

History of Buildings and things achieved by Very Rev. Fr. Tadros El-Bakhoumi - from February 1986 till current



History of Buildings and things achieved by Very Rev. Fr. Tadros El-Bakhoumi from February 1986 till current

Written by: **Very Rev. Fr. Tadros El-Bakhoumi**

I arrived to Australia from Egypt on 06/02/86, sent by his holiness Pope Shenouda III, to start serving at St. Mark church (70 Wollongong Rd, Arncliffe). Before leaving Egypt, I took the blessing of his holiness Pope Shenouda III, who said to me “keep an eye on things there and inform me”.

1. Solving a problem between the Church and Federal Government

The first thing I found is that there was a grant from the Federal government of \$11.000, to employ 2 social workers (bilingual liaising officers) to offer social services for the community. The priest who was in charge of this grant didn't use the money in the target it was given for but used it in his church and there was a court case against the church for that matter.

With the directions of his holiness Pope Shenouda III, I was able to organise a meeting with the minister of immigration and with the grace of God was able to solve the matter and cancel the court case.

2. The grant of social services for the church

According to what happened in number 1, the government cancelled the grant for the bilingual liaising officers and I have organised another meeting with the minister of immigration and with the grace of God, I was able to return this grant again to the church.

3. St. Mark Church at Arncliffe

At that time, I found that St. Mark Church at Arncliffe put an application for extending the original church building, to cater for more people and also put a DA application for building new Sunday school classes and it was refused by the council. I spoke to his holiness Pope Shenouda III, to get his permission to try to solve this and with the grace of God, with a few meetings with the Premier of NSW (The Hon. Barry Unsworth, the Mayor of Rockdale Council, the town planner) and with the officers in charge, I was able to get approval for both projects.

4. The Church and the Government

I found that the Coptic Orthodox Church in Australia has very little voice with the different Government departments and almost is not acknowledged by the Government. The church was registered as a company under the name, “Coptic Orthodox Church PTY LTD”. I started contacting different members of parliament, ministers and managers of Government departments and made relations and they started inviting me to official governmental functions, which I was very keen to attend to represent our great church and make sure that we are known that we exist in Australia. This helped achieving a lot of benefits for the Church later on.

5. The Church and the department of immigration

From the grounds I started in number 4, I started to make strong relations with the minister of immigration and with the State Director of NSW for the department of immigration, who is considered the second man after the minister in NSW and also with the secretary of the department of immigration. From this, it helped me to have relations and continuous meetings with the directors of different immigration departments in NSW- like Rockdale office, city office, Paramatta office etc... This helped me to facilitate a lot of things for the church.

6. Visas and citizenship

From number 5, it made me able to lodge and finalise all paperwork for the priests his holiness Pope Shenouda III, wanted to send for the service in Australia and to get them all permanent visas then citizenships. I have in this regard, made the paperwork for the 3 monks who came to St. Shenouda monastery and all the priests his holiness Pope Shenouda III have sent from year 1988 till year 2009, as well as the monks and priests that his grace bishop Daniel requested to bring to serve in Australia.

7. Vacation care centres in the churches

From my relations with the government, I found that there is a grant for establishing vacation care centres for the school students in the school holidays i.e. the church receives money from the government to get them in the church and the church serves them with different activities and outings. I was able to establish this grant for St. Mark Church at Arncliffe, at St Anthony and St Paul church at Guildford, St Mary's church at Sydenham, eventually St Mary, St Bakhomios and St. Shenouda church at Kirrawee and St. Demiana church at Punchbowl. These centres are still operating till now and I'm sure other churches have benefited by following the same system.

8. The church and social services

I established an office for social services for the Coptic Orthodox community in Sydney at St. Mark Church at Arncliffe with a grant from the government to pay for the officers and different expenses, then established the same service at St. Mary, St. Bakhomios and St. Shenouda Church. This grant was continuous for 10 years, until I left this service for his grace bishop Daniel to take care of it.

