



Catholic Diocese of Sandhurst

Vale Fr Paul Purcell 3 March 1927 to 29 August 2021



People from across the Diocese have paid tribute to Fr Paul Purcell who died on Sunday 29 August, aged 94.

Fr Paul was in his 41st year of priesthood following 30 years of service as a Dominican brother, which included 25 years as Captain of a mission ship in the Solomon Islands. He was awarded an MBE for his service to the people of the Solomons.

Fr Paul served as Parish Priest in parishes in Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane before joining the Diocese of Sandhurst just before Christmas in 2000. Fellow priest, Fr Rom Hayes, recounts Fr Paul's arrival at Wodonga parish; "He said five Masses that first weekend. In the 20 years that I've known him, he's never said no to anything."

Fr Paul 'retired' to St Kilian's Parish in Bendigo in 2012, where he continued to celebrate daily Mass until very recently. "A priest never really retires," he would often say.

With Fr Junray Rayna, Administrator of St Kilian's, Fr Paul concelebrated daily Mass, which was live-streamed from the St Kilian's Presbytery Chapel. Fr Paul was a great believer that the Church needed to embrace technology and saw the need to do whatever possible to provide opportunities for the Catholic community to pray together at virtual Mass during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns.

Born and raised in Yarraville, Fr Paul was an avid Footscray/Bulldogs supporter. He completed an apprenticeship in engineering and boilermaking before joining the Dominicans in 1949. His engineering skills were put to great use when he was tasked with rebuilding a 72 ft ketch, the *Salve Regina*, which was to become the mission ship he skippered to serve the people of the Solomon Islands.

Fr Paul was known for his quiet self-deprecating humour, dry wit, and gentle demeanour. An amazing cook, he was known for his love of hospitality and his famous celebratory toast "to astonishing good health!"

Fr Paul lived an enriched, adventurous, and rewarding life in the service of others. In doing so, he inspired and enriched the lives of so many. He will be dearly missed.

The Funeral Mass for Fr Paul was celebrated at St Kilian's Church on Friday 3, September 2021.

Funeral Mass Homily

by Fr Rom Hayes



What beautiful Readings we have heard to honour our Fr Paul. Taking liberty given by the Spirit, I'd like to dwell on the Gospel passage and see something of Fr Paul within it.

To begin at the beginning:

It was the night before Christmas Eve 1999 and there was a knock on the front door of the Wodonga Presbytery. And there at the door were two men, one very big and bearded. He said "I'm Fred and I've got with me my brother Jack ... he has come here to work. He is generally known as Fr Paul, and he left Brisbane this morning to come and work here as a priest."

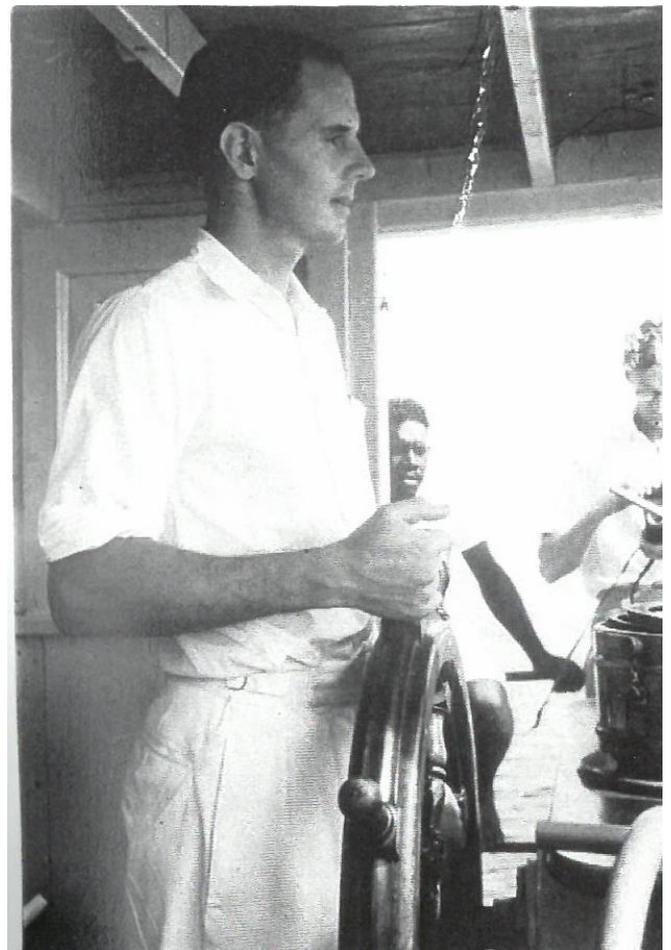
I had in fact heard that morning that a Dominican priest was going to help out in Wodonga. I invited them in and at the same time offer to get Fr Paul's suitcases. "No worry," he said and lifting a small kit bag said, "This is all I've got." His bedroom was so small and cramped but he assured me he would be okay.

