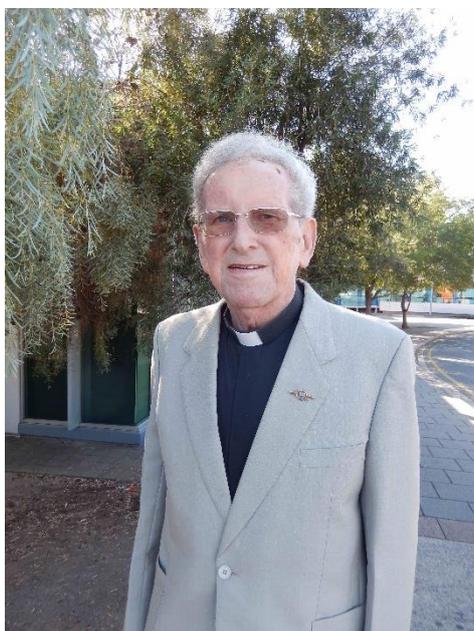


Rev. Fr. Sean Francis McGearty
15th January 1934 – 20th December 2019



Sean Francis McGearty was born in Ballivor, Co Meath, Ireland on the 15th January 1934. The fourth of eight children born to Patrick and Mary McGearty. In his homily at the funeral Mass celebrated at St. Joseph's, Brighton on 7th January 2020, Fr. Kevin Taylor said: "He delighted in the celebration of his Birthday. The 15th January was an important day. He shared the day of his birth with Mary Helen MacKillop – St. Mary of the Cross."

All the children attended the National School in Ballivor, before going to boarding schools. Sean went to St. Finian's in Mullingar. During the school holidays Sean worked for a local farmer doing all the jobs, including making hay, weeding the drills of potatoes, dairying and many other tasks. He always rejoiced in country life. He valued the work of the farming communities and always identified with their passion for the land, their livestock or crops. Fr. Kevin said: "You can take the boy out of the country, but you cannot take the country out of the boy."

After completing his Leaving Certificate Sean went on to study for the priesthood at St. Kieran's College in Kilkenny for six years. On 8th June 1958 he was ordained to the priesthood in St. Mary's Cathedral, Kilkenny. During the homily Fr. Kevin reflected "Share with all the people that Word of God which you have received with joy.' The Bishop invites the young priest on the day of his Ordination. Then he lays on him the responsibility to 'see that you believe what you read, teach what you believe and that you translate your teaching into action.' The priest is called to step forward as a prophet and to speak out from lived experience the Gospel." For sixty-one years Fr. Sean worked tirelessly in the vineyard of the Lord. Most of those years were spent here in the Archdiocese of Adelaide, with a ten-year period where he worked in Tullamore, Ireland."

On 5th November 1958 he departed Dublin bound for London. The next morning, he boarded the P&O Himalaya with five other Irish Priests on route to Australia and New Zealand.

Fr. Sean arrived in Adelaide on 2nd December 1958 and was met by Fr. Leonard Faulkner (later to be Archbishop of Adelaide). They became lifelong friends. Fr. Sean never lost his sense of humour. The gathered community at the funeral were told of his recollections of arriving in Adelaide. "Speaking of his arrival here in Adelaide he often remarked that he could have been mistaken for Charlie Chaplin. There he was fresh off the boat, dressed in an ill-fitting black suit and overcoat (on one of our hot 100 degrees summer days), carrying an umbrella (which could have been mistaken for a walking stick) and wearing a hat. At his side was a box which contained his books and chattels. Then he would add, I shuffled or waddled off into ministry."

Fr. Maurice Shinnick in the Tribute/Eulogy spoke of Fr. Sean in the tradition of the first missionaries of Christ. "Sean McGearty walked in the tradition of those first missionaries of Christ and chose to go to St. Kieran's Seminary in Kilkenny to prepare for a life as a missionary priest. While studying there, an Adelaide Irish priest in the person of Fr. Edward Louis O'Connell, the parish priest of Parkside, visited his old seminary and appealed for priests to come to Adelaide. Fr. Sean volunteered. A teetotaler all his life, he claimed that the deal was sealed by Fr. O'Connell and the Rector over a bottle of whisky – Irish, one presumes."

Fr. Sean served in many parishes in the Archdiocese, Murray Bridge, Goodwood, Brighton, Mt. Gambier, Woodville, Colonel Light Gardens, Christies Beach, Semaphore, (Tullamore-Ireland), Aberfoyle Park and Naracoorte. Fr. Kevin pointed out that, "Sean never forgot the friendship and warmth of the late Archbishop Leonard Faulkner. He also treasured the friendship of his brother priests, though there were times when that friendship was not reciprocated, and hurtful comments were directed against his Irish heritage...Yet in his own quiet way Sean continued to reach out to his brother priests. He never drove past a presbytery in the country without calling in, to check on the health and well-being of the priest stationed there."

Both Fr. Kevin and Fr. Maurice spoke of Fr. Sean's unique and creative ability to celebrate the liturgy. Fr. Kevin pointed out that St. Patrick always held a special place in Fr. Sean's devotions. He said that St. Patrick's feast day even trumped Palm Sunday! He told the congregation at the funeral Mass "Fr. Sean brought his own unique style to the celebration of the Liturgy. It is not everyone who can capture the significance of two important feasts and intertwine them into one celebration. While the Universal Church celebrated the Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday; Sean made sure that St. Patrick was not to be forgotten when the 17th March and Palm Sunday collided." Fr. Shinnick explained: "As Fr. Sean's first assistant priest at Christies Beach in the mid-1970s I remember his creative approach to liturgy, especially when St. Patrick's Day coincided with Palm Sunday."

After his retirement as Parish Priest of Naracoorte he undertook the role of being a supply priest for clergy living in the country areas of the diocese. He continued in this role for over 20 years. Since 1999 Fr. Sean assisted in the following parishes: Barossa Valley, Bordertown, Bridgewater/Stirling, Birdwood, Brighton, Hallett Cove, Kapunda,

Mallala, Millicent, Mt. Barker/Strathalbyn, Mt. Gambier, Murray Bridge, Noarlunga, Penola, Pinnaroo/Lameroo, Tailem Bend, Victor Harbor/Goolwa, Virginia/Two Wells, Willunga and Yorketown. There were representatives of each of the parish communities at his Funeral Mass celebrated at Brighton.

During his retirement he was able to pursue his passion for transferring the parish records of Births, Death and Marriages to a computer programme. Other interests to occupy his time was his photograph and his passion for Irish Family History. Fr. Shinnick said of Fr. Sean, "While a missionary priest in Australia, Sean never lost his love for Ireland and his family. His visits home were full of joy. Due to serious health concerns for his mother, who was not expected to live long, Fr. Sean returned to Tullamore in Ireland for some years where he threw himself into parish work and being of service to the Bishop of Meath. Also, in this time he became a founding member of the Irish Family History Society. That love of history would bear fruit in Adelaide where he computerized the church records of some of our oldest parishes."

Again, both Fr's Taylor and Shinnick spoke of the legacy that Fr. Sean leaves us as we welcome new Missionaries to Adelaide – our International Clergy. Fr. Kevin Taylor said 'We now have a growing International Clergy and Sean was their senior confrere. He looked out for them, visited them, made sure that they were settled, had all they needed for ministry. He would call in and visit regularly. He was determined to give them the friendship, respect and support that was at times denied him. Out of his own pocket he would buy them items they needed; he would supplement an air-ticket home in times of family loss. He would take them out for a meal.' Fr. Shinnick said "It maybe because of that experience of his arrival and first years here that motivated Fr. Sean to extend the hand of friendship to the new missionaries to the Church of Adelaide, especially from Vietnam and the African continent. He gives to us an important example – to make welcome, to support, and share friendship with the new missionaries of Christ to our Archdiocese."

Sean passed away at home on 20th December 2019 he was the last of the Irish Missionary Priest's to serve in the Archdiocese. When he died Fr. Michael Kyumu, (parish Priest of Brighton) Fr. Philip Marshall, (Vicar General) Gen Traynor (Carer and distant cousin) and Fr. Kevin Taylor had gathered around his bed. Fr. Michael reflected on the mutual friendship they shared, "He came from a land far away and I came from a land far away, we shared the common bond of missionary zeal, a love of the Gospel and a love of God's people."

Fr. Kevin Taylor told the congregation, "On the 20th December 2019 I had spent most of the day with Gen and Fr. Sean at their home. Throughout the day I prayed parts of the Divine Office with Sean, frequently I prayed the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary and Glory Be. At about 8:30 pm I whispered into his ear "When the Lord Jesus comes, you go with him. Everything will be fine. Gen will not be alone." I then decided to pray (Compline) the Night Prayer of the Church with Sean and at the conclusion I sang the Salve Regina. Now I am not sure if it was my singing that caused Sean to die or if he simply said, 'I am not hanging around for too much more of this'. But he simply slipped away.... Now I have been worrying myself sick for the past two weeks that my singing may have been the final straw, But I suddenly realised that it was a few days before

Christmas and Sean mistook my singing for the Angelic Choirs who came to the shepherds in the field around Bethlehem and he longed to be with them, so he went to God for Christmas.”

In conclusion Fr. Kevin said, “Every life that has ended in a position of fidelity to God, through personal struggle and short comings and weakness, is a victory. Today we can join with Fr. Sean to proclaim: ‘I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race.’” With deep affection and a cheeky smile, he added, ‘Sean, may you be in heaven half an hour before the devil knows you are dead! And may you find yourself on the right side of God in His eternal kingdom.

Fr. Sean was repatriated to Ballivor for the celebration of the Funeral Mass and burial on 22nd January 2020. Fr. Kevin Taylor travelled with Fr. Sean’s carer and distant cousin Gen Traynor to Ireland for the funeral celebrations. At the ceremony to receive Fr. Sean’s body at the Ballivor Church, Fr. Kevin spoke on behalf of the Archdiocese of Adelaide. He said: “I would like to begin by thanking Fr. Sean’s family for the nurturing of his vocation to the priesthood, the love of his family was always present in his life, the spirituality of family life was always present. I would also like to acknowledge and thank his family for the sacrifice they made in letting Fr. Sean leave his beloved homeland of Ireland and go to Australia to bring the Gospel message ‘to the ends of the earth’. Finally, I would like to thank the Bishop’s and Priest’s of the Diocese of Meath for giving the Church in Adelaide a wonderful missionary, a man of prayer, a man of the Gospel and for me personally a kind and generous friend. It is with a heavy heart at Sean’s passing but with deep gratitude to all the family, Clergy and People of God in Meath, that we return to you Fr. Sean. There will always be a link between the Archdiocese of Adelaide and the Diocese of Meath because of the life and ministry of this good and generous minister of the Gospel.”

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hanam. (May his soul be on the right side of God.)