

# RIP FR BARRY

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Fr Barry Stickland passed away on May 21, 2015 after a long illness. Fr Barry was born on June 19, 1942 in Ballarat and was ordained to the priesthood on August 23, 1985. He served in the Warrnambool Parish as Assistant Priest and in Ouyen and Timboon as Parish Priest. He retired from parish duties in January 2008

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR was the main celebrant of Fr Barry's Funeral Mass with his brother Fr Robert Stickland and the priests of the Diocese of Ballarat concelebrating. Family members and friends participated in the Mass with Fr Barry's sister, Denise placing the flowers on the casket.



**Fr Justin Driscoll spoke the homily and his words can be read below:**

*"Music is perhaps the most divine of all the art forms in that it creates an active, living and moving form that takes us for a while into another world." So writes John O'Donohue, who continues – "There is no doubt that music strikes a deep and eternal echo within the human heart. It is only when you become enraptured in great music that you begin to understand how deeply we are reached and nourished by sound."*<sup>1</sup>

St Bernard advised that those who wish to see ought "listen." Great music opens doorways into eternal presence. Even the philosophers acknowledge: *"The relationship between music and life is not only that of one language to another, it is also the relationship of the perfect world of listening to the whole world of seeing."*

Barry loved music – the tenors Mario Lanza and Enrico Caruso were amongst his favourites and he could talk for hours about them and often did! So too Yehudi Menuhin, who, when I read of him (after shocking Barry by admitting that I didn't know who he was), had characteristics that reminded me of Barry - a rich enigma: a gentle spirit tied to an implacable will: a perfectionist, an ascetic. It was said of Yehudi that he didn't just play the violin. Rather he seemed to regard music as a kind of prayer made audible, and mellifluous. Nothing in the world was so natural, or so pleasurable. Nothing was more indispensable. He said, *"The violin, through the serene clarity of its song, helps to keep our bearings in the storm, as a light in the night, a compass in the tempest, it shows us a way to a haven of sincerity and respect."*

Barry learnt the violin at first from Mr Payne and then from Sister Catherine of Sienna at the Convent of Mercy in Ballarat East. She had a significant influence on Barry's development, well beyond the realm of violin lessons. Catherine of Sienna recognised Barry's great musical ability and wanted him to further his studies with either Isaac Stern or at the London Royal College of Music. Because his circumstances didn't allow this to happen, Barry didn't pursue this path, instead he worked for the State Bank of Victoria for twenty-two years. In some ways, Barry always remained a banker!

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<sup>1</sup> John O'Donohue, *Eternal Echoes*. Exploring our hunger to belong, 79.



He had grown up in Ballarat having been born in June 1942, the eldest of Stanley and Julie May Stickland's three children, followed by Robert and Denise. He attended the Queen Street State School and then went on to Ballarat East High. During that time he went to the Victoria Street Baptist Church where his religious education began. Later, it was also in Victoria Street, but at St Alipius', where Barry was instructed by Fr Vin Fennelly, prior to his conversion to Catholicism. Perhaps not as dramatically as Nicodemus from the Gospel, who came to Jesus at night, Barry's journey of faith was also one that saw him responding to the Spirit's promptings which was continually leading him

into the light. Having said that his journey of faith wasn't as dramatic as that of Nicodemus – Barry however was still prone to the dramatic, as he was to also prone to being nostalgic, which as was once said – isn't what it used to be! But I note that Barry died during the week of prayer for Christian unity and that today's feast is of St Augustine of Canterbury, missionary to the English.

Most of us here, with the exception of Barry's family, have probably known Barry only in this third and final chapter of his life, spent as a priest of the Diocese of Ballarat. In realising his vocation, Barry had a sense that he would no longer be "in the world" and left off from the violin and other such worldly pursuits as he saw them. His seminary days were spent in Sydney at St Paul's National Seminary conducted for those who were then considered late vocations, with the likes of Denis Ryan, Gary Jones, John Speakman and Michael McKenna. A formative pastoral placement in Horsham with Fr Frank Madden was part of this experience and Frank continued to be a wise mentor to Barry, especially in the Ouyen years when Barry worried about the parish finances as they approached building a new church which he often told parishioners "would be the death of me!"

After ordination to the priesthood here in this Cathedral, almost thirty years ago, Barry was appointed as Assistant priest at St Joseph's Warrnambool where he joined Frs Paddy Bohan and Tom Kiniry in the presbytery. Barry loved Warrnambool and his years at St Joseph's but his asceticism was such that he always saw himself as both belonging and not belonging, not having known the sort of Western district Irish Catholicism that he found himself immersed in at Warrnambool. From Warrnambool Barry was appointed Parish Priest of Ouyen from where he often referred to himself as "the desert father." It was an enormous challenge for him, but he became very much at home in the Mallee amongst the communities of Patchewollock, Tempy, Underbool, Walpeup and Ouyen. He was something of the desert father – enjoying solitude and silence, at home with Thomas Merton and the Seven Storey Mountain, John of the Cross and the Dark Night of the Soul.

Timboon followed for Barry and the contrast in landscape from the Mallee couldn't have been greater. Amongst the twelve Apostles Barry enjoyed being the Pope's man with a particular sympathy for Pius XII. He loved reading and was prolific, retaining information, facts and history covering an extensive range. It was with great reluctance that Barry's health meant retirement from active ministry and a move to live at Beaufort – although we here in the Cathedral came to benefit from the sacramental ministry that he

offered, with Barry's particular desire to make himself available as a confessor to those seeking the Sacrament of Reconciliation. For Pope Francis, the focus on Mercy, so central to this healing sacrament, is already characteristic of his pontificate, saying that "The call of Jesus pushes each of us never to stop at the surface of things, especially when we are dealing with a person. We are called to look beyond, to focus on the heart to see how much generosity everyone is capable. No one can be excluded from the mercy of God; everyone knows the way to access it and the Church is the house that welcomes all and refuses no one. Its doors remain wide open, so that those who are touched by grace can find the certainty of forgiveness." Barry's ministry amongst us has contributed to this house of God being an oasis of mercy, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey and for that we are grateful.

He was overwhelmed at times in his final years as he struggled to come to terms with sickness and suffering which St Paul's reading to the Romans highlights and the significance of hope. This could become all consuming for Barry and at times made life a challenge for those closest to him also. He was blessed to have his sister Denise, who cared for him, was patient with him and loved him dearly. Days of oncologists, doctors, treatment and appointments seemed never ending so in the end his death seemed almost sudden to us.

So with John Henry Newman we pray to God for Barry –

*May He support us all the day long, till the shades lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in His mercy may He give us a safe lodging, and a holy rest and peace at the last.*