9. Liaising with the department of immigration to solve all the problems with different cases for the members of the Coptic orthodox Community, concerning their visas and status in the country; over the years there was a huge number of those cases that have been finalised.

10. Non-Egyptians join the Coptic orthodox church

In particular, St Mary, St Bakhomios and St Shenouda church at Kirrawee with her open heart service, was able to join a big number of people from different nationalities to the Coptic orthodox faith, be baptised and attend the church services. At the moment there are about 19 different nationalities in oneness and unity, attending the English holy mass, bible study lectures, youth meetings etc... in the church. The number of people who have joined and baptised over the years will be close to 200 members.

11. The Church in Canberra



I have been visiting the Coptic orthodox community in Canberra on Saturdays, to pray the holy mass for them, which used to be in the hall in one of their homes; noticing that they do not have a church there, I worked very hard with the Federal Government in Canberra, until I got approval by granting a parcel of land (3 and a half acres of land) in one of the top areas – 'North Canberra' (suburb is Kaleen), which is about 10 minutes from Parliament house in

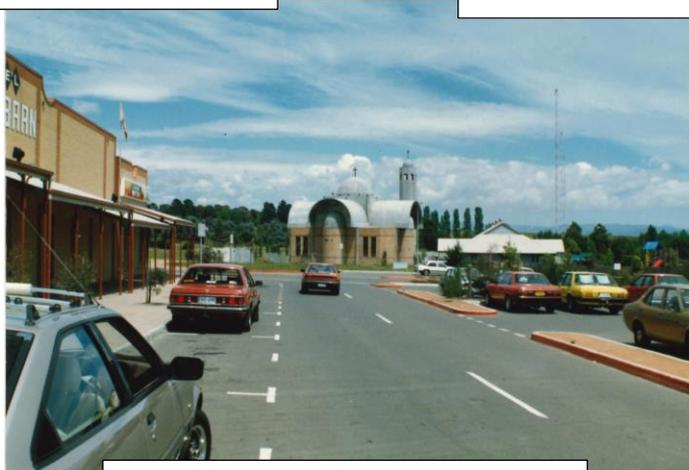
Canberra (this land is in a corner of 2 main streets in Kaleen and it is exactly in front of the main shopping centre of Kaleen) .



St Mark Church Canberra after completion



St Mark Church Canberra final building stage



St Mark Church Canberra completed

I established the different services in Canberra like the passion week and the feast of Resurrection, Sunday school and in parallel, I was moving between Sydney and Canberra to build a church for them in the land we took from the government. At that time, there were only 9 families in Canberra and their donations were very little for such a project but with the grace of God, and His great support, I was able to build the church there. The foundation stone was laid by his holiness Pope Shenouda III, in November 1989 and the church was finished by the end of 1990. His holiness Pope Shenouda III consecrated the alter of the church in January 1991. At that time there was the 'world council of churches' assembling in Canberra and this made the consecration of the church be attended by the Prime Minister of Australia. Many ministers and chief personalities of the Federal government and all the heads of different churches around the world, who were there attending the world council of churches, in which his holiness Pope Shenouda III was chosen to be one of the 7 members of the committee, heading the world council of churches.



HH Pope Shenouda III with heads of world council of churches in St. Mark Church land Canberra



HH Pope Shenouda III with heads of world council of churches in St. Mark Church land Canberra

In the prayer of consecration, his holiness Pope Shenouda III, was so happy and he asked the ladies to make this special sound that they do in weddings, to highlight the great occasion of consecrating the Church altar and Baptism and ordained many deacons on that day. It was an occasion of great memory to the church.



