

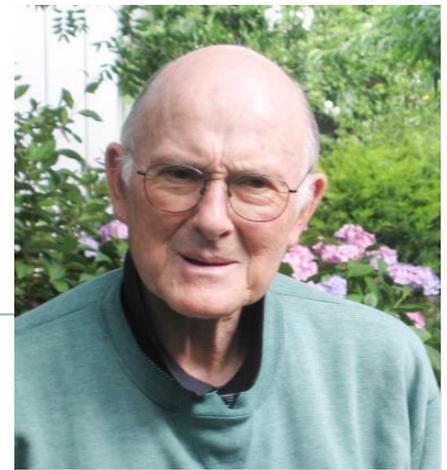
Fr John Bernard Cunningham PE

17 April 1934 to 13 July 2013

Funeral Mass : Ss Peter and Paul Church, South Melbourne, 19 July 2013

Readings: Revelation 22:3-5; Romans 14:7-12; Luke: 24:13-35

Entombment : Priests Crypt, Melbourne General Cemetery, Parkville



Introduction from

Fr Thang Vu

Parish Priest, Catholic Parish of Ivanhoe

The words that follow speak for themselves and represent a strongly felt desire by Ivanhoe parishioners, school families and many others to record the many appropriate and wonderful things said about former Parish Priest of the Catholic Parish of Ivanhoe, Fr John Cunningham, following his death on Saturday 13th July 2013 after an illness. Like the Shoes of the Fisherman his boots are hard to fill, but the legacies of lay participation and collegiality he helped establish and encouraged in Ivanhoe remains here strongly as a positive force in the living, evolving, church, together with the parish values his personal life humbly represented; Inclusiveness, Hospitality, Mission and Service. I am grateful for the encouragement he gave me when considering the challenge of replacing him on his retirement, and for his support since then. With thanks from us all, may he now rest in a very well-earned peace.

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available on the website
ivanhoecatholics.com:

- Extracts of 'The Last Word' - a conversation with Fr John on retirement, 20 January 2011—video available to download
- Collated funeral notices

The Last Word

*Ivanhoe Parish Website,
Friday 19 July 2013*

Fr John Cunningham's remains were entombed in the Priest's Crypt at Melbourne General Cemetery this afternoon, just around the corner from the Elvis Presley memorial. Given his sense of inclusiveness that would surely have been very welcomed by John. At the Ivanhoe Parish Vigil Service last night and the Funeral Mass this morning at his first parish of Saints Peter & Paul in South Melbourne many fitting things were said about his humility and greatness as a priest, the word 'great' not being one he would have approved. After all that was said of him at the Vigil last night covering his life as a priest and towards the end of the Service John was given a 'right of reply' via a video interview of him recorded by Sr Carmel Butler just before his retirement in 2011. He said things of honesty and wisdom that were both simple and profound. He spoke very optimistically of a future church with a high level of lay participation. At the very end of the interview and in response to a question about the people of the Catholic Parish of Ivanhoe he said with feeling what wonderful people they are, then looking at straight at the camera concluded by saying to everyone, very poignantly and prophetically, the words that are often most difficult to say, "I love you too".

From Vicar General - Mgr Greg Bennet

Dear Friends,

FATHER JOHN BERNARD CUNNINGHAM PE – RIP

Early this morning (Saturday 13 July 2013), Father John Cunningham PE died peacefully at St. Bernadette's Aged Care, Sunshine North.

Fr John was born in Derry, Ireland on 17th April 1934 and studied for the priesthood as a student for the Archdiocese of Melbourne at St. John's College, Waterford being ordained on 14th June 1959 at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Waterford before arriving in Melbourne in November 1959.

Fr John served as an Assistant Priest at Saints Peter and Paul, South Melbourne (1960-1965), Sacred Heart, Oakleigh (1965-1969), Corpus Christi, Kingsville (1969-1973) and as Parish Priest at Good Shepherd, Mulgrave (1973-1980), joined the Parish Team at Airport West (1980-1985), assisted at West St. Albans/Kings Park (1985-1989), as Parish Administrator of Sacred Heart Newport (1989), Parish Priest of the new parish of Keilor Downs (1989-2001), Parish Priest of the Ivanhoe Cluster 2001 until his retirement as Pastor Emeritus in 2011.

