

DEATH NOTICE

Fr. Timothy O'Toole (SPIR)

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of the Passionist community of Marrickville (Australia)

Born: 29 September 1956

Profession: 20 January 1979

Ordination: 03 December 1983

Death: 22 December 2017

Requiescat in pace

Eulogy for Fr Timothy O'Toole CP

A good man, a man who was kind, compassionate and gentle, a brave man, a friend

These have been just some of the descriptions of Fr Timothy O'Toole, the man that we simply knew as Tim.

In many ways it was appropriate that Tim spent over nineteen years of his 34 years of priesthood at St Paul Apostle Parish – he was a man heavily connected with family and truly lived out our Parish motto “To live as one family”. Tim loved his father and siblings unconditionally, he was totally committed to his Passionist family and he gave so much of himself to our parish family here at St. Paul Apostle.

Tim and John arrived here at Endeavour Hills on July 1st 1998. In many ways they complemented one another- Tim was able to temper John's passion and energy with groundedness and a wonderful gentle humour. From the beginning it was obvious that Tim and John were very down-to-earth and were prepared to roll-up their sleeves and join in at the most basic level of Parish activities. They led the Parish with wisdom and vision and together introduced us to the Charism of St Paul of the Cross.

In the simplest of terms, the Passionists make a special promise to promote the memory of the passion of Jesus by word and deed. They do this especially in preaching and in the various ministries among the poor, and the marginalized of every kind, in whom they see Christ Crucified today. They walk with the hurting and try to be instruments of hope and love to those that are suffering. Tim very clearly showed us how to do this in his life and his legacy for us is that we ourselves must continue to care for those that are hurting and struggling in the shadow of the cross.

When we think of Tim I'm sure we all think of occasions when we have been the recipient of his kindness, compassion and empathy. I remember clearly one Holy Thursday night where he was the main celebrant. He was visibly upset because a family in our parish had just lost all they had in a house fire. He used this as the basis of his homily and ensured that the collections that night were forwarded to that family to help them rebuild their lives.

Last Friday when Tim passed away, Facebook had so many acknowledgements from members of both the Endeavour Hills and Marrickville parishes of the kindness that Tim shared when he walked with those families who were experiencing times of bereavement, despair or celebration.

Tim was definitely not a high-falutin', lofty type of character – this was demonstrated in his sermons which were very authentic, full of stories about the issues we were dealing with daily, the people he came across and the simple but true message of our faith. Tim's struggle with his weekly homily meant that he was able to discern what the gospel message was, in its truest, most distilled form and always challenged us into thinking: What does Jesus mean for us here today?

Tim was a man of the people. He recognised the dignity of each and every one of us and it was so important to him that he cared for us to the best of his ability. I used to laugh at him when he preached on the gospel of the Good Shepherd.

After his stint in Bourke as PP where sheep farms were in the hundreds of thousands, Tim would observe that it would only be an idiot that would leave such a large flock to look for a lost lonely sheep. How ironic was it though that Tim himself was the epitome of the Good Shepherd! Tim prided himself on the fact that that he knew everyone's name – in fact it even became a competition between Bev (our first Parish Secretary) and him who knew more people individually. But it was not only the names that he knew, but also the family connections. He would often make comments to me like "You know Mary don't you? She sits in the third seat near the kitchen and is married to Tom. Now Tom has a brother-in-law Bill who has a boy who goes to Mazenod and is in Year 10. He barracks for Richmond and is good at computers" – I used to think how on earth do you know all this stuff?

Tim would often join the coffee club up at the shopping centre and was always a regular attendee at Men's Club. He supported all the social events of the Parish. The only group he didn't participate in was Women Wine and Wisdom but I'm sure he knew who attended and what they spoke about!

In many ways Tim will be remembered as a builder – not just as a builder of things but rather a builder of community. He was very proud of the new Parish Hall and the renovated Annex but it was more a means to an end. As Dick Barnfield reminded me recently, Tim wanted a place that all people, catholic or not, believer or non-believer could gather as part of our one family. His humanity drew people to him. He was a man's man and it was this quality that saw many open to him and receive his friendship. His openness and ability to non-judge truly broke down many walls and initiated fresh relationships. His involvement in the Men's Club was one of the catalysts for Parish growth and a source of tapping into the needs of the people he sought to serve.

I think in many ways he was a reluctant leader. He valued his privacy and did not necessarily like being the up front man. I am certain however that his leadership was effective and he had that special gift of empowering those with whom he worked. With Liz, Bev, Didi and Gillian he trusted them implicitly and supported them totally in their decision making. When it came to the

decision to initiate a Parish soup van Tim sought the advice of the Pastoral Council and Finance committees and liaised with the St Vincent de Paul society. Again he quickly formed a committee who were equally passionate and committed to serving the peoples of Endeavour Hills and its environs.

Tim appreciated the efforts of all those in the Parish House. In particular he counted the Sisters of the Cross, Bridget, Anne, Joan and Karen as not only valued colleagues who shared in the Passionist Mission, but as dear friends whose opinion and companionship he cherished.