After Consecration – St. Mark Church Canberra

12. Special in-country humanitarian program

After I came to Australia, having in memory the terrible persecution our brothers and sisters were suffering in Egypt, I kept fighting to get a solution to rescue those families, who are under death threat because of their Christianity (either those who are Muslims and found the truth and wanted to be Christians or some Christians who under pressure, denied their faith, embraced Islam then they regret it and want to return to Christianity again). After struggling with 7 ministers of immigration, I could achieve the approval from the 7th minister (the Hon. Jerry Hand) in June 1991 to allow 20 cases (families or individuals) every year to be granted permanent residence to Australia, under the in-country special humanitarian program, which means the church recommends the cases and the Australian embassy checks their paper work and they grant them their visas in a very short time. The first five families of those cases arrived in September 1991 and St. Mary, St. Bakhomios and St. Shenouda church, carried the burden of accommodating them, spending on them, until they settle and also with all the other cases who followed them. The number of cases that I have helped in this program was from year 1991 until year 2002. Before Bishop Sorial took over this program, I helped close to 200 families and individuals to immigrate to Australia.

13. The church constitution

As I mentioned earlier on, when I arrived to Australia in February 1986, and found that the church was registered as a holding company PTY LTD, it was a shock to me to see my church registered as a company and not a religious body, the church of God, so I took the following steps:

- I firstly spent few months to understand the system of the country and investigate the legal point, to learn how to change this registration from company to a religious body.
- I contacted his holiness Pope Shenouda III at the end of 1986 and explained to his holiness what was happening and his reply was, “if you can change it legally with the government to be registered as a church, that will be a great blessing”.

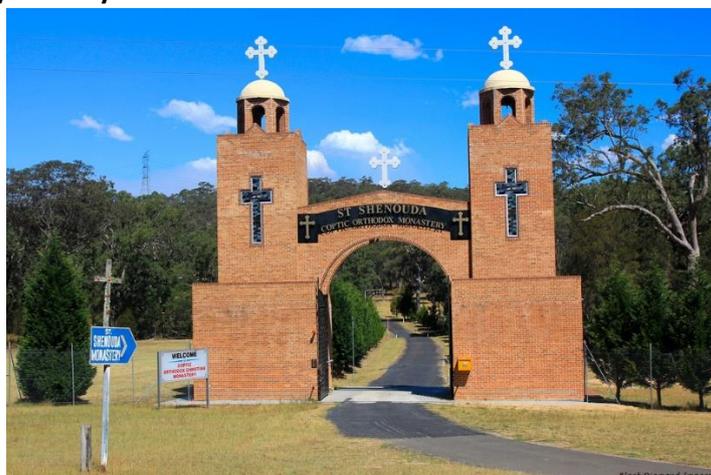
- I started contacting different government departments in the beginning of 1987 and after I found out the way that we should go, I formed a committee, who were (Dr. Medhat Guirgis, Mr. Amir Hanna, Mr. Magdy Kelada and Mr. Adel Guirgis) and I explained to them what I am going to do and we had a few meetings to put the main frame of the church constitution, that we can register the church.
- I took all what we had and went to one of the big legal firms in the city ('hunt and hunt') and there we were dealing with the principal solicitor - Mr. Ted Mc Keown.
- After a lot of work, I reached with the solicitor the final draft and I discussed it with the committee I formed and then we showed it to his holiness Pope Shenouda III in his visit in November 1989 and it was finalised with the solicitor on 21/12/1989.
- The solicitor lodged it with the Parliament of NSW, after all final changes and with the approval of his holiness Pope Shenouda III in April 1990.
- In July 1990, an act of parliament was issued to register the Coptic Orthodox Church as a religious body with a holding body ('Coptic orthodox Church NSW property trust'). At that time, the attorney general (the Hon. Grey O'Regan) organised a meeting with me and all the heads of the other orthodox churches (Russian, Serbian, Yugoslav, Macedonian...etc...) and said to them "You all should be very grateful to Father Tadros, as he worked very hard and made a big umbrella to cover you all, that you all can now apply and get your churches to be registered as a religious body".
- The constitution went into many amendments, according to the needs that arises with the church expansion and the number of churches. The last amendment was made in March 1995 and approved by his holiness Pope Shenouda III, then when his grace bishop Daniel was ordained bishop of sydney and affiliated regions, I delivered the constitution for him and he also made some more amendments in the constitution.
- The different amendments that happened over the years and the time of each amendment, which is an important part of the history of the constitution of the church, are attached with copies of the amendments and the solicitor's letters to me for each amendment and its finalising to be part of the constitution. The stages in which the constitution went through are as follows:
 - a. A letter from his holiness Pope Shenouda III, by his own hand writing and signed in Canberra during his visit to Australia 1991, in which he also has consecrated St. Mark Church in Canberra.
 - b. Amendments in January 1992 and a letter from his holiness Pope Shenouda III, with a letter from the solicitor and a letter from me in Arabic, explaining the required amendments and their reasons for each amendment (a copy of the amendments is attached).
 - c. A letter from the solicitor in July 1992, requesting the final amendments to be signed by his holiness Pope Shenouda III.
 - d. A letter from the solicitor in February 1993 with new amendments during the visit of his eminence metropolitan Bishoy (visiting the solicitor with his eminence metropolitan Bishoy was on 09/02/1993). It was signed by his holiness Pope Shenouda III on 14/02/1993 then sent to the solicitor to add it to the constitution on 23/02/1993.
 - e. A letter from the solicitor on 04/04/1993 by the final amendments to be signed by his holiness Pope Shenouda III.
 - f. A Copy of the envelope and a letter from the solicitor explaining that all the last amendments have been lodged to the parliament and added to the constitution to be the final thing in March 1995 and a copy of about 10 pages of the original constitution, signed by his holiness Pope Shenouda III in the bottom of each page.