We decided to have a wee drink in the dining room, and it was explained to me that family and

old friends called him Jack since his Baptismal name is John. On entering the Dominicans his name became Paul., He stood at the table and Jack raised his glass and joyfully said "Your astonishing good health!"

Fr Paul (Jack) loved work, especially his work as a priest. Every morning he would be out walking at sunrise and greeting tradies on their way to work. He always made a special stop and yarn with Butch. Then he'd return for Masses and hospital visits. He also loved to cook our meals.

As you may know, Jack spent many years as a Dominican brother, sailing a large 72-foot mission boat around the Solomon Islands. He loved the sea and her changing moods. Even back here he was constantly monitoring the movement of the wind in the trees.



Some of the travels at sea were long and Jack had a spot in the stern where he'd have a sleep.

His crew thought he was great and would wake him when the going got rough.

The image of Jesus asleep in the stern out in rough waters comes to our mind. Jack was highly respected by his crew, and he was always able to keep peace and confidence within the boat.

There were times when I personally found myself in the rough waters and Jack always proved to be a figure of wisdom and helped calm the troubling waters. He not only gave wise comment, but also willingly offered personal sacrifice for the sake of the community.

He was, of course, highly respected by all people who knew him in the Solomons. The governing authorities saw fit to have him awarded with an MBE from Queen Elizabeth. He loved his trip abroad to London to receive the medal of honour. However, just as enjoyable was his trip to the Gardiner Diesel Factory. The directors made a great fuss of him because his boat was powered by a 'Gardiner'.

In recent years Jack became attached to a small iPad. It contained all the Church prayers. Recently, he spent a long time saying his prayers. I commented he was spending much time at prayer, he wryly replied, "Preparing for my finals."

As I conclude I know Sandhurst nurses, Marie Flynn and Trish Mudge as well as Helen Fowler are due a special thanks. I feel inadequate, but I know Jack's great love for them was the most beautiful word of thanks. He loved his small community of Inglewood and often expressed his admiration especially for Margaret and Peter. Michael Nolan was a standout. And there was no one to equal his caring and competent mate, Neville. Nev could always make him laugh.

When I was at Wodonga and St Kilian's with Jack, we enjoyed waiting together to end the day and say "Goodnight". It was also a special moment of tossing down a wee drink and saying, "Your astonishing good health!".



Fr Paul with his MBE.

Eulogy

by Clare O'Brien

I'd like to begin by acknowledging and paying our respects to the Dja Dja Wurrung peoples on whose land we gather today. We express gratitude in the sharing of this land, our sorrow for the personal, spiritual, and cultural costs of that sharing and our hope that we may walk together in harmony and in the spirit of healing.

My name is Clare O'Brien, I am the niece of Fr Paul, and it is my privilege this afternoon to speak on behalf of the Purcell family: his sister-in-law Margaret, his cousins, nieces and nephews, and to share some of our memories of Jack.

It's important that I start by thanking everyone who has been involved in the care of Fr Paul throughout his illness: the nurses, the staff of St. Kilian's Parish, the priests of the Sandhurst Diocese, parishioners and friends, who have so selflessly and lovingly cared for him. As a family we will be forever grateful for your kindness.

Most of you who are here or listening will know my uncle by his religious name – Fr Paul, but to the family he has always been Jack. It is sad that due to the pandemic this church is not overflowing with those who Jack touched throughout his life.