Fr John will be well remembered as a thoughtful, encouraging, humble and faithful priest. Throughout his fifty four years of priesthood, he was always prepared to engage with new pastoral projects, to place his trust in his co-workers and lay people. He empowered others by allowing them to embrace the gift of baptism and to bring their gifts to the service of others. He loved to read, to listen attentively, to share ideas, to gently form and to reflect deeply upon the Church. He did not accept thanks or praise easily, but chose the pathway of humility. Fr John understood human frailty and was attuned to the action of God's grace witnessed in the gift of friends and those with whom he had shared his pilgrim way.

On the day of his death, we give thanks for the young man John Cunningham who chose to leave his homeland and to be ordained for the Archdiocese of Melbourne enriching others by his kindness, trust, generosity, friendship and priestly witness.

Grant, we pray, O Lord,

That the soul of Fr John, your servant and priest

Whom you honoured with sacred office

While he lived in this world,

May exult for ever in the glorious home of heaven.

May he rest in peace.

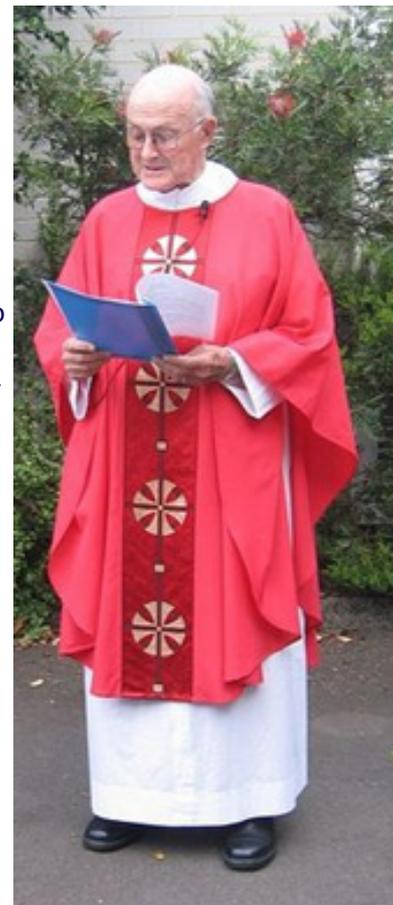
Fr John Cunningham

Ivanhoe Parish Website—John Costa with thanks to Margaret Colangeli and others

Our much valued and loved former Parish Priest of ten years died peacefully this morning following an illness.

Fr John Bernard Cunningham was a humble and private man, though to most that didn't conceal the very faithful, thoughtful priest and caring pastor he was, driven in his mission by Christ's example. Greatly informed and influenced as well by his many experience of life, across time and two continents, through both difficult and happier periods, he was responsive and sensitive to the realities of humanity, being ever inclusive, supportive and encouraging. So often highly relevant personal experiences linked to Gospel readings brought his homilies powerfully and helpfully to life in accessible and contemporary ways. Sharing, more than preaching, he would characteristically then conclude with the question "does that make sense? - which almost invariably it did.

Many people bring stories of John Cunningham. They start in Derry Ireland where he was born on 17 April 1934 and where as a youth he enjoyed playing soccer. His journey to the priesthood began in 1952 when he left behind parents, brothers, sisters and friends for St John's College seminary in Waterford, Southern Ireland, spending the next seven years studying for the priesthood, followed by ordination in 1959. Departing then for Australia his first appointment as Assistant Priest was to St Peter and St Paul's, South Melbourne (1959 - 1966). This was followed by Sacred Heart Parish Oakleigh (1965 - 1969), Annunciation Parish, Kingsville (1969 - 1973), PP Good Shepherd Parish, Mulgrave (1973-1980), Airport West Parish (1980 - 1986), Resurrection Parish, St Albans West (1985 - 1989), Administrator Sacred Heart Parish, Newport (1989), Caretaker of St Anthony Parish, Melton South (1989), PP Mary McKillop Parish, Keilor Downs (1989 - 2001), PP at the Ivanhoe Cluster and in 2005 The Catholic Parish of Ivanhoe (2001 - 2011).



Ivanhoe, 2010

Comments such as those that follow from parishioners during his time as Ivanhoe Parish Priest say more than mere chronology; "Some are physically young but mentally old.