14. Liaising with the government in approving St. Mark Coptic school in Sydney with the grant to pay for the students like other schools.

15. Liaising with the government to give the whole land of school at Bexley, to build on it a new church for St. Mary and St. Mina to replace the one that was at Sydenham, which was highly affected by all the aeroplanes taking off and landing, which makes hearing the prayers in the church very difficult. Also getting approval from the government for a full compensation to be used to build the current church (Cathedral) for St Mary and St Mina at Bexley.



16. St. Shenouda Monastery at Putty



My brother Doctor Medhat Guirgis wanted to donate a big land to build a monastery on it with the name of St. Shenouda the Archimandrite, as a gift from his and his wife's heart to the Pope. I was requested to find a suitable land to build the monastery on it and I formed with me a committee of Mr. Sobhy Nicola the engineer and builder and Mr. Eisa Tadros. With hard work and checking so many areas of land, we finally settled in the land at Putty, in which is the current monastery at the moment. Metropolitan Bishoy visited the land during his visit and was very happy with it and he engraved his signature on one of the trees there. His holiness Pope Shenouda III, in his visit in 1993, laid the foundation stone for the monastery and was very happy with the land and gave me his directions to build a monastery there. At that time also, I was in parallel building St Mary, St Bakhomios and St. Shenouda Church at Kirrawee (168 Bath Road), while also supervising building the monastery at Putty. With the grace of God, both projects were finalised at the end of November 1995. At that time, I had already finished building the church of the monastery with all its icons, coverings, vessels and everything needed, also 4 cells for monks. Each cell contained a reception room at the door and a private room for the monk inside with its own toilet and small kitchen. Also, there was a big hall, a kitchen, a laundry, a store room, a huge water tank under ground with a pump lifting the water to the cells and the building. His holiness Pope Shenouda III consecrated the alter and the church and sprinkled water in all the other rooms for the monks and other facilities and on that day, Dr. Medhat Guirgis offered the contract of change of possession from his name to his holiness Pope Shenouda's name and they both signed and I witnessed their signature in my role, being the justice of the peace and it was a joyous day as you could see the big smile on his holiness' face, seeing the first monastery in NSW under the name of St. Shenouda the Archmadrite, which is the same name of his holiness.

