

A SPECIAL MILESTONE

Bishop Paul Bird recently celebrated a special milestone, 40 years in the priesthood. A small gathering was held to celebrate this occasion in the Cathedral Presbytery.



Bishop Paul was born in Newcastle in New South Wales on 17 July 1949. The Bishop received his primary school education at the St Francis Xavier Parish Primary School in Carrington which was conducted by the Sisters of St Joseph and his secondary education under the care of the Marist Brothers at their High School in the Newcastle suburb of Hamilton until 1965.

He then joined the formation program of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (the Redemptorists) and made his profession at Galong on 11 February 1968. He studied for four years at the Redemptorist seminary in Wendouree in Ballarat, completed his seminary studies at the Yarra Theological Union in Melbourne and was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop John Toohey, Bishop of Maitland, at Waratah in Newcastle on 17 May 1975.

Bishop Paul took an active role in the parish mission programs of preaching and prayer conducted by the Redemptorist Congregation throughout Australia whilst based in their communities in Perth and later in Sydney. He studied at the Catholic University of America in Washington DC graduating as a Master of Arts with a specialisation in liturgy in 1981. On his return to Australia, he resumed work in the parish mission programs from a base at the Redemptorist community at Mayfield in Newcastle. He also taught in the field of liturgy conducting seminars in Australia, Singapore, Malaysia and Samoa and served for three terms as director of the Institute of Pastoral Liturgy in Brisbane and has, since 1985, been a consultant to the National Liturgical Commission.

In 1987 the Bishop was appointed superior of the Redemptorist community at Brighton in Melbourne and commenced twenty years of service as editor in the congregation's publications ministry, Majellan Publications. He served various terms totalling fifteen years in all as a member of the Provincial Council of the Redemptorist Congregation. He represented the Australian province at the congregation's general chapter in Brazil in 1991 and, from 2008 until the announcement of his appointment as Bishop of Ballarat, he served as Provincial of the Australian Province of the congregation with overall responsibility for the communities and missions in Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia.

Bishop Paul was appointed Eighth Bishop of Ballarat by Pope Benedict XVI on 1 August 2012 and ordained as Bishop on 16 October, 2012. At the time of his appointment as Bishop, Bishop Paul said, "he was feeling excited but also rather nervous about taking up the role of Bishop of the Diocese of Ballarat. The nervousness comes from the fact that this role will involve new responsibilities and I'm not sure how I will go in meeting the challenges involved. At the same time, I'm excited at the prospect of meeting the people of the diocese and doing whatever I can to encourage them in their faith and in their Christian lives."

The Diocese congratulates Bishop Paul on this special occasion.



During this Year of Consecrated Life, we have published reflections by members of various religious congregations. Bishop Paul has written the following reflection as a member of the Redemptorist congregation.

I have been invited to offer some reflections on being a Redemptorist and a Bishop.

First of all I would like to offer a couple of observations on how becoming a bishop has affected my relationship with my Redemptorist congregation.

A few months after I was ordained bishop, one of my Redemptorist confreres asked me how I was finding the transition from living in a Redemptorist community to living by myself as a bishop. Was I feeling removed from the congregation? My response was that I had visited Redemptorist communities a number of times over those months for the celebration of Redemptorist feast days and that I still felt very much at home with the Redemptorists. However there was a certain sense of detachment in that I was no longer attending chapters and no longer involved in the day to day discussions and decisions of the congregation. I summed it up by saying that I still felt very much a Redemptorist but without any particular responsibilities. My confrere then said: "A Redemptorist but without any particular responsibilities. That sounds like most of the confreres!"

More recently I have been reflecting further on my relationship with my Redemptorist congregation. The image that has come to my mind is the image of a grandfather. I see myself as something like a grandfather in relation to the congregation. I have great affection for the congregation. I love to join in Redemptorist family gatherings, but I don't have direct responsibility for the care of the congregation. My brother Maurie has nine grandchildren. He is a very devoted grandfather. He loves to spend time with all his grandchildren. But he realises that he doesn't have the primary responsibility for these little ones. That belongs to their mums and dads. Maurie can just enjoy being a kindly grandfather. I feel something like that in regard to the Redemptorists. The current leaders in the congregation are the ones with the direct responsibility for the congregation. I can be content with being like a kindly grandfather and offering the confreres encouragement in their community living and in their apostolic ventures.

So, this is how being a bishop has affected my relationship with my congregation.

How has being a Redemptorist affected my being a bishop? I believe my being a Redemptorist is influencing my ministry as a bishop very much.

In the Redemptorist Constitutions there is a paragraph that provides something of a picture of the ideal Redemptorist. This is the ideal that I have imbibed over my 46 years as a Redemptorist. Constitution 20 describes the ideal Redemptorist missionary in these terms:

"Strong in faith, rejoicing in hope, burning with charity, on fire with zeal, in humility of heart and persevering in prayer, Redemptorists as apostles and genuine disciples of Saint Alphonsus follow Christ the Redeemer with hearts full of joy; denying themselves and always ready to undertake what is demanding, they share in the mystery of Christ and proclaim it in Gospel simplicity of life and language, that they may bring to people plentiful redemption."

This is a description of the Redemptorist missionary. I read it now as a description of the Redemptorist missionary bishop.

There are elements in this description that would apply well to all bishops. "Strong in faith, rejoicing in hope, burning with charity, on fire with zeal, in humility of heart and persevering in prayer, bishops proclaim the gospel of Christ."

At the same time, there are elements that have a particular resonance with a Redemptorist approach to mission. The reference to Saint Alphonsus as a model. The reference to being ready to deny themselves and undertake what is demanding – this is an element that Saint Alphonsus emphasised for anyone thinking of being a Redemptorist. The reference to sharing the gospel in simplicity of life and language – a simple style of life and simple words – this is another point Saint Alphonsus emphasised. Finally, the reference to "plentiful redemption". This phrase is part of the Redemptorist motto: "With the Lord is plentiful redemption".

This paragraph from the Redemptorist Constitutions sums up much of my mission as a Redemptorist. As I read it now, it sums up much of my mission as a Redemptorist bishop. In this sense, my being a Redemptorist gives a particular colour to my way of being a bishop.

The final point I would mention is that my being a Redemptorist bishop has been helpful in a very practical sense in arranging collaboration between the Diocese of Ballarat and the Redemptorists. We currently have three young Redemptorists serving in the Ballarat Diocese. They are all fairly recently ordained as Redemptorist priests. They are each spending twelve months in a parish in the Diocese as part of their introduction to priestly ministry. I see this as a blessing for our Diocese, particularly for the three parishes where they will serve. I trust it will also be a blessing for the Redemptorists as these young members of the Congregation develop their skills in ministry with the assistance of the priests and people of these parishes. I believe that my being a Redemptorist has facilitated this collaboration between the Redemptorists and the Diocese.

To sum up, my becoming a bishop has changed my relationship with my Redemptorist congregation, but I still feel very much a Redemptorist. My being a Redemptorist is influencing the way I am a bishop. I pray that I might truly be a Redemptorist missionary bishop, bringing people plentiful redemption.

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR