

CHURCH ORGANS AT HOLY FAMILY PARISH, INDOOROOPILLY

From Mike Muller, May 2026

THE PIPE ORGAN

The Holy Family Parish Church at Indooroopilly has a magnificent pipe organ that was incorporated into the original construction of the building. It was ready for use when the church was opened in 1963. From the time of the organ's planning and construction in 1962 until around 2000, the parish organist was Keith Benjamin. Following are his recollections in 2010 of the beginnings of the organ and a description of its structure.

“In the days when Mass was being celebrated in the old church, the Parish Choir and the School Choirs were accompanied by a single keyboard pedal pump organ. In the early 1960s, when plans were under way for a new church, the organising committee felt that such a building deserved a more sophisticated instrument than an ancient pedal organ.

When the Church was nearing completion, I was invited by Father Victor Roberts to accompany him on a tour of inspection to see and hear organs being used in various churches around the city. We looked at both pipe and electronic organs.

Our final call was to the Whitehouse Brothers establishment at Kelvin Grove. Here we were shown the potential of an electro-pneumatic pipe organ with two manuals and a full-length pedal board. It didn't take long to decide that this was the instrument to grace our new Church. To suit the ambience of a large concrete church, the register was worked out in consultation with church organist and music critic Frederic Rogers.

When the organ loft was completed, the new organ was delivered and installed under the supervision of Messrs Howell and Kevin Whitehouse. As the choir loft was fairly narrow, it was decided to mount the organ housing on a steel rack high above the console and suspended from anchors in the concrete ceiling. The two units were inter-connected by multi-wire electric cables.”

Keith Benjamin was involved in the Royal School of Church Music chapter in Brisbane and gave generously of his time over decades as the Organist for Holy Family Parish. He retired from playing the organ in the late 1990s although for some years afterwards he still regularly negotiated the spiral staircase to the choir loft and sang with the choir at Sunday morning Mass. Keith passed away in August 2010.

Around 1998, we were blessed to have Grace and Bob Harwood arrive in our parish. One Sunday, the choir sang a cappella in the church when there was no-one available to play the organ. Grace made the mistake of saying she could help out if that happened again, and ended up playing the pipe organ regularly until 2001.

After Grace moved from our parish, we were indeed fortunate to have Dr Wes Jordan, Organist at St Stephen's Cathedral and a Doctor of Music, Organ Studies, offer his services to the Parish for Sunday morning and special occasion Masses. Wes had played the Holy Family Parish organ some years ago during his music studies. During his time at Holy Family Parish, Wes composed a Mass which he dedicated to the parish as the Mass of the Holy Family.

When Wes Jordan moved on in August 2006, once again the parish was fortunate to find an excellent Organist in Ms Vivienne Hall, a new parishioner. Vivienne had many years of experience with organ playing and was an active member of the Brisbane Theatre Organ

Society. Vivienne retired from playing the organ in 2012 and provided the following description of the Holy Family Parish Pipe Organ.

“This pipe organ built in 1961 by Whitehouse Brothers has an excellent selection of tonal voices which, with couplers, enhance the acoustics and blend very well within the church surrounds. In its earlier days, it was played by Dr Robert Boughen, now the City of Brisbane Organist, for his first recording. It is an organ which is a joy to play.”

For more than 40 years until his official retirement in 2004, Dr Robert Boughen was organist at St John’s Anglican Cathedral in Brisbane. In the late 1970s, he did indeed play the organ in Holy Family church to record a program for the ABC entitled “The Three Doctors of Brisbane”, using music composed by Dr Carmusi, Dr Robert Dalley-Scarlett and Dr William Lovelock. Dr Boughen said his outstanding memory was of the “glorious acoustic” of the building.

THE ALLEN PROTÉGÉ ORGAN

When Vivienne Hall retired, the pipe organ had sadly reached a stage where it had become unserviceable, and its refurbishment is beyond the current capacity of the parish. However, in an incredibly generous offer Vivienne purchased an Allen Protégé organ and donated it to the parish. She dedicated this organ to the memory of her sister Beryl who had passed away in 2013 and who had also been a parishioner and active in the Theatre Organ Society with Vivienne. The organ was installed in the choir loft beside the console of the pipe organ. There is a small plaque attached to the organ in Beryl’s memory.

At this time, the parish welcomed the arrival of a young and distinguished organist and keyboard player in Brendan Murtagh, a graduate of Queensland Conservatorium of Music. Brendan coordinated the music program at Holy Family for a number of years and was assisted by Conservatorium colleagues including Brett Sturdy and Kate Littlewood.

When Brendan moved on, for some years the organ was played by Thien Pham on Sunday mornings and also for some time by Janelle Ellem for Vigil Masses. Church services ceased in March 2020 when the Covid pandemic arrived.

When Masses resumed in October 2020, the parish welcomed Denise Jones, a parishioner and highly qualified keyboard player (M.Mus. (UQ). M.MA (NY)) and very accomplished user of the Allen organ up to the present day. The parish also has an electric piano in the body of the church and music for Sunday Mass currently alternates between the Allen organ in the choir loft and the keyboard in the church, with assistance on the keyboard from Chanaah and Aleisha Thevasagayam, under tuition from Denise. Naomi Fong also played the piano on occasions in 2020 – 2021.

Denise has provided the following description of the Allen organ.

“The Holy Family Church is a huge cylinder and requires a great organ to fill the space. Once you "tame" the brute with clusters of stops, it's a performer's best friend. With 2 manuals and pedals, the grandeur of performing is guaranteed, whether for the gentle sound of "Silent Night" or the dynamic of "Hail, Redeemer".

Several features are available on this organ - the delightful stops of the "Celeste" and the "Chimes" can enhance the Christmas and Easter liturgies. What I call the "Cheat" stop on the

Great can be coupled to the pedals, it allows time for the performer to co-ordinate left hand with the pedals - always a friend!

Unique to this organ is the use of programs that can provide an orchestral tutti for organ concertos, symphonies with organ, and orchestra with choral and organ. This magnificent instrument was donated to the Church and is currently worth \$60,000.

The organ washes the surrounding suburb of Indooroopilly on Sunday mornings regularly. I have always looked forward to practising, rehearsing, and performing on the organ over the past 5 years and I will fiercely guard it in the future.

Thank you, Vivienne!”

Vivienne Hall passed away on 26 December 2022. The Allen organ at Holy Family Parish Indooroopilly remains as a tribute to Vivienne and her sister Beryl.



The console of the Whitehouse Brothers Pipe Organ

The pipes and organ housing



The pipes and organ housing suspended from the ceiling of the choir loft



Keith Benjamin and Vivienne Hall at the console of the Holy Family Parish Pipe Organ



Dr Wes Jordan at the console of the pipe organ in St Stephen's Cathedral



Denise Jones playing the Allen organ, Easter morning, 2026



The console of the Allen Organ