

A LEGACY OF STRENGTH AND KINDNESS:

THE CENTURY-SPANNING JOURNEY OF ST PATRICK'S SCHOOL



The history of St Patrick's School in Masterton is a tapestry of faith and perseverance, woven through over a century of change from the scratch of slate pencils to the glow of digital screens. The story began in 1883 within a humble room of the local presbytery, where Father Anthony Halbwachs first gathered students to learn under the banner of "Strength and Kindness".

In those early years, the school's foundations were literal and metaphorical. By 1884, Father Treacy had constructed a modest one-room schoolhouse, and the arrival of dedicated lay teachers like Mrs Carrick brought a sense of disciplined excellence to the growing parish. However, 1898 marked a transformative era when the Irish Brigidine Sisters arrived to assume stewardship of the school. These "hardworking and dedicated" sisters instilled Christian principles that would define the institution for generations to come.

The school's physical landscape shifted as the town grew. The original building was moved to Queen Street in 1897, later joined by the "Catholic Institute" building—a relic from the World War I Featherston Military Camp. Former students from this era fondly recalled the simple joys and rigours of the time: the "squealing and squeaking" of slate pencils, the status symbol of a small sponge for cleaning one's slate, and the rhythmic games of spinning tops and marbles that filled the "horses' paddock" playground.

As the 20th century progressed, the school faced both triumphs and trials. On January 29, 1928, a grand new brick school was blessed and opened, a testament to the community's sacrifice and the leadership of Monsignor John McKenna. Yet the devastating 1942 earthquake left the school

severely damaged, forcing the sisters to teach in the parish hall for over a year while repairs were made.

By the 1970s, the tide began to turn toward a new era of integration. The growing student roll led to overcrowding, and for a time, classes were scattered across the town in temporary headquarters. In 1978, the school found its current home at the former St. Bride's College site. The following decade brought the historic integration into the state system in 1983, coinciding with the school's centennial celebration.

Transition eventually saw the departure of the last Brigidine Principal, Sister Jean-Marie McErlean, in 1987, handing the torch to Michele Lafferty, the first lay principal in nearly a century. Despite these changes, the "Brigidine educational culture" remained steadfast. Today, the school stands as a modern sanctuary of learning, guided by the values of Strength (Kaha), Kindness (Atawhai), and Excellence (Kairangi). Its heritage is preserved in a massive eight-meter wall built from the bricks of the old school, while the St. Brigid Prayer Garden honors the sisters who once walked its halls. From its musical excellence to its commitment to Māori studies, St Patrick's continues to "shape and mould" the youth of Wairarapa, just as it has for over 140 years.

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The Birth of St Teresa's School

In the shadow of war's end, Father Vincent McGlone wandered the quiet streets of Bell and Birdwood with a vision shimmering in his heart. The year was 1945, and he secured a parcel of land—bare earth pregnant with possibility—where dreams of a Catholic school might take root. Yet, nearly a decade would pass before, on a brisk morning in February 1954, the first breath of St Teresa's School stirred within the humble walls of an auction mart. Through those doors trickled forty-three children, wide-eyed and brave, greeted by the steadfast Brigidine Sisters. Desks and blackboards were but a wish; the room was shaped and divided not by wood and stone, but by the resourcefulness and hope of its founders. For more than a year, these pioneering students, alongside Sisters Ephrem and Christopher—gentle and cheery souls—laboured and learned in an environment cobbled from faith and determination.

At last, permanence was wrought from vision. The Trotman Brothers, with hands skilled in brick and timber, raised the school's first true walls for £6,697. On May 4, 1955, those doors swung

wide to welcome hope made manifest. St Teresa of Avila's name was chosen like a benediction and etched into the spirit of the place was a motto: "Strength and Kindness." These were not mere words, but the living breath of the Brigidine Sisters' faith, woven into the fabric of every lesson and prayer.

Life at the School

The first children to cross into St Teresa's carried memories of cruelty—the bruises of bullying, the ache of isolation. Within these new walls, however, they found a haven: a community that gathered them in as kin. Here, school life unfolded in rhythms all its own, punctuated by rituals and traditions that bound hearts together.

- Each dawn at St Teresa's began in a hush of reverence. Children's voices joined in prayer, and as pens met paper, sacred initials—"AMGD" and "JMJ"—were carefully inscribed, silent offerings for the greater glory of God, and under the gentle guardianship of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.
- Recess rang out with laughter and the clatter of marbles rolling across the yard, culminating each year in the exuberance of "Smugglers Day." Sometimes, the children's games took an unexpected turn—boxing matches with Father Wall, the Marist missionary, whose playful spirit brought together the sacred and the spirited in equal measure.
- Community, in those early years, meant rolling up sleeves. Teachers and mothers scoured classrooms at day's end, their laughter echoing through the halls as they swept away the dust of learning. To keep the school's heart beating, families gathered for lively "card evenings," where games of Euchre and Housie helped raise the funds that kept their dream alive.

Evolution and Lay Leadership

As the years passed, the school's pulse grew stronger. When space ran short, lessons spilled into an old parish cottage, its floors sloped and its corners dim, but its air thick with the promise of learning. In 1975, a gentle tide of change swept through: after two decades, the Brigidine Sisters bade farewell, and Brian Moisley took up the mantle as the first lay principal. Worries fluttered through the parish, but under Moisley's steady hand, the school blossomed—its students shining far beyond their numbers when they ventured out into the world. By 2011, the school's story welcomed a new chapter, as Principal Carol Pilcher oversaw the rise of a new building to shelter its ever-growing family.

The Magnificat Community



Beyond the school's embrace, the Magnificat Community took root on the gentle sweep of Cross Creek Farm, ten kilometres from Featherston. Here, a handful of Wellington Catholics, yearning for lives steeped in faith, founded a haven—a sanctuary where souls seeking God could rest, reflect, and be renewed.

The retreat's heart beats within two homes—Bethlehem and Nazareth. The latter, once a place of birth and beginnings, journeyed to the farm in

six great pieces, its walls carrying the memory of mothers and newborns into a new chapter as a dwelling for contemplation and peace.

Peace reigns across the fields, where guests wander among curious llamas, gentle alpacas, and patient donkeys. In this pastoral quiet, the call to reflection grows strong, and the spirit finds gentle company in both beast and breeze.

From its beginning, the Magnificat Community was called a "ministry of friendship," a tapestry first woven by four Consecrated Women Living in the World—an ancient calling rekindled in the wake of Vatican II. By 2011, the tapestry had grown richer and broader, enfolding eighteen residents whose stories spanned many lands and lives.



CPW

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SATURDAY

07 - 09

PM PM

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and Dance**

*Please bring a plate
of finger food and
drink to share*

21 JUNE

SUNDAY

10 - 03

AM PM

**ANNIVERSARY MASS
BOOK LAUNCH
LUNCH
CONCERTS**



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