

# FOUNDATION DAY – 20 AUGUST 1863

## 2016 - 153rd ANNIVERSARY of the FORMATION of the CONGREGATION

The congregation at St Paul's celebrates in August each year the official formation of its earliest congregation in 1863 by the Rev. Matthew McGavin.

This year a wonderful choir of young voices from Clayfield College will enrich our Anniversary Service at **9:30 am on Sunday 21 August**. Guests and visitors are welcome!

The original declaration as shown here says:

*In the month of July 1863 the Reverend Matthew McGavin, A.M. an accredited Minister of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland (as per the documents submitted to the audience on the first Sabbath of his appearance) landed in Brisbane and commenced religious services in the City.*

*For some time he rented the School of Arts in Queen Street as a place of worship on Sabbath, there after a few weeks he organised a United Presbyterian Congregation by obtaining the names of duly certified persons to the following declaration: Brisbane 20th August, 1863 .....*

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Matthew McGavin was born in Scotland on the 23rd October 1807. He completed an MA in 1830 and was ordained in 1831.

He married Elizabeth Cluff Chep in 1832 and they went on to have seven children. Elizabeth died in 1851 when her youngest child, Eliza, was just three. Grace Ewing, a widow, became his second wife in 1857.

He was a gifted musician and in 1853, with the organist at Paisley, Andrew Thomson, he published 'The Precentor's Guide to the Selection of Tunes'. He also wrote, amongst other things, a Psalm tune called Clydesdale.

When the Rev McGavin emigrated to Australia on the "Cairngorm" in August 1863 with Grace and the sixteen year old Eliza, he found the Creek Street congregation looking for a leader. His family was welcomed with open arms. His daughter Eliza(beth) Armour laid the foundation stone of our present church building which opened in 1889. (Cemetery records reveal that his three sons are all buried in Brisbane.)

The Jubilee History of the Presbyterian Church in Queensland published in 1899 tells us that "Mr McGavin's ministry in later years was dogged by serious illness. He was a man of marked ability as a preacher, of sound scholarship, of calm and judicious mind and warmth of heart; strong in his convictions and fearless, yet courteous, in the expression of them. Few men have held a higher place in the respect of the community for sterling integrity."

In "The Queenslander" Jan 2 1875 an obituary which occupied much of page 2 says in part "His work in the pulpit was in no small measure supplemented by his pen on rare occasions in the public journals and from time to time under other more abiding forms. The community at large have expressed in equivocal terms their admiration of the dear, masterly logic and the massive yet polished diction with which he handled those subjects which he now and again spoke from the platform."

Not long before his last illness in December 1874, the Rev. McGavin delivered two lectures on 'The Claims of Popery' to benefit the Queensland Presbyterian Sabbath School Union. These are referenced in the National Library.

The Rev. McGavin travelled to Sydney for medical attention not long after these lectures as he was very ill. Sadly he died on 16th December 1874 and was buried in the Presbyterian section of the Willoughby Cemetery.

*(Information for this article has come from the entry by RS Byrnes in the Australian Dictionary of Biography, "The Jubilee History of the Presbyterian Church in Queensland" by the Rev. Alexander Hay and from newspapers of the time, "The Brisbane Courier" and "The Queenslander" and was compiled by Deaconess Dianne Parker.)*