On 3 March 1927 John Frederick Purcell, was born at home in Powell Street Yarraville, to Alma and George. He was the second youngest of six children, David, Madge, Molly, Joan and Fred.

Jack must have been an easy child, as there are very few stories about him when he was young. An interesting fact is that Jack didn't speak until he was around 2 years old - apparently, his

sister Joan did all the talking for him. Well, he certainly reversed that situation in his adult years.

I recall my mother telling me that Jack was a bit of a pyromaniac as a little boy, lighting fires in the back yard, eventually setting fire to the shed. His mother's patience frayed; his penalty was severe enough that he stopped lighting fires. Perhaps this was the first sign of Jack's future in the priesthood – lighting candles and burning incense was in this DNA from an early age.

Jack attended St. Augustine's Primary school in Yarraville and then Parade College in East Melbourne.

During his youth Jack joined the Catholic Young Men's Society (CYMS) and participated in the debating team. I'm sure it was here that he honed his skills of thinking through an issue, looking at points for and against and then articulating his point of view, clearly and concisely. Jack went on to debate at state level. Using these skills and life experience, Jack has often been sought out for his sage advice and guidance.



Fr Paul at the CYMS Victorian Inter-society Debating Competition in 1949.

After finishing school, Jack completed a Fitter and Turners Certificate in 1949. He was also a

qualified diesel mechanic and boilermaker. He was employed as an engineer at McAlpine's Flour Mill, to service all the machinery. His boss, a wily Scotsman, on one occasion found Jack sitting reading a book. In no uncertain terms he told Jack he didn't pay him to sit on his backside reading all day, to which Jack replied that if he wanted a second-rate job done, he could hire someone else. The boss never challenged Jack again, and the machinery worked like clockwork under Jack's supervision.

Jack then entered religious life and became a brother in the Dominican order. Strange for the times, like his brothers David and Fred, Jack was a good cook and one of his initial tasks was to cook for the other trainees – around 40 men. Cooking for others became a lifelong habit for Jack, one many of you would have experienced.

Because of his skill set with machinery, the Dominicans decided that they could use Jack's expertise in the Solomon Islands.

When Jack returned home every three years, we were all excited. As little kids, his handshake would crush your hand and he was like this superhero, telling amazing stories that we could only dream about. His deep voice and tales of wrestling sharks had my brothers spellbound. I also recall that on one visit home, Jack brought a few Islanders with him; one of the many demonstrations of hospitality that is so much at the core of who Jack was.

As well as servicing the diesel generators, Jack also had responsibility for training a crew of local Islanders to run and maintain a boat called the *Salve Regina* and to make repairs when damage was done. Teredo worms were also an issue for boats in the islands and one time Jack jumped on board, only to go through the wood and break three ribs. That Christmas visit, he was a lot quieter, being in considerable pain every time he laughed.



Fr Paul as a missionary in the Solomon Islands.

While in the Solomons, Jack was appointed Harbour Master. For his work throughout that time, which enabled the locals to become self-sufficient, he was nominated and received an MBE, Member of the British Empire, or as he liked to call it – 'My Bloody Effort' award. He travelled to England to receive his award from the Queen - quite a treat for a Republican and a. After 23 years of work in the Solomons, Jack returned home to pursue his dream of becoming a priest, studying at St Paul's seminary for late vocations in Sydney. Jack was ordained in 1980.

We remember our dad, David, being deeply respectful of Jack and his vocation, and regarding his younger brother in a reverential way. He encouraged us to recognise the important role Jack would play into the future, having a special role in touching the lives of others.

Over the coming years he worked in Dominican Parishes in Brisbane and Sydney, before returning for a short stint, back in the Solomons. On his return Jack moved to the Sandhurst Diocese, where he worked at Wodonga. I think

his close relationship with Fr Rom was a major reason he made the move to Bendigo.



Being a member of the Dominicans, the Order of Preachers, it was inevitable that Jack's homilies would be wonderfully reflective observations on the Readings, leaving his listeners with beautiful gems to contemplate.

