

Leo was born in Cobden on January 6, 1923 – the eldest of eight children of Jack Baker and Mary Denise (Thompson). The others were Margaret, Des, Chris, Denise, Nell, Bernard and Patrick.

In 1925 the family moved to a farm near Tatura then to several other locations around Shepparton, where many suffered the effects of the Great Depression of 1929. In 1936 the family moved back to Cobden where Leo finished off his 8th Grade of primary school at Cobden State School.

In 1937, aged 14, Leo went looking for work to supplement the meagre family income. He milked cows, felled trees in the bush and cut them up for firewood for the Cobden Butter factory. He did very heavy work in the local hardware store and as a builder's labourer. In June 1939 he went as a boarder to St Patrick's College in Ballarat to learn Latin, because he felt called to become a St Columban's Mission Society priest.

In March 1942, he began three years of study in Essendon. Three years later he began a four-year course of Theology at Corpus Christi College Werribee. On July 25, 1948 Leo was ordained as a St Columban's Mission Society priest by Archbishop Daniel Mannix in St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne. In February 1950 he boarded the 'SS Taiping' to take up his appointment to Korea. In July of that year because of the Korean War, he was forced to evacuate to Japan which became his new assignment. He was there for thirty-six years, apart from three years in Australia (1976-79).

In 1986, aged 63, Leo was appointed to Australia. He assisted with the Columban Mission Appeals in parishes of the Ballarat Diocese and in Adelaide. In 1988 Leo took the Pacific Mission Institute Renewal course in Turrumurra, a nine-month residential course. He began his card making ministry. He became Chaplain to Nazareth House nearby. In 1998, aged 75, Leo retired to Essendon and celebrated his Golden Jubilee. From 1999-2014 Leo continued his retirement in Essendon. He was very active in the garden and Chaplain in several holiday homes of the Mercy Sisters with more photography and card-making.

In 2014 Leo opted to move into Mercy Place, a Retirement Village in Colac, where he died peacefully on March 27, aged 96 years.

Fr Pat and Fr Chris Baker



*Fr Leo Baker (centre) with brother Fr Pat (left) and Fr Chris (right)
at his 70th Anniversary of Ordination Mercy Place, Colac – July 25, 2018.*