Tim loved interacting with the youth of our Parish. He had that special gift of being able to relate to them on many levels and quickly established their trust and respect. Tim's honesty and authentic, humorous nature appealed to our younger members of the community, so our young people knew that they always had a unique place at St Paul Apostle Parish, that they were valued and were always welcomed here.

To this end, the Principals of our Parish schools, Christine, Helen and Paul appreciated the involvement that Tim had with both the administrations, the staffs and pupils at both schools. Most Parishes have only one school to deal with. Tim had two. He was active in supervising the building programs that both schools embarked upon, the employment of staff and overseeing the sacramental programs. It was not unusual to see Tim at the South school gates greeting the students by name as they left for home.

At a secondary level, Tim was the canonical administrator and chaplain of St John's Regional College and a regular visitor at Mazenod College where many of our Endeavour Hills students studied.

Tim was a popular member of the Dandenong Deanery and established excellent relationships with the faith leaders of our neighbouring churches. Tim believed that being a member of a faith community meant that there had to be some tangible response to the injustices of our world. I think this is why he embraced our outreach groups like JPIC, interfaith, the bi-weekly Bread run, Refugee Alliance, Wellsprings, CanCare, St Vinnies, the Christmas Hamper program, and the like with so much fervour.

Tim was a very human character – he could be grumpy but I guess that very human characteristic is what endeared him to us! We know he hated the hot weather, he wasn't into highbrow music, he loved a smoke and a drink and he was certainly a technophobe – Android vs iPhone, Microsoft vs Apple – Tim had an opinion on them all. But one thing is for certain he was a wiz at getting them all working!

Several of us were fortunate to travel with Tim on two separate Pilgrimages: the first to Italy to walk in the footsteps of St Paul of the Cross and the second to Jordan, Israel and the Holy land. These were unique experiences. Tim loved showing us the land of the founder of his Order, of sharing in the hospitality of the Passionists in the different houses that Paul of the Cross established and of celebrating Eucharist and Prayer with his friends.

Tim coined a phrase early on in our travels “What happens on the pilgrimage, stays on the pilgrimage” so it precludes me from talking about how the double bed broke, the number of tunnels from Cinque terra to El Grasso, the table top dancing or the late evening spiritual imbibing. Perhaps a feature of the Holy Land visit was the way that he could journey on this trip with his friend Br Jerome and the bond, not to mention the mischief they got up to is bound up in the confidential Pilgrimage Seal.

At the farewell ceremony our Parish held for Tim last year, in response to Dick’s eloquent presentation, Tim remarked that the most single vivid memory he holds of our Parish is the number of our community who attended the funeral of his father in Geelong. He seemed surprised, but he shouldn’t be – it was simply a measure of the love that we had for Tim. In his ministry Tim had taught us well. We all knew how much he cared for his Dad, how regularly he visited him and the loved he shared for him. It was no different than how he cared for us.

As Fr Brian will share, Tim was a vibrant and committed member of the Passionist communities to which he belonged. He was community leader several times and cared for his Passionist brothers thoughtfully and lovingly. His house was characterised by hospitality and welcome and he loved to repay the kindness that was shown to him and his fellow priests by the parishioners of SPA. As one parishioner recently remarked, if you were having a party you’d simply just invite him – that’s what you do with friends!

At this point I would like to formally offer prayerful condolences to Tim’s family and to the whole Passionist order on behalf of St Paul Apostle Parish and thank them both for sharing the gift of Tim with us. It was a privilege to celebrate his 50th birthday, his 25 years of ordination and 30 years of profession here with us at Endeavour Hills.

Not long ago the Bishop of Parramatta Bishop Vincent Nguyen, wrote a reflection on the role of Priesthood as the Catholic Church in Australia travels forward from the recent trials and tribulations of the Royal Commission.

In his writings he urges the priests of Australia to embark on a leadership based on service, not hierarchy, to move beyond the status quo and take the risk of going to the peripheries. He emphasises that our church must be for the poor and stand on the side of the poor. Our priests need to walk with the outcast and with the vulnerable. Bishop Vincent speaks of a return to the message of the gospel and an ability to walk with people in the complexity of their lives. He wants his priests to be agents of hope, to be human, and to assist people by cultivating faith and trust in God. Truly Tim was a priest that embodied all these qualities.

In these words I have endeavoured to provide a lens through which we encountered Tim; but each of you will have your own memories, your own experiences and your own unique reflection on how Tim touched your life. It will great to share them after this ceremony.

But perhaps you might agree with some of the sentiments expressed by Linda and Gerard Daly when I asked them what they would like to share. In part they wrote,

“We cherished his friendship, we experienced joy and sorrow with him. We did not see him as a priest who was a friend but rather a friend who happened to be a priest. He gave support not only to us but to our children. He gave us strength and stood by us when things were too hard to bear. His pastoral care was second to none. He was passionate, vulnerable and down to earth. He was our buddy and we loved him very much”

And so now Tim your St Paul Apostle family bids you farewell; and we join with God the Father when he says “Come now good and faithful servant, enter into the gates of heaven and enjoy the eternal reward you so richly deserve!”

Tim we love you, and may your soul and all the souls of the faithful departed rest in peace – AMEN.