Everywhere Jack lived, he made lifelong friends. He loved nothing more than to celebrate all aspects of life. Everyone would have experienced Jack's toast - "(To) your astonishingly good health."

Jack had a presence in a room. He loved to sit back and take in everything around him. He was a great listener and always saw the good in others. He had a wonderful sense of humour and loved to laugh.

Jack enjoyed a glass of wine, referring to it 'like a kiss from an angel'. Often, he would nod off for his customary 5-minute nap, then waking with a new lease on life - you knew you were in for a very long night. His sister-in-law Margaret told me that when Jack visited and had nodded off, she would go to bed, because when he woke, he and Fred would talk late into the night.

Jack would go out of his way to help others. Nothing was ever too much trouble. Trish and Marie said he even insisted on walking down the

stairs last week to make it easier for the ambulance officers.

Despite years of living away from home, overseas or interstate, Jack maintained a close relationship with all of us. He always knew what the members of the extended family were up to in their lives, how their families were going and growing and took pride in our achievements.

Jack's humble and gentle nature, his love of life and positive attitude drew people of all ages and backgrounds.

He gave his life in service to others, blessing the lives of all he met. Jack's 94 years were truly lived to the full.

I'd like to conclude with a quote from Mother Teresa that I think sums up Jack's life:

It's not about how much you do, but how much love you put into what you do that counts.

Rest well.

Farewell Jack.



Bishop Shane incensing Fr Paul's casket

Homily at Vigil Prayers for Fr Paul

by Fr Junray Rayna



I am so blessed to lead and to give the homily for the Vigil Prayers for my dear friend Paul. Here are my words for Paul.

If I was a painter, I would find it a difficult task to paint an image of Fr Paul John Frederick Purcell, or "Jack", as Fr Rom used to call him; because Fr Paul was a very multifaceted person. I could describe him as a polymath, "having learned much", "a universal person", who is an individual and whose knowledge spanned a substantial number of subjects. The Church Father Saint Irenaeus famously said that, "The glory of God is man or woman fully alive." When we see Paul, even at 94, he was very much alive.

- He loved politics, hymns, and classical music. He was a debater.
- Well, he solved sudoku at the start of the day. There are seven books of sudoku in his room.
- He was an engineer and could listen the engine of your car and pinpoint if you were driving a good car.
- A wonderful man of hospitality. He would comment if the house was running out of

wine or whisky. If the beer was no good, he would say that the chemical formula for that beer was P¹S² (Piss). Paul was a wonderful cook.

- He was a priest who was very faithful to his daily prayers. He has only one app on his iPad, that was the Universalis.
- He was the captain of the missionary boat "Salve Regina." As the skipper for many years, he could read the wonders of the sky. He could read if would rain or if it would be a great day.
- He loved the colour blue. He loved seeing me when I was wearing blue.
- Fr Paul was a man who was very open to the culture and language of other people. In his boat, the crew members spoke six different languages, but they were able to navigate together. When we went out for an Asian meal, Paul would use chopsticks with me.
- He had some Pidgin English: If the food is good, he would say: "Stink too much!" It means "The food smells so good!"

- There are many others you can also think of:

To us who know Paul dearly and lovingly, this is very true. There are so many amazing aspects of his life to explore. Nevertheless, I will attempt to paint Paul in three images:-

- Paul as a Dominican Missionary Brother,
- Paul as a hardworking pastoral Priest, and
- Paul as a Friend.

Paul as a Dominican missionary brother

I asked Paul once when we went for a drive to see the Silo Art at Colbinabbin: "Paul, what made you join the Doms?" He mentioned that his sister Joanne was very close to him that some people thought that they were twins. Joanne was a Dominican Sister - that was start of Paul's journey.

As a brother, Paul had a very humble role in the priory, as a cook. He was very proud to cook for 33 members of the community. He had many hours of peeling potatoes; that is why, whenever we had Friday fish and chips, he would be in-charge of the chips and he would comment if the year had a wonderful season for potatoes. He was a humble worker.

He had no clue why the Dominicans had chosen him to captain a mission boat since he did not know how to swim, and had a terrible experience when his cousin nearly drowned when they were young.

