

## Memories of Some Priests of St Teresa's, Karori

The Lumbs came to Karori at the start of 1969. The new church was built and opened with Fr Herlihy as PP and Fr Cahill as his curate. Mass was said at St Patrick's Makara too.

Fr Herlihy (otherwise known as The Mons) was a tall man, with quite a loud voice, sometimes a little curt in manner and, to a young mother newcomer, a bit formidable. To my great embarrassment he offered to give a "mother-to-be" blessing when my second child was imminent. It was clearly an offer I couldn't refuse. He did home visits around the parish and for me this was a source of anxiety, especially latterly when we had three small children about the house, and their friends, turning our house into a minefield of balls, buzzy bees and dinky cars, for a man with an upright stance and a touch of arthritis.

Although it would be fair to say he had a low tolerance for small children and babies who squawked during Mass, it was during his time as parish priest that the Children's Christmas Mass was started, that has since become a tradition. Here confident children get speaking parts as Mary, Angel Gabriel etc, while the rest take part as a flock of angels or a gang of shepherds, and there's a real live baby Jesus. One year no family had a baby young enough for the role and as part of the notice from the pulpit about upcoming rehearsals for the Nativity the Mons said as a parish, we could have managed to produce a baby on time.

The day we had an earthquake during Mass he demonstrated his confidence in the Lord by ignoring it and carrying on. This was the era of Parish Socials (possibly on or near St Patrick's day) with shared food and home-grown entertainment. Many people had their party pieces, for example Fr Hehir played reels on his violin. The Mons' party piece was a humorous poem called "Maginty" which was much requested and vigorously delivered. The script was that the speaker was in love with a beautiful girl (much described) who turned him down and married Maginty. ("Oh how I envied Maginty" was the last line of each verse). Then Maginty died and our author married his dream, the widow, joyfully. He finds she has turned into a nagging shrew and so Maginty was still envied - this time for resting in peace.

Mons was a strong supporter of CWL and its chaplain for a long time. He gave lifts to CWL Conferences to CWL members. Dorothy Smith (then CWL president) said she kept her Rosary handy on one trip to Palmerston North, but at least could be sure they wouldn't be late.

Fr Cahill was a lively, youngish priest when we arrived. He was physically fit and active, with a big interest in construction and cars. He had inherited a garage full of tools from the late Robert Flynn (a builder) which he used to do running repairs around the parish plant and the school. He is credited (I heard) with standing over the builder of the new church and suggesting they put plenty of reinforcing in the walls. His interest in cars lead him to give the nuns driving lessons (which in one case he claimed to regret, after one ex-pupil drove him through central Sydney). He was always happy to tinker with his cars, listen to the engines of any second-hand car a parishioner was thinking of buying and offer tips on maintenance or repair. He had a well-worn boiler suit and a battered towelling sunhat that could be seen on the church roof when he was trying to trace yet another leak, or clean out the leaves and seagull feathers blocking the drains of the "hidden gutters", or touch up the paint.

He oversaw the fund raising for the organ's installation. I think he may have done duty at Scott Base one summer - mostly because I can't think of any other reason for him to be visiting one of Tom's colleagues (Peter Mac. who had crossed Antarctica with Hillary during the International Geophysical Year). This was the era of formal black suits for priests and Fr Cahill made the mistake of sitting on the cat's chair. He got covered in white cat fur so Peter's wife - a pragmatic housekeeper -ran the vacuum over him before he left.

He was an Army Chaplain and on one deployment up north was part of the troops called out to try and save a pod of beached whales. He told us how involved one got with the creatures, and, how on this trip

he found his pastoral duties were consoling tough young soldiers who were distressed, mourning when 'their' whale didn't make it.

He was very popular with the school children and should he cross the playground during break time, was either mobbed or involved in a game of soccer. He developed a tradition that at the end of the summer term, he would take the current Form 2s on an all-day picnic with their form teacher and some press-ganged parents, as chaperones and kitchen hands.

As the Mons got older, and so infirm that he took to a wheelchair, Fr Cahill became a vital support for him. Con-celebrated Masses after Vatican II meant the Mons could don his vestments and take part. Father Cahill was strong enough to wheel him down the steps from the Presbytery and back him up onto the altar. Apparently, there was one incident (Midnight Mass) when the Mons was forgotten and left sitting in the lounge in his vestments. He was retrieved by some men from the congregation. Mons was not happy. A story was told at Fr Cahill's memorial service how he and Fr Hehir decided to spruce up the inside of the old church by giving it a lick of paint overnight, changing it from cream to green. This rather surprised the Mons when he went in to say early morning Mass next day. When the Mons died, Fr Cahill was moved to Kaikoura.

Fr Hehir's death notice described him as 'beloved pastor' and mostly this was a fair description. His nickname for many years of 'the late Father Hehir' was also a true description, which he accepted with grace and good humour. It was a standing joke that St Teresa's had a priest who was frequently late for Mass. Mothers of small children found this useful as they could have extra time to get the tribe into their "Sunday best", but parishioners with a devotion to punctuality, or after-Mass plans, were not amused. Father Hehir's outstanding talents was his facility with words but he was also blessed with musical ability and a fine tenor voice. As the liturgy changed after Vatican II, he took on the tasks of teaching the congregation the new vernacular and modern hymns, using time at the beginning or end of mass (presumably adjusting his sermon so as not to overrun.) He also took on singing the "Exultate" during Holy Saturday Liturgy.

