

The Dempsey Medal

THE DEMPSEY Medal is awarded annually by the Archbishop of Sydney to members of the Catholic clergy and laity.

Its presentation seeks to encourage and to recognise outstanding contributions and service by members of the Sydney Archdiocesan community to the local Catholic Church or the wider society.

Although the Medal is awarded for outstanding service or witness to parish, diocese or community it is primarily intended to recognise those people who have made an outstanding contribution in the context of their local parish.

At the discretion of the Archbishop, the Dempsey Medal may be awarded to a non-Catholic in recognition of outstanding collaboration, support for, or contribution to the works of the Archdiocese or its parishes.



Nominations

NOMINATIONS FOR the Dempsey Medal are assessed in the same way as nominations for Papal Honours but the decision to make the award rests solely with the Archbishop of Sydney rather than the Holy See and references to are to be provided from two (2) people.

All nominations must be kept strictly confidential and forms for making nominations are available from the website of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney under the headings of either Archdiocesan Medal or Gifts and Resources.

Completed nomination forms should be sent to:

**The Chancellor
Archdiocese of Sydney
133 Liverpool Street
Sydney NSW 2000**



**CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE
OF SYDNEY**

CATHCOM ARC-498/FEB17

The Dempsey Medal



An Honour from
the Archbishop
of Sydney

James Dempsey

JAMES DEMPSEY was transported to Botany Bay for life for his involvement in the Vinegar Hill rebellion of 1798 in Co. Wexford, Ireland.

He was a Lay Carmelite – a Tertiary or Confraternity Member of the Carmelite Order, which was not officially founded within Australia until 1881. He and fellow layman John Butler arrived in Sydney aboard the ship Atlas in October 1802. His wife and four children remained in Ireland. There is no record of his trial but that is not unusual for Rebellion prisoners.

Both men were stonemasons and soon began working on government projects, with Dempsey receiving a free pardon in 1811, while Butler was conditionally pardoned in 1814 and granted a free pardon in 1827.

Three priests were among the Rebellion prisoners, but their ministry was severely restricted and by 1810 they all returned to Ireland. For the following ten years, apart from a few months in 1817-18, there was no priest in Australia.

Available evidence suggests that James Dempsey then became virtually the centre of Catholic life in the colony. He accompanied the condemned and led prayers as they faced the scaffold. His Kent Street house became a social and religious centre where the Rosary was said on weekdays and Vespers recited on Sundays.



• Fr Jeremiah O'Flynn

In 1817 Fr Jeremiah O'Flynn arrived in the colony, only to be deported by Governor Macquarie six months later. By accident or design, he left the Blessed Sacrament at Dempsey's House and the best room was turned into a chapel

with a small confraternity of men watching over the treasured Sacrament.

The first official Catholic chaplains arrived in 1820 and planning began soon after for the first St Mary's Cathedral; a project which saw James Dempsey working as the superintendent of construction and also serving as one of the chief fundraisers for the building.

His son, Cornelius joined him in 1821 and settled in the Shoalhaven area of the South Coast, while James travelled to India to gain all of just ten rupees as a donation from the Bishop of Calcutta to assist the Cathedral appeal. James Dempsey came home and advanced £300 of his own funds to assist the work.

Some of Dempsey's letters of the time have survived, revealing him as a spiritually strong and humble Catholic man who was seen as having played a leading role in the building of Sydney's original St Mary's Cathedral.

James Dempsey died in 1838, and a reproduction of Mass being celebrated at his Kent Street house is reflected in the Cathedral's stained glass windows. It is located on the western aisle of the nave, closest to the west transept – on the left when facing the altar.



• Sketch of the St Mary's Cathedral drawn by Fr John Therry.