He thought of the words Jesus said to Peter: "Someone will take you where you don't want to go."

Fr Paul was chosen to skipper the ship because he was the only engineer among the Dominicans. Before sailing, Paul completed a marine and navigation course. Then, on 1 June, Saturday morning in 1957 in North Sydney, it was the blessing and launching of their mission boat "Salve Regina." The Provincial, Fr O'Rourke mentioned that "The boat belongs to the Dominican Fathers and Sisters who share work and responsibility of the mission in the Solomons." It was attended by Cardinal Gilroy and a Polish Countess who travelled from China. It took 18 days to travel from Australia to the Solomon Islands and the seas were very rough at times.

While working in the Solomons, Paul became well known to many people and trained local men to run the boat. He took pride in his mission work but he was able to learn the beautiful journey from attachment to detachment. He was able to work in one place and then another. Always truly present to what he was doing, a man of order, integrity, and stability.

I said to Paul last year, "Paul I have some friends in the Doms in Camberwell. Would you like me to take you there for a visit?" He replied, "Is that one way?" He was afraid that I might leave him there.

Paul as a pastoral priest

Paul was the Parish Priest of Holy Name, in Wahroonga, NSW. Hearing his stories, I got the impression that he was working really hard, especially visiting and anointing the sick in three hospitals. I mentioned to him that some priests are working hard and others are hardly working.

Paul used to say, that he came back to the parish house around 9:00 in the evening, after long hours of visiting people in hospital. He hadn't taken a holiday in years, which is why you heard of his famous epic drive from Brisbane to Broome, one of Paul's amazing life adventures, which he seized between appointments.

As a priest, Paul would not be happy with me now, because I am talking so long. As a member of the Order of Preachers, he proclaimed the Gospel with such authority, clarity, and integrity! He would not allow his parishioners and his listeners to die of boredom while he was preaching. He had natural gifts of wit and wisdom, and short Homilies.

Paul had wonderful stories of Wodonga, Mt Beauty and, of course, among us here at St

Kilian's Bendigo. He was very faithful to the midday Mass. He was always delighted to concelebrate Mass. The Eucharist was very central to his priesthood. The Eucharist was the pinnacle of his day, where we usually encountered him, and where he formed friendships. That is one beauty of his priesthood, that he could be tough and stubborn, but you could be a friend to Paul. That brings me to my last point.

Paul as a friend.



Fr Paul and Fr Junray relaxing at St Kilian's

The Greek philosopher Aristotle defined friendship this way: "What is a friend? A single soul dwelling in two bodies." I had never expected in my life that I would have a very good friend in his 90s. We had a very ordinary, beautiful, deep friendship. It looks beautiful now, but I can remember some struggles at first.

The first time I met Paul was in Wodonga eleven years ago. I said to him, "Good evening, Father!" He responded, "Don't call me Father, I haven't fathered anyone!"

When I first came to St Kilian's, sometimes it felt like travelling on rough seas. As we know, Paul was a captain for many years, and he was used

to being in charge. He would say to me, "Don't tell me what to do, I've done this for forty years." Nevertheless, Fr Paul knew that I loved him and cared for him, and he usually called me "the boss" or "Your Eminence."

The way I understand friendship now, especially living with Paul for the last three years, is that "to advance in friendship is to advance in virtues." In Hosea, one verse I love is this:

"I shall lead her into solitude and there speak to her heart" (2:14).

Our friendship deepened because we were in touch together in our own solitude. Paul had his moments of solitude in his room, and I had mine in the mountains or hills. When we talked, we talked together about deeper realities of life.

Our friendship deepened because we allowed our hearts to speak. He knew how to read me, when I was drained, exhausted and tired, when I was happy and ready to drink, or ready to travel or to listen to classical music.

My dear friends, in our friendships and lives, this is important:

At the evening of our lives, we shall be examined on how much love is in our hearts.
At the evening of our lives, we shall be examined only in love.

At night, I usually said to him, "Goodnight, Paul" and he replied, "My friend, sleep the sleep of the just."

Paul, "Sleep the sleep of the just; rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven."

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