

# Portrait of a Parish

A History of Saint Patrick's Church and Parish  
Ingham 1864 - 1996



Bianka Vidonja Balanzategui





# **PORTRAIT OF A PARISH**

**A HISTORY OF ST PATRICK'S CHURCH AND  
PARISH, INGHAM, 1864-1996**

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This book is dedicated  
to all the bishops, priests, religious  
and people who helped create  
the history contained in this book.

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# **PORTRAIT OF A PARISH**

## **A HISTORY OF ST PATRICK'S CHURCH AND PARISH, INGHAM, 1864-1996**

by

**Bianka Vidonja Balanzategui**

St. Patrick's Parish, Ingham 1998.



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### Foreword for "*Portrait of a Parish*"

September 1997

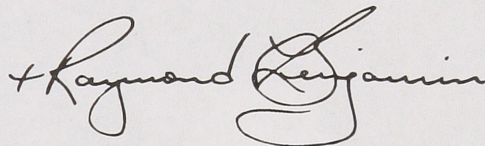
Dear Reader,

I welcome the publication of this fine historical work, "*Portrait of a Parish*".

History is always fascinating, but most especially when it is an account of the lives and affairs of our own places, our own people. St Patrick's Parish, Ingham is a lively and important community within our Diocese, intensely proud of its membership of the Catholic family, and its many achievements. Officially, St Patrick's Parish foundation date is 1914. But the story begins long before that, and is told in excellent fashion within these pages.

On behalf of Ingham Parish, and of the whole Diocese of Townsville, I thank and congratulate Bianka Balanzetegui and her many collaborators, on the production of "*Portrait of a Parish*", and assure her that it will be treasured as an important element in our Diocesan archives.

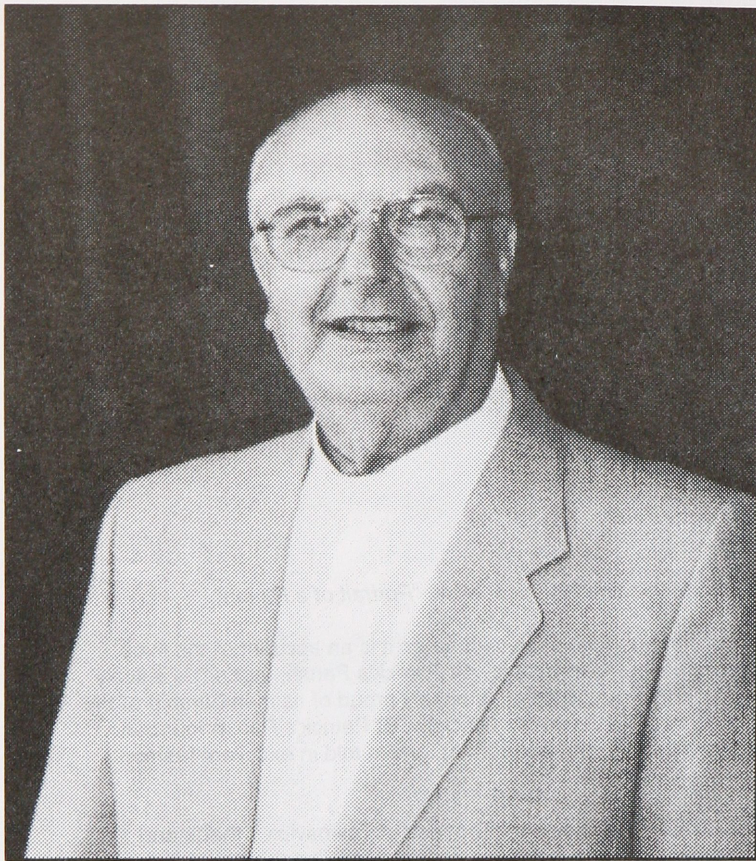
Yours sincerely in Christ,



**BISHOP OF TOWNSVILLE**







***Father Tindaro Ferlazzo,  
Parish Priest***



***Father Michael Loke s.v.d.,  
Assistant Priest, 1998.***

*Plate 1*



## FOREWORD

One of the many surprises I enjoyed when I came back to St. Patrick's Parish as parish priest was meeting Bianka Vidonja Balanzategui.

She was a young mother with three beautiful children, married into a well known family whose members had been long time friends of mine. She was obviously talented and seemed to fit in comfortably in the prominent Italian culture of Ingham, even though her father was from Slovenia in northern Yugoslavia, her father-in-law an Australian born Spanish Basque. She had grown up in the canegrowing towns of North Queensland as her father worked in the many canecutting gangs of the immediate Post War II era. I met her as a teacher but soon learnt she had graduated from James Cook University of Townsville with three degrees: *Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Arts with Honours majoring in history, and a Master of Arts.*

I soon sensed her passionate love and interest in all matters concerning North Queensland migration, the cultural meltdown and the harsh conditions the migrant families of many nationalities endured. She obviously had drunk deeply of her own childhood experiences as shown in her excellent book: *Gentlemen of the Flashing Blades.*

So I felt God had answered my subconscious prayers of writing a history of St. Patrick's Parish. As Ingham was one of the prominent centres of the religious, cultural, political and cane industry evolution of the last hundred years, I thought the history of the parish should not be lost forever.

Bianka graciously accepted my invitation and as I expected, gave of herself most generously, researched most diligently and condensed very appropriately the vast amount of material into an interesting and very readable history of how the parish developed and met the ever changing challenges of our changing society.

The writing of this Parish history was inspired by the uniqueness of the Parish and the extraordinary factors that boiled up and needed attention. Miraculously wise decisions were made at the right time, wise people were on the spot with the special talents needed for the time and the spirit of God hovered over the whole Parish at all times changing peoples hearts and calling forth leaders, priestly, religious and a large number of ordinary people to build up the Body of Christ in this beautiful setting of the Herbert River Valley.

The origins of the Parish in the late 19th century were pretty typical of most Australian country Parishes. Groups of Irish Catholics dribbled in behind the original pioneers, taught the faith to their families and then strongly felt the need of the Mass and Sacraments. They welcomed visiting priests and bishops and roused up energy and support for a Parish church, a Parish priest and a Catholic school. In our case the Mullins families welcomed the visiting clergy, built the little church and the convent and were a respected part of the community.

But in the early 20s, the ethnic composition of the district took a dramatic turn. Ingham and Innisfail became the focus point of mass Italian migration to Australia and Ingham won the crown of being the little Italy of Australia as well as the unfortunate and untrue title of being a Mafia town.

The huge majority of the immigrants were poor Italian country folk looking for work and a better life, but unfortunately, there was a very small element of political agitation with strong communist affiliation. Some few even preyed on their own countrymen.