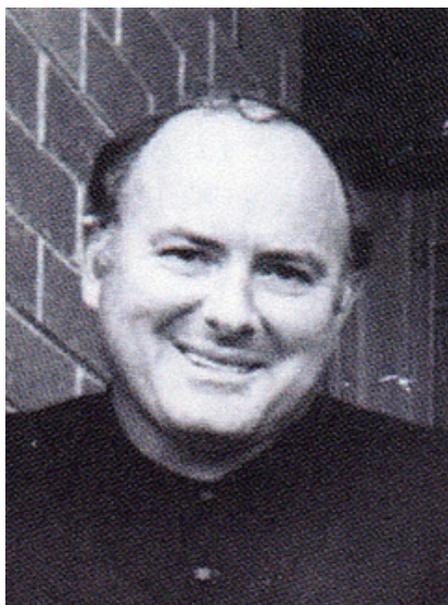
John by his own description was 'an old man', but mentally young and alert to the world, and in the church somewhat ahead of his time"; Not being highly social in public by nature Fr John would often exit functions after a respectable time with the words "I must get home to the wife and kids". Despite strong faith his wicked humour sometimes also lead him to ask parting congregation members after Mass such rhetorical questions as "what are you doing this afternoon - no more of this religious stuff I hope?"; and in a different vein one commented that "Humility and compassion are truly visible traits in John and he does so much for so many with little fanfare and no kudos".



Fr John has always shown particular respect for young people, concern for their needs and openness to their thinking. He re-established what for 6 years became a very successful Young Peoples' Group in Ivanhoe Parish. Recognising the reality of the times he listened to them more than preached, and responded thoughtfully and by his living example. At the 50th Anniversary of his ordination, which he was initially very reluctant to publicly celebrate, a Youth Mass actively engaging young people in liturgy, music and readings and even Gospel commentary, to his delight packed the church with young people and their families, and to his further surprise and gratitude some members of his family from Ireland. Honest messages from youth written to him on a large farewell card then poignantly made very clear what was already well acknowledged, that they greatly valued and respected Fr John. People of all ages, to whom he equally ministered, similarly appreciated his ever ready and non-judgmental support. Photo: Palm Sunday 2010 Ivanhoe Parish.

*With Michael Thomas,
Mary Immaculate Church Foyer, Ivanhoe*

Fr John Cunningham—Ivanhoe Parish Website (continued)



*Good Shepherd Parish
Mulgrave, 1973-1980*

With family long left behind in Ireland Fr John was fortunate to be befriended by a particular family from an earlier parish who duly 'adopted' him into their fold, allowing him to share something of regular family life, in the process also very much helping to care for him, and particularly in his declining health following retirement.

Amongst the many things that Fr John will likely be gratefully remembered for at Ivanhoe parish are his embodiment of the Parish values of Inclusiveness, Mission and Service, and to the extent possible for a private person, also hospitality. Another that has arguably had an even greater and more lasting impact on the Parish, and that might hopefully encourage like behaviour across the wider church, was to be so directly inspired by Christ in all that he did. In that context it was commented that "John has led and supported the involvement of the laity with the management of the parish in a collaborative model, decisions are shared and in his absence, the Parish Leadership Team manages the parish.

While some are concerned about the future of the church John was optimistic that the future of the church is one of strength for the followers of Christ. The formal church as it was in the past has gone. The current generation has different views, expectations and relationships with the church compared to its predecessors".

Another person similarly commented that "For my part, I had already recognised

that John was a priest who totally believed that we are 'the church' as had been set out so clearly in the documents of Vatican II". Also encouragingly Fr John was a 'yes' rather than 'no' priest, gladly welcoming and empowering those prepared to share responsibility. His passionate belief in the 'people of God', community, and importance of inclusive participation in church life by lay people has noticeably moulded the Ivanhoe Community as it continues down this path.

Much can be said about John, his wisdom and his impact. Here is a further quote; "I was complimentary about our new Parish priest and commented that we were fortunate to have John who appeared to be 'one of the good guys'. No sooner had the words been uttered when the newly appointed person informed me that this was a terrible thing to say about someone. This was my personal introduction to John Cunningham which reflected not only his wonderful sense of humour but also his humility.....I thank John for his unconditional acceptance, prayers, care and concern for both myself and my family".

Towards retirement Fr John was adamant that this would be dependent on the parish finding a suitable successor. Around the time of such appointment John subsequently looked particularly pleased. A further debt of gratitude is owed to John by parishioners for helping to attract the best possible replacement. We are most fortunate.

No one is perfect and John would be the first to admit his warfare with technology, particularly church microphones. As for computers he felt destined to remain in terror of them despite best efforts by some persistent parish Primary School students to tame his fear. As a priest who ministered to many at their deaths John was very comfortable with the idea of death. He sometimes spoke of the words he would ideally like for his own eulogy - "He came, he was here, he left".