17. St. Mary, St. Bakhomios and St. Shenouda Church at Kirrawee



After finishing St. Mark's Church at Canberra and after his holiness Pope Shenouda III consecrated it, he asked me in June 1991, to start a new church in the southern side of Sydney, centred at the Sutherland shire and follow up the service at Canberra on Saturdays, until he will find a priest for Canberra. I used to travel to Canberra by car in the early Saturday morning after the youth meeting in the church at Kirrawee (at that time it was based in Sylvania), to pray the mass for the congregation in Canberra on Saturday morning, spend some time with them to attend to their needs and then return back to Sydney for the prayer of vespers and midnight praises at St Mary, St. Bakhomios and St. Shenouda church and also attend the usual service of Sunday. According to his holiness Pope Shenouda's orders to start a service for the Coptic orthodox church in the Sutherland shire, we firstly started renting the hall at Sylvania high school located at Belingara road, we used it from Friday night for the youth meeting, until Sunday early afternoon after finishing the holy mass and Sunday school service. In this time, I used to carry all the icons, the mobile alter and all different things needed for the holy mass, to pray the vespers, midnight prayers, holy mass and Sunday school service, then carry it back home. We used to pray the Thursday early mass in the hall of my own alaya receiving the people, who were willing to pray the holy mass before work and go to work at the end of the mass, as I believed that the continuous prayers of the holy mass will build the church.

Then we hired St. Mark Anglican church down the Tom Uglys bridge at Sylvania for a few months and there we put a temporary iconostasis and mobile alter and at that time, his holiness Pope Shenouda III, appointed Rev Fr. Abraam El-Baramosy to serve the church in Canberra, which made me able to concentrate more to find a parcel of land to build the church in the Sutherland shire.

After checking 32 places, we settled in the place where the church is now (168 bath road Kirrawee), as the main target was to find a land facing the east direction with its length, as I was insisting to build the church with its true rituals i.e. towards the east. We payed the deposit and exchanged contracts in March 1993. At this point, I rented a cement factory, to use it for the church service, which is located at Flora Street, exactly in front of the church new site to make it easy for me to follow up the new buildings of the church.



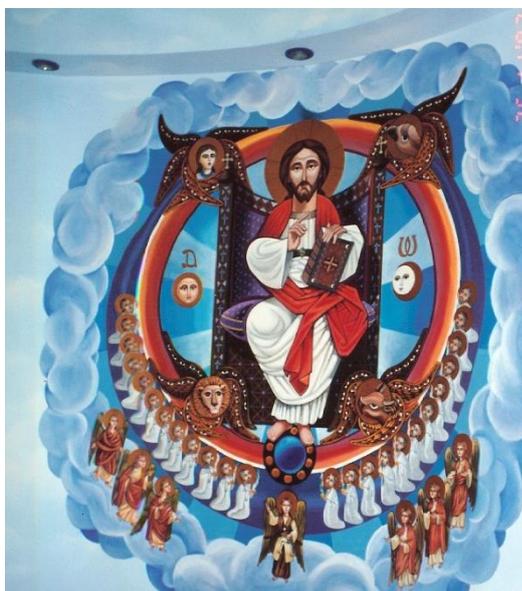
The land we bought was a vacant land and full of bush and weeds and we worked very hard to clean it, then we built the first building, which was a big hall in the bottom, which was used to be the church and at the top was the Sunday school classes and a borrowing library. And at that time, his holiness Pope Shenouda III, sent metropolitan Bishoy to lay the foundation stone with the attendants of the Mayor, Councillors and dignitaries from the government and surrounding churches. We started to pray the holy masses in this new hall, while still not fully finished and do the Sunday school classes in the open area and inside the hall, until we could build the second floor for Sunday school classes.



