

A Short History of St Margaret Mary Church Community

The Community was originally a daughter Church of Sacred Heart Parish, Fareham (founded in 1878). As the population of Park Gate, Locks Heath, Titchfield and Warsash grew, an outstation was created to serve the Catholics of the area. Every Sunday a priest travelled from Fareham to celebrate Mass in the Territorial Army Drill Hall, Bridge Road, Park Gate. Sunday Mass was at 10:15 to coincide with the local bus services as the Priest had an earlier Mass in Wickham.

When a permanent Church was planned, it was decided to dedicate it to St Margaret Mary: a 17th century French Roman Catholic Nun and Mystic who promoted devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Her Feast day is 16th October.

Designed by architect R S Shaw (husband of a parishioner), the Church was opened and solemnly blessed by Bishop Derek Worlock on 8th January 1966. It continued to be served from Fareham by Fr Joseph Rea and his Curates: Fr Cormac Murphy O'Connor (in later years Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster Diocese) and Fr Michael Gedge. Fr Michael became the first resident priest by moving into lodgings in Segensworth Road: to provide better pastoral care for this part of the Fareham Parish.

The Parish of St Margaret Mary came into being on 8th September 1967 with Fr Kevin Gallagher appointed as Parish Priest. The boundaries of the Parish were initially defined as Southampton Water to the south, River Meon to the east, River Hamble to the west and Fareham to Eastleigh railway line to the north. A bungalow, 9 Admirals Road, was purchased as the priest's residence.

On 17th April 1969, Fr Desmond Close was appointed as the second Parish Priest. Construction of the Church Hall and current Presbytery began in 1973 with both in use in time for Easter a year later: the Hall as a Social Club. During his time at St Margaret Mary, Fr Close was appointed Canon. He remained at Park Gate until 1981 and was succeeded by Canon William Murphy.

The area continued to expand and by the late 1980s there was a need for a local Catholic Primary School. After a period of campaigning followed by considerable fundraising *and* a major bequest from a Parishioner, St Anthony's Primary school was built. It opened in 1991 in Titchfield Common. The benefactors are commemorated with an annual School Mass and the stained-glass window in the school foyer celebrates Canon Murphy's work.

On Canon Murphy's retirement, Fr James Boyle, a Mill Hill Missionary, came to 'look after' the Parish for six weeks. He arrived on 7th January 1992 but remained in the parish until 2007 when he was recalled by the Mill Hill order to serve in Central Belfast.

As the Parish community continued to grow, with the large development at Whiteley, Fr James sought to increase the space, facilities, and vista of the Church. Bishop Crispian Hollis visited the Parish in December 2004 to bless the newly completed, design award winning extension. More architectural information: <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/park-gate-st-margaret-mary/>

Fr John Cooke was appointed Parish Priest in July 2007 and provided a period of spiritual and catechetical growth in the Parish. After all the building projects, the Golden Jubilee of the Parish was celebrated on 16th October 2016 and Bishop Philip Egan dedicated the Church and Altar.

After 10 years in the Parish, Fr John was moved to Bournemouth and Fr Peter Hart became the sixth Parish Priest in addition to his role as Director of Permanent Diaconate Formation in Oscott Seminary.

In the Spring of 2020, the world was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Church buildings were closed by order of the Government, as were schools, some shops, and businesses. People were told to 'stay home' and life changed for many. While continuing his Hospital Chaplaincy role, Fr Robert Stewart was appointed as Parish Priest from September 2020.