

Fr Frank O'Loughlin – 24 Years. A Reflection

1 August 2020

My name is Kristin Allen and I am speaking on behalf of the Parish Leadership Group and the many parishioners who cannot be here tonight

Fr Frank is not expecting this but, like good Catholics, the Leadership group decided it was better to seek forgiveness after the event than ask for permission before.

Tonight, is Fr Frank's last mass as Parish Priest at Sacred Heart Sandringham. He will be around for the next few weeks, but this will be his last Mass as Parish Priest. Tonight, is also Fr Franks 51st anniversary of ordination.

In a time in which we are sad and anxious, this departure is indeed something that causes even more sadness. Yet tonight we will not dwell on that sadness nor will we increase our anxiety by endless questions. Tonight - we rejoice and are glad for what we have had in the last 24 years.

How lucky have we been. How blessed.

For 24 years we have celebrated and have been led by this erudite, scholarly man who has more degrees than I have fingers to count and who speaks fluently several modern languages other than English and fluently reads and writes a number of languages which are not modern. An internationally acclaimed author of over 20 books.

He is indeed a man of many parts and during the last, nearly quarter of a century, he has been our Parish Priest.

Some years ago at one of our celebrations, and let us face it there have been many of those over the last 24 years, a friend an ex student of Fr Frank's sang a rollicking song 'Pastor of the Flock'. He reprised this performance at Fr Franks celebration of his 50th. anniversary just a year ago. It was, of course, a parody on Master of the House from Les Misérables. Like all the best comedy there was, in the parody, a kernel of truth.

If were to try (foolishly) to encapsulate Fr Frank in one word, it would be, I think, as pastor.

He has been our pastor.

And what a wonderful pastor he has been.

For 24 years he has christened our children, given them their first communion and married many of them. He has sat with the dying, blessing

and anointing and celebrated lives and melded fractured families at funerals.

He has laughed with us and cried with us, he has sat at our tables and he has celebrated our lives. He has even told us jokes. He has gathered us together and unified us.

In all this he has been the one to lead us to The One. As he has told us so many times in one of his favourite quotes from St Paul; *“Nothing can ever outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord”*. In his sermons, in his chats in his seminars, in his 100 words of faith - in everything, he has held Christ up to us, in a way that is relevant and meaningful to our lives. Learned and erudite he may be, but also humble.

And so, we are joy filled because through this, and because of this, we have become a Christ centered community. We are both individually and as a community better people. We have learned to pray, and we have learnt to be Christ centered.

Of course there is sadness. Sadness that we cannot gather and say farewell especially for a man who just loves a celebration. But there will be a time when we can do that and we will gather and maybe Fr. Frank will even give us a joke or two.....

In his homily on the Sunday of the centenary of the parish Fr Frank said 'You! We! belong to Him. He has claimed us as his own, to be his witnesses. In Him we can glimpse now, and will eventually fully enjoy, a wonder and a permanent joy that we did not think even possible for us human beings. Glory be to Him now and forever! Glory be to Him here in Sandringham.'

And there is Glory to Him here in Sandringham because we have been blessed. And we are joy filled even in this difficult and anxious time.

For this we are deeply grateful and Fr Frank we thank you from the depths of our hearts.

We wish you well in the future

May God hold you in palm of his hand and bless you