To sum up simply, the following familiar words seem appropriate. "I was hungry you gave me food, I was thirsty you gave me something to drink. I was naked and you gave me clothing. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me." Together with all else he did and for whom, John ministered well and with care to the sick and dying, and was well prepared for his own death. A debt of gratitude is owed by many. May Fr John Bernard Cunningham now rest in peace.

We express our sympathy to Fr John's family in Ireland, and to his 'adoptive family' in Melbourne.



Derry, Ireland 1934

Denis Minogue and Anne Murphy, Airport West

Extract from Vigil Service

I am Denis Minogue and together with Paul Hassell and John Cunningham we formed the first Team Ministry in Australia at Airport West Parish in 1980. I have been asked by John's carer, Margaret Colangeli, to speak about John – especially his time at Airport West.

John Cunningham was born in Derry, Northern Ireland on April 17th 1934 to Kathleen & Felix Cunningham. They lived in a modest home in Great James Street. He was one of 11 children.

In his early teenage years he excelled in a number of sporting activities – soccer, Gaelic football and running.

In 1952 he entered St John's Seminary in Waterford and studied for the priesthood for 7 years - being ordained on the 14th June 1959. Soon he sailed out from London on the SS Orion for Australia – arriving at Station Pier in November 1959 where he was escorted by Bishop Fox to his first appointment at St Peter & Paul's, South Melbourne.

He spent 6 years there before moving to Sacred Heart Oakleigh in 1965. Then in 1969 he went to Kingsville for 5 years and then as Parish Priest in 1973 at Good Shepherd, Mulgrave. Gabrielle Sharman from Mulgrave fondly remembers the days when John opened the parishioners to ways of the recent Vatican Council II. It was to be the era of the laity and John willingly embraced the idea of the Church being the "People of God."

In 1980 he made the step to become part of a new ministry– the Team Ministry at Airport West, Keilor, Tullamarine, Keilor Park.

A number of priests in the Melbourne Church had been discussing ways of working together in a large parish and living some form of community. When the opportunity came for them to start a Team Ministry, Paul Hassell and myself – just young priests at the time - needed a priest who was already a Parish Priest, well respected and more importantly had a vision of Church in a new era. We approached John who wholeheartedly welcomed the opportunity and in January 1980 we established the first Parish Team Ministry in Australia.

We quickly involved the laity in being a very active part of our parish with the establishment of Liturgy Groups, Baptism and Marriage Preparation Teams, Adult Education and Scripture Groups, Parish Council and Finance Teams, parental involvement in all sacraments, catechetics and very strong partnership with the teachers in the parish schools.

The former priest's house, the presbytery, became the parish house. It was an open door to all – for social occasions and pastoral needs. Initially we survived without a housekeeper. John took on the role of head chef and Paul and myself attending to the other domestic duties. The domestic duties part only lasted for about 12 months – when we decided the place was so disorganised we needed a 'house creeper'.

Paul and myself were the "doers". John was the heart and spiritual father of the Team. He listened to our stories and shared his own brokenness and made hospitality the key to community. On Friday nights we would review our week and pray together at home. The meal would be prepared by John and bishops, priests and parishioners came to share at our table. Generous John would always over provide and on one such occasion with a whole pot of spaghetti let over he tossed the contents of the pot into the garden. The next morning to the amazement of all there was the miracle of the "spaghetti tree".

John's presence was special – even though at some social occasions it was very brief – as many of you would know!

Paul eventually left priestly ministry, married and came to live at Ivanhoe. When he was dying John ministered to him and gave him great comfort.

Often when John spoke it was very cryptic and it required a sharp mind to decipher his message... humorous or spiritual.

He was generous to a fault – giving away most of his possessions. He lived very frugally. Anne and myself went to see him a couple of weeks ago in the nursing home. He was lucid at the time and Anne said to him "What is your room here like?" He answered "A room is a room is a room". Margaret Colangeli relates the story that he even gave away his glasses to a lady in the nursing home. Just as well he didn't give away his teeth.

During his time at Airport West Parish he met up with the Colangeli family – John, Margaret and their children Paul and John from Tullamarine. The Colangeli children took a great liking to John and that friendship would be one that endured and gave John a sense of home and belonging. Margaret's grandchildren – Gianluca (photo left), Mia (photo centre) and Freya looked on Fr John as a special part of their family.