Laying the foundation stone- St Mary, St Bakhomios at Kirrawee



- At the same time, I was as mentioned, searching for a land to build St Shenouda monastery and then supervising the building of the monastery, while at the same time, supervising the building of St. Mary, St. Bakhomios and St. Shenouda Church at Kirrawee.
- With the grace of God, both the church at Kirrawee and the monastery were finished in November 1995 and his holiness Pope Shenouda III came to visit Australia and he consecrated the church on the 8th December 1996 and he was very happy to see the church with her true Coptic design. At the main icon of the Pandocrator on the eastern wall of the sanctuary, his holiness stopped and looked at it for about 10 minutes and he said, "I have never seen a full icon for the Pandocrator like this icon".



As I always accompanied his holiness minute by minute in all his visits to Australia, he used while consecrating any church, to comment on some ritual mistakes or things needed to be corrected. After he finished consecrating St. Mary, St. Bakhomios and St. Shenouda church, he left his grace bishop Moussa to pray the holy mass in the church and he went with Dr. Guirgis to consecrate the alters of St. Anthony and St Paul church at Guildford and on the way he said to Dr Guirgis, "I tired to find a one mistake to comment on it but I couldn't".





- After this we built a back hall (a shed building to cater for different church functions, funerals, birthdays and weddings).
- After this we bought the house next door to the church and after renting it for some time, we established a child care centre on the land ('angel long day care centre' located at 166 Bath Road Kirrawee). It was approved by the Government and open to operate year 2004 to serve children from ages 2-5 years old.



- After this, we bought the next-door house for the childcare at 164 bath road Kirrawee) then after this, we bought 2 houses on the other road on the corner of the church, which are adjacent to the church on the side 20 & 22 Clement Pde Kirrawee)
- Then we went to the next project, to take the second house next to the childcare (164 bath road Kirrawee) to knock it down and make an extension to a bigger Child care centre and it was built to cater for the children from ages 0 – 2 years old and by this, the child care is serving a capacity of 52 children of different ages and they started to operate from 2010.
- After this, we bought the house on the corner (162 bath road Kirrawee), which made the whole corner of the church to the other street, the church property. At the moment, those 3 houses are rented to pay the mortgage.
- Then we took an area of the backyards of the 2 houses at Clement Pde Kirrawee and made a new open area in them, which contains a new kitchen, a coffee shop, canteen, playground for the children, some other toys for the children, a basketball field and a soccer field, a sitting area between the playing area and the new kitchen and coffee shop, which is offering a great service to the congregation and to the children.

In this new area, the foundation for a bigger and better hall is already done and we had the council approval for the building and this will be the future project, to knock the old shed hall and move the play ground and the soccer and the basket ball to the back area and build the new hall to be a more suitable place for functions, weddings, funerals etc.

18. the service of our brothers and sisters in prisons

With the grace of God, I started this service with one Iroquoian inmate in Goulburn jail, who was a friend of one of our Coptic men and he asked 9 priests to visit him and they all refused. He asked me and he was shock when I said, 'I will come to visit him with you'. This was in year 1999. Visiting this inmate, other orthodox inmates noticed me inside the prison and they requested my service to them, which I did wholeheartedly. Usually they move the inmates from prison to prison, then I go to see them in the new prison and other orthodox inmates see me and ask.

Gradually the number of Christian orthodox inmates increased from most of prisons of men and women in NSW and with the grace of God, I became officially accredited by the department of corrective services to be an official chaplain for the Coptic orthodox inmates in prisons. This service requires a lot of travel to different prisons all around NSW and the list of inmates I am serving at the moment is around 180 between different jails. I feel great blessing in this service to serve His children, who are vulnerable in prisons and deprived of enjoying the great blessing of the great sacraments of the church.

Written by: **Very Rev. Fr. Tadros El-Bakhoumi**

20th Abee, 1734 Martyrs

27th July 2018

Martyrdom of St. Tadros El-Shotby



Pope Shenouda III presents to Hon. Phillip Rudock

Minister of Immigration



Laying the foundation stone at St. Mary, St. Bakhomios and St. Shenouda Kirrawee. Metropolitan Bishop with Hon. Ian Swords Sutherland Mayor