



# SSS Grapevine

An Internal Publication of the  
Province of Saint Ann (USA)  
Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament  
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## Another Visit to Our History Foundations in Australia

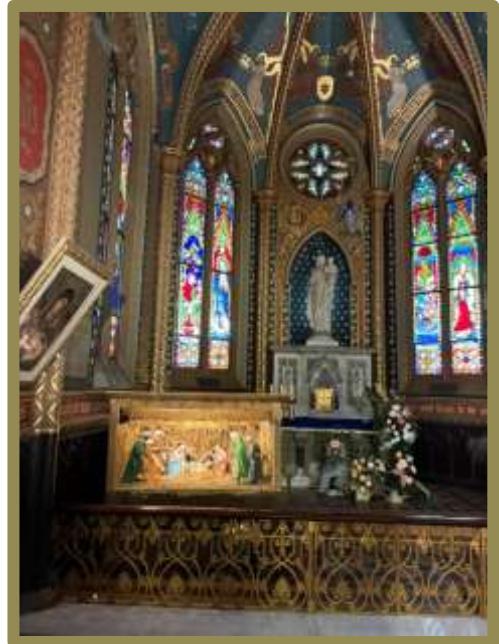
By John Thomas Lane SSS, *Provincial*



(SSS) men religious, based on our shared similarities and needs; learn about the affiliate vocation program; and look forward to future collaboration and planning for the next International Eucharistic Congress, which will be held in Sydney, Australia, in 2028.

At the invitation of the archbishop, the SSS first came to Melbourne from the United States in 1929 to develop this Eucharistic shrine-center. Saint Francis Church (**above left**)

After my time in Uganda, I spent a few days visiting our two foundations in Australia. My goal was to conduct pastoral planning and research with the Blessed Sacrament Community



Saint Francis was well established as the first church in the state of Victoria. Franciscan Friar Patrick Bonaventure Geoghegan founded the parish in May 1839. He oversaw the construction of Saint Francis, with ground broken on October 4, 1841 (*the feast of Saint Francis*), and the church completed on May 22, 1842. Being the first church in Melbourne, it also served as the cathedral church from 1848 to 1868. The church has been added to over the years, with a Ladye Chapel (*British spelling – photo in the right*) in 1856-58 and an extension of the sanctuary in 1878-9. It remains the busiest church in Australia, with 10,000 visitors a week. The current community is seven religious:



Father Ben Ho (*local leader*), Father Anthony Nguyen (*parish priest or as we call them in the USA, pastor*), Father Chaminda Fernando (*parochial vicar on loan from Sri Lanka*), Deacon John Pugh (*one of the two SSS deacons in the world, serving on staff here*) with other men Fathers Anthony McSweeney (*former Superior General*), Alfred Yap, Joe Dirks and Ken Boland serve the worshipers. Two other SSS religious live in a nearby retirement/nursing facility. Fathers Ed Wood and Brother Eugene (Joseph) O'Callahan are celebrating their 104th and 103rd birthdays, respectively. There are three affiliates in a discernment program living in the monastery and sharing in the life of the shrine

and the SSS community. We hope and pray that they discern our way of religious life and proceed to initial formation (*postulancy, novitiate, and scholasticate*).

The place is busy with 4 weekday Masses, and 8 weekend Masses (*1 vigil Mass on Saturday*). In the picture (**above right**), you see Saturday night cleaning time from the Vietnamese youth community, who join Father Ant (**in green**), who gathers each week for food, fellowship, and to prepare the church for Sunday. Australia's first named saint, Mary MacKillop, was baptized at Saint Francis, 6 weeks after her birth on February 28, 1842. In religious life, she would wish to be called Saint Mary of God. She founded Catholic schools and institutions throughout Australia and New Zealand with her order, the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart. She was canonized on October 17, 2010.



On Australia Day, January 26, I traveled to our other community in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. While I had some holiday time to myself, I was also able to visit with community members, Fathers Iggy Vu (*community leader and parish priest-pastor*), Boris Perlaki, Jegaraj Joseph (*on loan from the Indian province*), and Philip Watkins (*provincial*). Brother Neil Austin works at night to serve the church as sacristan. In nearby nursing homes, Fathers Joe Fernando, Bernard Carty, and Kevin Gallagher reside. Father Graeme Malone SSS works as a hospital chaplain in a nearby Sydney suburb. During his calling hours there, he lives nearby to this hospital and is also assigned to this local community.