Young Mia wrote this about Fr John –

"Johnny the Priest"

One day when John was in his 20's

He became a priest and left Ireland and came to Australia. It took lots of day on a ship.

He worked as a priest in Australia

When Johnny arrived my Nonna got to know him.

One day when me and my Nonna knew him a lot, I started to call him "Johnny".

I think he has a good job and he does a good job as a priest!"



On his 25th Anniversary of Priesthood – instead of taking the big overseas trip– he spent six weeks working with the men at Corpus Christi, Greenvale a hostel for homeless men - listening to their pain and carting bricks to help build their new chapel.

John was part of the priest's bushwalking group "Peregrinating in Salubrious Surrounds" which included the likes of Barry Hughes, Frank Bellett, Grant O'Neill, Bill Gill, Bob Wood and our intrepid leader, Vin Corbett. John was more the 'billy boy' – the cook – rather than the 'bush basher'.

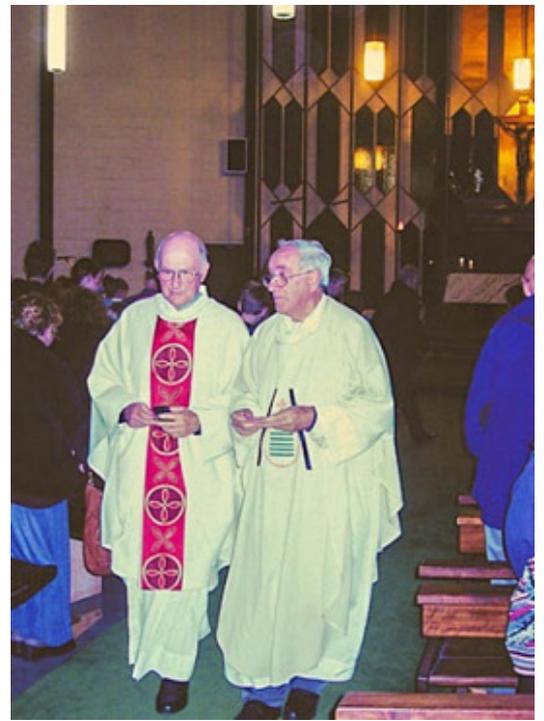
In 1985 John moved to St Alban's West with Bob Wood for four years. Then he was appointed administrator in 1989 at Sacred Heart Newport, followed by another short stay at St Anthony's Melton South.

In 1989 he went to Mary MacKillop, Keilor Downs, which was a new parish. He established the new Parish and then came to Ivanhoe in 2001 where he completed his active days as a parish priest.

His 54 years of priesthood were lived in serving those who struggled with life. He had his own struggles and doubts. Now he rests in peace and will happily occupy just a small room in the Father's house – along with a kitchen.

Anne Murphy: I was a teacher at the Parish School when John came to Airport West. To conclude the story of his time at Airport West, John loved many different kinds of music especially folk music where he could find a spiritual message. One day he told me one of his favourite songs was written by Eric Bogle – called "Scraps of Paper". He said - as Christians we find scraps of paper, snippets from life that can reflect the message from the Gospels..

I invite you to listen to "Scraps of Paper". (Recording played)



*With Fr Len Thomas,
Mary Immaculate Church, Ivanhoe*

Letter to John from Paul McEntee—Former Principal of Mother of God School

Read at Vigil Service

Dear John

When I last saw you I was resigned to the fact that it would be our last coffee together as I was heading overseas and you were heading somewhere else.

When I was told of your passing I was heading towards Ireland and so I did what was expected and travelled to your last post in Ireland. Waterford the city of protection from the wind and the water was where you were ordained over fifty years ago. How very fitting for a man who was a protector of many.

However, before we reached Waterford we spent the night in Limerick. In the pub that night after a brief conversation with the lead member of the band- there were two of them, they dedicated a song in memory of John- 'Far away in Australia" At the conclusion, we raised our glasses and toasted " A great man- John Cunningham". I don't think John would have appreciated the use of the word great but it wasn't his choice this time and I felt proud to be able to take his name back to its origins. The Irish crowd appreciated the fact that one of them had made Australia a better place for all.

