

Inaugural Mass of Our Lady of the Valley Parish

20 June 2026

We have gathered today for this inaugural Mass celebrating the establishment of **Our Lady of the Valley Parish, Diamond Valley**. This new parish brings together the communities of St Mary's, Greensborough; St Thomas the Apostle, North Greensborough; Sacred Heart, Diamond Creek; and St Peter's, Hurstbridge. It is a significant moment: a time to honour our past, acknowledge the complexity of the present, and embrace the future with Christian hope.

For decades these communities have been centres of faith, prayer, service, and Catholic education. Sacred Heart was established in 1914, St Mary's in 1955, and St Thomas in 1986. Each has nurtured generations of families, formed young people in faith, and provided a place where people encountered Christ and found belonging. That history is not left behind today. It lives within us and remains a precious gift to this new parish.

Yet this day is not without sadness. The creation of a new parish also brings grief, uncertainty, and for some a profound sense of loss. A parish is never merely an administrative structure; it is a spiritual home, shaped by memories, relationships, sacrifice, and identity. For many, this moment involves letting go as much as beginning anew. That experience deserves to be recognised with honesty and compassion.

In reality, this transition has been unfolding for many years. It began in 2012 when Fr Grant O'Neill was not replaced at Sacred Heart and Fr Michael McEntee became parish priest of both Sacred Heart and St Thomas. In 2017, when I became parish priest of all three communities, we moved more intentionally into a partnership of parishes. Throughout that time, parishioners across ministries and committees have collaborated generously, sharing gifts, resources, and responsibility. Their quiet commitment has already laid the foundations for the parish we became on May 24th, the Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, and coincidentally this year, also the feast of Pentecost. Today we formally celebrate our new parish.

Important as our history is, the Church teaches that a parish is more than its buildings, customs, or cherished memories. Since the Second Vatican Council, we have come to see more clearly that the Church is, in Christ, the sign and instrument of communion with God and unity among people. A parish is therefore not simply a territory to preserve but a community gathered by Christ,

sent on mission, and called to share in the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people in it and around it.

That is why the name **Our Lady of the Valley** is so fitting. It honours our heritage while inviting us into a shared future. It speaks of a people rooted in this place who entrust themselves to Mary's care as they begin a new chapter together. Chosen through wide consultation, the name expresses a new identity capable of holding together memory, diversity, and mission.

The Eucharist we have just celebrated is the deepest expression of that identity. Around this altar, Christ unites us not by nostalgia or sentiment but by his self-giving love. He makes us one Body, teaching us that communion is not uniformity and that unity does not erase difference. Instead, the rich traditions of our communities become gifts to be shared for the sake of the Gospel and the life of the wider Diamond Valley.

The question before us, then, is not simply, *What have we lost?* It is more importantly, *Who is Christ calling us to become?* What must we release so that a more missionary identity can emerge? How do we ensure that every person feels they truly belong? How do we honour our different traditions while drawing strength from one another?

If we remain close to Christ, these questions will not divide us but deepen us. They will shape us into a parish alive with communion, participation, and service; a community attentive to those on the margins and committed to bearing the face of Christ in this part of the world. Our hope is not that the future will be easy, but that it will be fruitful, because the Lord who has faithfully guided these communities in the past will continue to lead us into the future.

I would like to thank our musicians who led us in song this evening and the children of our 3 schools who made up the choir, as well as the many who prepared the liturgy for our celebration; our bishop, Thinh, who led our celebration of this Thanksgiving Eucharist, and finally, I would like to thank you, all of you, who in various ways have worked towards the establishment of our new parish by participating in our consultative process. I feel so proud of working with competent, dedicated, enthusiastic and compassionate people who have done amazing tasks associated with this amalgamation – Agencies of the Archdiocese, our secretaries, Pastoral Associates, Pastoral Councils, Strategic Planning Committee, Finance Committee, Liturgy Committee, the Principals of our 3 schools. These are the leaders who exemplify for me the dedication and commitment required to move us forward in hope and purpose to be the face of the compassion of Christ in the Diamond Valley.