We have operated a chapel–shrine in Sydney since arriving here in 1953. (*The picture to the on the previous page shows the original setup.*) In 1955, the Australian communities became their own leadership entity, or province, breaking from the United States province. Shortly after, the newly founded Australian province broke off to send missionaries to Sri Lanka and India, thereby establishing these provinces. The property was a furniture store that the early brothers and fathers converted into “Blessed Sacrament Chapel.” To meet the need for more modern space and a larger church, a new monastery opened in 1963, and a church in 1964. Because of the recent canonization of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, our founder, in 1962, the church took on this special name now that our founder was a “saint.” During the 2008 World Youth Day, our parish church served as a catechesis site for youth, and I contributed at that time. After this event, the shrine and monastery were modernized into their current form.

The Archdiocese of Sydney is gearing up to host the International Eucharist Congress in 2028. You may recall from a September 2024 *Grapevine* that the SSS priests, including yours truly, were welcomed and greeted by Archbishop Anthony Fisher, OP, to participate in planning the next event. My coming to Sydney is part of our long-range planning for our province and Aggregation members to join with the SSS Australian province.

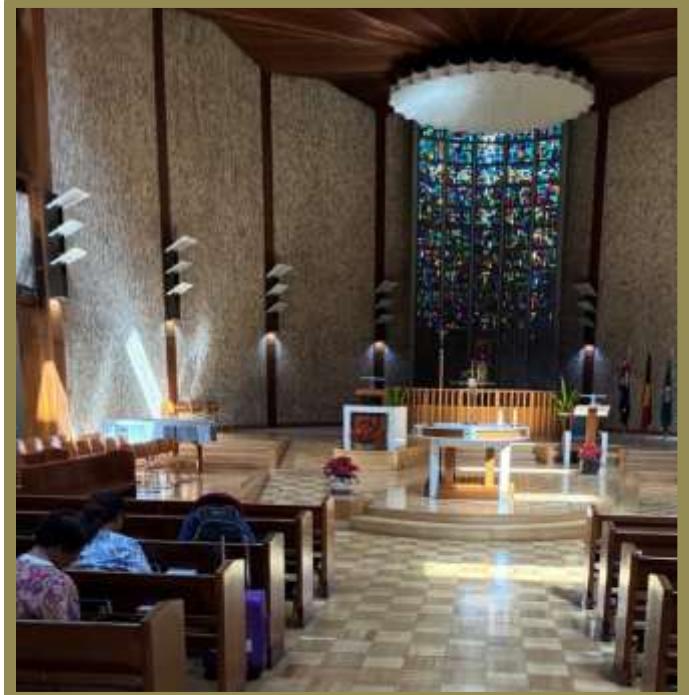
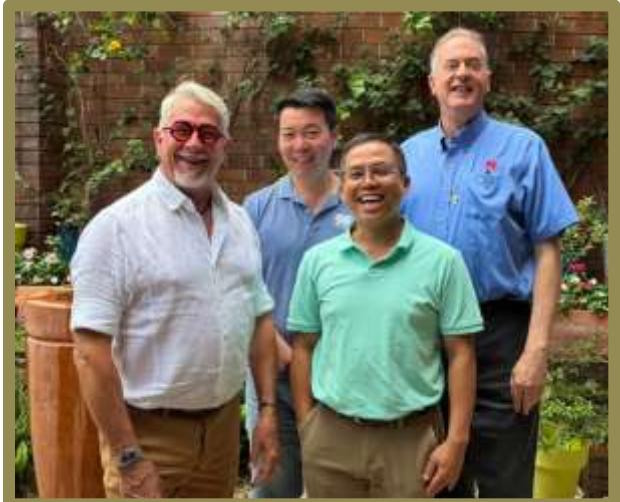


Lastly, I visited with our second-year novice, Matthew Vlastelica’s family (**pictured to the left**). We enjoyed a lovely luncheon together in the heart of Sydney, just down the tramway to our Saint Peter Julian Church.

The Provincial Council of Australia (*pictured to the right are Philip Watkins, left, Ben Ho, and Ignatius Vu in front of me*) met to brainstorm about the future and the realities of our provinces. We hope for continued collaboration and support as we work together to build the mission founded by our beloved founder, which truly reached all corners of the earth.

**Photos below:**

*Members of the local communities:*



*Left: Fathers Iggy and Jegaraj.*

*Above: The current sanctuary of Saint Peter Julian, Sydney, with exposition throughout the day.*

*When in Sydney, visit our Blessed Sacrament church at the Chinatown-Haymarket tram stop (641 George Street) for our full Masses, and also see the shrine of Saint Mary MacKillop in North Sydney. Her tomb, at her shrine, is shown below.*