The next day I visited The Cathedral of the Holy Trinity & St Patricks and attempted to realize what it would have been like for you so many years ago to leave here for Australia, but unfortunately I could not envision the experience. The Cathedral is situated in a cobblestone street facing a multitude of shops and people, no gardens, no fences and no obstacles between the Church and the people. This was your Church John , because you always said your service was to the people who you didn't see in the Church building. Upon leaving after I had lit a candle in front of the statue of Our Lady, who I felt like John, was servant to the Lord in all that they did and I gave the money to the beggar at the Cathedral's arched doorway, unlike John I didn't give her every euro I had on me.

Farewell John, and like one of the 72 disciples that was sent by the Lord , he will be more than pleased that one sent so far from his homeland did triumph over the evil forces of Australia and yes your salvation was assured many years ago on the banks of the Suir river here in Waterford.

Pat Kelly

Extract from Vigil Service

I first met John Cunningham in the middle of the 1970's when we were guests at a St Patrick's Day dinner. Now you would probably be aware that such dinners involve several toasts to the saint and that occasion was no exception. Whether by a concern for correct political balance or mischief, John decided a toast to the Queen would be in order. He was never invited back. There was that bit of mischief in John reflected in his many sayings.

I had few contacts with him over the years until he arrived in Ivanhoe as Parish Priest.

In 2001 John stood on this sanctuary and advised that our Archbishop had asked him to look after the Ivanhoe Cluster. He had agreed to it for 12 months and proceeded to give us a litany of his ills and ailments to reinforce his short tenure. Well the short tenure lasted a decade with an impact and effects within the parish and well beyond.

I have been asked to reflect on John's life in Ivanhoe in the light of the beatitudes. Before doing that, let me recall some of his sayings. If you heard his one and a half homilies at Mass, the first after the gospel and the half before Mass ended you will recall.

"Does that make sense?"

And if the response was a little slow in coming.

"Well it makes sense to me anyway."

"What do I do next? - with a glance to Merle"

And, occasionally a reference to myself – I'll ask Pat Kelly about that.

And at functions when due to leave:

"I must get home to the wife and kids."

But you may not have heard this from him so often.

"When I began this I thought it was about saving my soul. I now know
It is about making a difference."

Well John Cunningham made an incredible difference. And that difference in regards to some of the traditional beatitudes and what might be today's beatitudes might be something like this.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: John's concern and support for those who are hurt, lonely, broken, poor was evident in his words and actions. He knew of hurt and how a cup of coffee, a conversation or a handout could help mend the person. At least until he saw them again. He volunteered to work with those with mental and other illnesses both in the physical and pastoral ways. A cleaner and a priest. In all manner of things, John was generous in the extreme.

Blessed are they that mourn. His dedication to those who were ill, dying, or in mourning was exceptional. He had the ability of soothing and comforting all. Each person in need was supported as though they were the only one. There are many in Ivanhoe and elsewhere who remember the care, love and support provided unselfishly.

Blessed are the meek. The children. "I learn so much from the children" he said, "they are so wise" and then go on to relate a story of his involvement with one or more children. And they so respected Fr John.

I know John would permit me to make a new beatitude, in fact if consulted he would more than likely insist on it. My first modern beatitude is "*Blessed are they that provide inclusiveness*". John was inclusiveness itself. No one was excluded from his life, his compassion, his understanding, his support, the church. Inclusiveness lives on as one of our parish values which provides us an ongoing challenge to emulate John in our approach to others.

Hospitality, another of our parish values. John welcomed all without question. There were no inquiries, no what if's, just welcome. A public welcome from the sanctuary for visitors at Mass. A private welcome to all he met.

The 10 years in Ivanhoe included some significant events in John's life and in the life of the parish.

He promoted the move from the cluster of 3 parishes to the one Catholic Parish of Ivanhoe.

He celebrated 50 years as a priest.

He encouraged us to learn of today's church, how its role had changed in our lifetimes. We were no longer immersed in a uni-cultural church centred environment as we were as young people but are now members of a church in a secular and multi-cultural society.

He had us take training in Communion Services in case it was needed. One Sunday the supply priest did not arrive. The Communion service was held. There was no reaction, just the people gathering to join the Lord.

With much scheming from the Colangeli family, John's family in Ireland, Len Thomas and many parishioners, John travelled to Ireland. His friend and fellow priest Len Thomas accompanied John, we think in the dual roles of companion and chaperone. No one was prepared to imagine John lost in an international airport.