To make use of his skill with words Fr Hehir was appointed the Archdiocesan Director of Communication, which included broadcasts of Mass from St Teresa's purpose-built equipment\*. In the new era of vernacular liturgies, prayer services and house Masses, he often wrote for specific meetings. This could be nerve racking for the organisers as the Service/song sheets could well arrive at the same time as the congregation, and with the ink still damp. When Father wrote a funeral service for our family's still born twins it was not rushed, the parents' ideas were thoughtfully incorporated and a gentle consoling liturgy produced. I sent the Order of Service to an old friend back in Preston, who showed it to a priest friend of hers who was so impressed, that he wanted to use it himself. \*Karen here: newly engaged to my husband John (1976), who worked for NZBC National Radio at the time, he was the producer for the Mass broadcasts and I can remember sitting in the empty pews while the evening recording was taking place. The recording booth was where the Chapel now is, adjacent to the Sacristy.

Editing "WelCom" became Father's major task rather than radio Masses. He often drove the copy up to the printer in Wanganui to meet the deadline. He often said the early morning Mass because he'd have been up all night putting in the final touches. "WelCom" won awards. No surprise that Father preached a good sermon, thoughtful, spiritual and with a graceful humour included. It may have been his experience as a broadcaster that gave him the certainty that the core of the Mass took 23 minutes (information that he shared at a Family Group meeting once.) At heart he was a perfectionist, and took pains with what he produced - both factors that made for procrastination.

The "History of St Teresa's Church" for its 50th anniversary was never published, though the material was collected, the photos saved and placed on the Parish website by David Ross, after Fr Hehir's death. Musically he was famous for playing the violin, mostly in the Celtic style which went down well at parties. I once heard him play duets with John Smith\* (another local Celtic violinist) that were spine

tingling. His violin also featured with Johnny Douglas\* on piano, in a jazz group that performed in the parish. When he retired, Father Hehir made time to go to the Metropolitan Opera films showings at the Penthouse. The last time I saw him there, was for "Romeo and Juliet" when he confessed that he adored Anna Netrebko. He was generous with his time and had wide interests, which all contributed to a life over filled and sometimes with too much going on. But he also had charm in spades and so was usually forgiven any glitches.

The Good Friday Liturgies, were known throughout the Archdiocese as the Fr Hehir liturgy, people would travel, some great distances to be part of the 3pm at St Teresa's. Being in the choir, apart from the genuine solemnness of the liturgy, there was always a sense of occasion. One year, 1991/2 ? that sense of occasion for the Easter Vigil, resulted in some very anxious moments for the choir. Fr Hehir could not find his standard Exultate and we were all practiced and ready to go and he produced one, that afternoon, that when we heard it, could only be described as an early 'climate change moment'. The choir had not seen it before and I don't think neither had Fr Hehir, it was also a few verses longer than usual. He did eventually find his real one, which was written out later for us to follow by our choir director at the time, Roz Vogel. It is now a firm fixture in our Easter Music folders and is still sung by Johnny Celeste, to this day.

The Readers practicing for the Easter Ceremonies, would have also run into a few time delay difficulties. The 11am Saturday rehearsal call pre-Palm Sunday, Fr Hehir always delayed because he was rewriting the script to ensure, not only liturgical accuracies, but to add more interest in the 'production' to make it more accessible and authentic, to the congregation.

Fr Hehir was also involved in the Broadcast to Schools and he worked many times with Dad, Geoffrey de Lautour. Dad being a professional opera singer at the time and wanting proper rehearsal time; Fr Hehir, would turn up with the script, 5 minutes before going to air LIVE and that was that. Deep breath and off they went.

Fr John Berry was a mature vocation and had worked as a speech writer. This gave St Teresa's the benefit of good sermons, not too long and easily followed even when the subject was complicated. Father loved the visual side of church life. He often wore clerical dress even more relaxed lay styles had come in. He had an immense black cape for cold Karori days and would have fun doing a Dracula impression for the school children. He loved "the bells and smells" side of church services, and rich forms both of church art, vestments and music. All of which flowered after he moved from Karori to the cathedral. He was infamous for his generous use of incense. He also was a tremendous influence on the children in teaching them the importance of the Liturgy, point noted by one of the CWL members who used to teach at St Teresa's.

The Lumbs used to host exchange students for the Lions and, having a couple of Italian boys staying, decided that Sunday Mass at the cathedral with Father Berry would show we weren't rough colonials. They seemed impressed but pointed out that they didn't go every Sunday back home. To them it seemed a warm church both in atmosphere and temperature, but one of our guests had a problem with the incense irritating his asthma. Perhaps Fr Berry did overdo things a bit, but he was able and friendly.

Anne Lumb, Karen Saunders  
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\*John Smith violinist, Jennie Vowles' brother-in-law.

\* Johnny Douglas, NZBC National Programme broadcaster and well-known Wellington dance band musician.