Surrey Hills convent until 1907, when the parish rented a house for them in Alma Road. The Josephite Sisters later purchased a home in Havelock Road Hawthorn East (1910), now the site of the Mary MacKillop Aged Care Facility.

The increase in enrolments in the early decades of the school's existence necessitated the construction of new infant school classrooms in 1910, followed in 1923 by the construction of the first stage of a new brick school. The parish and parishioners experienced considerable financial hardship in this period, as did the sisters, who were totally dependent on the local Catholic community for their income. In an attempt to maintain the school during the Depression years, a variety of social functions and fundraising events were held at the school site. It quickly became an important and highly valued gathering place for the parish community.

In the 1950s, Our Lady of Victories was not exempted from the state-wide crisis of reduced school resources and finances caused by post war immigration and a shortage of teachers. Another challenging time occurred when the Sisters of St Joseph could no longer sustain their presence in the school, largely due to reduced vocations. They withdrew in 1978. Their legacy continues to be honoured and remembered in the hearts and memories of many past pupils and in parish celebrations.

Significant demographic changes in Camberwell began to occur in the 1990s and beyond. Over time, declining enrolments left the then Parish Priest, Fr Michael Morgan, with no choice but to close the school. This occurred in December 2014. The school site was subsequently leased by the Department of Education as an additional campus for Camberwell Primary School. This leasing arrangement is ongoing.