John was not always restrained in his comments. The federal government's stimulus program provided new halls for our schools and Kathy Lowe, Principal at St Bernadettes was determined that their hall would be called the Cunningham Centre. John objected. Kathy won. The hall is a monument to John's time in the parish and especially his relationship with the schools.

So to draw some of this together as I try in this short time to describe the essence of Fr John Cunningham.

John was a true Christian. He got to people. He affected them. He made a difference.

He impressed the young and the old. The capable and the needy. The free standing and those with brokenness. Children related to him and he to them.



Pat Kelly—continued

He may have been advanced in years but he was youthfully progressive. He worked diligently to form the parish from the cluster of the three former parishes. He promoted a collaborative leadership model and put it in place including a governance regime that covered his absence from the parish.

John clearly did not want to leave Ivanhoe or retire but his health left him little choice. He applied the same dedication to the overall approach to the future of this parish as he paid to the individuals in his pastoral care. He was saddened by the problems afflicting the church but optimistic that not only would it survive but it would grow and flourish. But it was not the church that he or I were born to but a new church focused on care for those in need and inclusive of all comers.

He worried about his successor and spoke openly of his pleasure when Thang accepted the challenge and was subsequently appointed Parish Priest.

John clearly lived by the simple philosophy. Find Christ in the people in daily life.

When I began this I thought it was about saving my soul. I now know it is about making a difference.

Vale Fr John

Memories of Fr John—Chris Dixon

Funeral Mass

Fr. John's final appointment was to the Ivanhoe Cluster following the sudden death of Fr John Rogan at 58 with the Cluster only 18 months old. John's claimed one year appointment turned into a ten year tenure. Week One at Ivanhoe saw him telling the congregations of all his ills and ailments and then stating that with all these issues "we (Ivanhoe) couldn't be blamed if he was carried from here in a box".

John encouraged and developed collaborative leadership that allowed much to happen; including -after much planning and consultation the amalgamation of the three parishes into one, and -planning for the future pastorally, property wise and financially. Collaborative leadership only broke down in one area, when it involved John personally. But, following epic organisational effort – we got him to Ireland, thanks to the Cunningham family, the Colangelis, parishoners and Fr Len Thomas.

Similarly celebrations of his 50 years of Priesthood ended successfully, but were not easy to arrange given John's modesty. As stated last night at the vigil John saw his test as "When I began this I thought it was about saving my soul. I now know it is about making a difference"

His real difference making was at the interpersonal level rather than the Administrative level.

1. He was there for people in their times of need.
 - when they were mourning
 - when they were in hospital
 - when they were dying, empathising with the dying, really journeying with them
 - when they asked him in Bourke and Lygon Streets for a donation.

His generosity with time and money was legendary.

2. His commitment to young people including our youth group (more comfortable there socially than at Parish functions).
 - our schools. Almost every week he visited every one of the 20 classrooms across the 3 Parish schools, talking and learning from the children. Then passing this knowledge on to us in his homilies.

SO HE PASSED HIS TEST HE MADE A DIFFERENCE.

We therefore remember a humble and private man who expressed a sensitive humanity.

We remember his

- (1) his contrariness
- (2) his efforts to keep the authorities on their toes.
- (3) His sayings and questions

"Does that make sense"? (and his answer – Well it makes sense to me anyway)

His "What do I do next"?

His "Must get home to the wife and kids"

And his favourite answer

I'm old and decrepit

I will conclude by thanking all who have assisted Fr John during his life but particularly over the last 12 years.

Special mention to Fr Len Thomas for his supportive role, and the Colangeli family for being his family in Australia.

John remained humble and human.

John was an inclusive, Vatican 2, Yes not No, priest.

REST IN WELL DESERVED PEACE JOHN



Funeral Mass Homily— Fr Maurie Cooney

1. There's been a collage of words of appreciation from children at St Bernadette's West Ivanhoe in John's several rooms since the Golden Anniversary of his ordination 4 years ago. One of the children wrote:

"Fr John is a great Priest ... he breaks the Bread really well!" '...and they recognized the Lord at the Breaking of the Bread'.

Being Priest is how every one of us has known John Cunningham. And he has helped us to: recognise Christ ... amongst us ; recognise Christ ... saving us ;recognise Christ ... making us who we are and are becoming:

Yes, that is who we are and are becoming - the Body of Christ: how many times have we heard him come at that and get inside that from so many different angles!!

2. This Emmaus story says so much about John and his convictions, and about John's and our life in Christ: the questioning and puzzling over what it's all about and doing that with us and so many others, so many different 'types' who are on the journey together. In the Emmaus story there is the Scripture, the Word of God that intrigues and challenges and reveals and calls ... and always promises.

And the Eucharist, of course: in its Word and Sacrifice and Meal, taking hold of us and binding us with one another in Christ.

John's stories / reflections / musings / commentaries - somewhere there are piles and piles of books and loose scraps of paper with his jottings and meanderings – they ensured that we never presumed to know it all or that we had grasped it all: as obscure as his remarks may have been at times, Christ and the Body of Christ are so real.

On one of my last visits I asked John if there was anything I could do for him: "You could clean your plate and then we could go to the beach," he said. Is this the dementia showing through? Or is this one of his cryptic insights that I'll see the meaning of sometime later?

I went on: "John, you've done so much good for so many people in so many ways." And he said, "Well that's a load of b*****!" That wasn't the dementia; and it certainly wasn't cryptic!

And the setting for that Emmaus story is the journey: from Ireland to Melbourne, and then to those Parishes and communities we've recalled, in each of which there is so much to tell: and always that we're doing this together, this being and becoming the Body of Christ.

3. John has been very much a Priest of the Archdiocese: a presence in all sorts of diocesan gatherings and projects – leading a Priest who didn't know John closely to comment 'he's been one of the wisdom figures for us'.

He held Archbishops and Bishops and Vicars General – 'the powers that be' as he referred to them - in some esteem because of the roles they had and the opportunities that were theirs for leading us to becoming more the People of God in these new times.

And because of that there are Archbishops and Bishops and Vicars General who have experienced the passion of John's frustration at times ... I think they call it 'venting'.

All the while he had such deep appreciation for the care they had given to him.

He said that the reason he chose to come to Melbourne was that he had been approached by 'the powers that be' of the day to undertake further study – in the area of Canon Law. That was enough motivation to choose Melbourne on the spot, he said. Despite that early aversion, he knew very well the final words in the Code of Canon Law: "...the salvation of souls, which must always be the supreme law in the Church, is to be kept before one's eyes". And that's largely how he did his ministry – doing what he could in deep compassion to ease what was weighing on others heavily. And calling us to recognise that we do this together, and 'you do so much that I can't do, and you do much better than I can do'.

4. As well as changing locations along the way, life itself is the journey, too, isn't it?

Along the way John experienced intimately the flaws and darkness of the journey.

He was deeply sorry for the hurts he saw that he had caused some others – who all the while saw the beautiful goodness in this man, and loved being part of that.

Their goodness to him had him awed in utter humility and gratefulness.

He travelled to Ireland 4 years ago to speak with his family: one, to say 'good-bye' for he knew that was his last opportunity to travel like that; and two, to speak apologies to them one-by-one for leaving so long ago and not giving them a helping hand along the way to which every one of them said quizzically 'What?'

5. He was aware of that line in the Second Reading "We shall all have to stand before the judgment seat of God";

and we also shared some lines from an Irish moral theologian: 'We may not be able to forgive ourselves, others may not forgive us, history may not forgive us. But God does – and not conditionally. It is not only if we have first shined and combed ourselves and put on our best suits and made ourselves respectable enough to appear in his presence that he does so. He does it anyway.' [Vincent Mac-Namara, *The Truth in Love*, 191] If we had to get all of it right before God accepts us, we are without hope. And we are people of great hope. And so we laugh and love and enjoy: ... John's been great company for us, hasn't he!

6. Ah, yes, "the life and death of each of us has its influence on others".

The Vicar General wrote last Saturday about John: '... a thoughtful, encouraging, humble and faithful priest. Throughout his fifty four years of priesthood, he was always prepared to engage with new pastoral projects, to place his trust in his co-workers and lay people. He empowered others by allowing them to embrace the gift of baptism and to bring their gifts to the service of others. He loved to read, to listen attentively, to share ideas, to gently form and to reflect deeply upon the Church. He did not accept thanks or praise easily, but chose the pathway of humility. Fr John understood human frailty and was attuned to the action of God's grace witnessed in the gift of friends and those with whom he had shared his pilgrim way.'

7. For John, in the end ... and all along the way ... it is also the life and death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that has its influence on us. And so our First Reading: He will see the Lord face to face, and the Lord's name will be written on his forehead. It will never be night again, and he will not need lamplight or sunlight, because the Lord God will be shining on him. He will reign for ever and ever. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!