

SIXTY YEARS A PRIEST

Fr Bill Melican celebrated sixty years of his ordination to the priesthood on July 26. This is a remarkable achievement and we congratulate Fr Bill on this occasion.

After the meeting of the Council of Priests recently, the priests of the Diocese honoured Fr Bill and others who were celebrating jubilees this year with Mass and Dinner to mark the occasion of their Jubilees of Ordination. Fr Bill also had a celebration with his family. Fr Bill was ordained by Archbishop Simonds in Ballarat on July 26



Above L-R: Frs Barry Ryan, Bill Melican, Eugene McKinnon, Wally Tudor, Justin Driscoll, Neville Stanislaus and Bishop Paul Bird

1955. He has served as assistant priest in the Parishes of Swan Hill, Linton, Colac, Ballarat East, Mortlake, Charlton, Mildura, as well as serving as Administrator in Charlton and Robinvale. Fr Bill has been Parish Priest in Hopetoun, Swan Hill, Camperdown, Stawell, Creswick and finally Robinvale where he retired from. Many people around the Diocese know Fr Bill and would like to acknowledge his sixty years as a priest.

Julie Orr (Melican) expresses her thoughts on this occasion:

Uncle Bill is a much loved, admired and respected brother, brother in law and uncle of the Wangoom Melicans. Born on January 3 1931, he was the second of four boys; Michael, Bill, John and Denis. All boys attended St Patrick's College, Ballarat before moving back to the farm however Bill went onto Corpus Christi in Werribee and was ordained in 1955.

As a family we have so appreciated that he has been able to officiate at the majority of our family baptisms, weddings and funerals, spanning five generations, and consider that to be rather special. It is on these occasions in particular that we experience his great gift of oratory; his ability to reflect a bit on his 'take on life' as he weaves together seemingly unrelated topics to make his point.

He is an unassuming man, not a great one for gathering many personal possessions around him other than a considerable library of books reflecting a great interest in history and sport. He reads extensively and his memory and knowledge of historical and sporting personalities and events makes for interesting and entertaining conversation around the dinner table or in the social arena; perhaps this is one of the aspects of Bill that endears him to so many.



Above L-R: Fr Anthony Nagothu and Fr Bill

He has a great memory too for poetry; I have been very fortunate to hear his recitation of 'Man from Snowy River' and remember Uncle Bill in 'full flight' cracking the whip and resounding the thunder of the horses as they flew down the mountain. I had never seen any recitation come to life like that poem did that day, something I will never forget.

Congratulations Uncle Bill on 60 years as a priest.

Jack Melican has written the below:

Every family is better off with a member like Uncle Bill! For 60 years he has been dedicated to his church, his family and the many parish communities he served over his journey, has been very well lived and we all thank him for making our journey better for having known him. The next generation is upon him and I'm sure that phone call will come with a request to officiate at some family celebration and I know that upon checking his calendar, he will say 'that should be right!'

Fr Bill wrote the following for "Our Diocesan Community" in 2012 and we have reprinted it here for your interest.

I was born in Warrnambool on January 3, 1931. My childhood, like my adulthood, was quite unremarkable. I was one of four boys and our parents were dairy farmers. My schooling was attempted at the local state school, St Thomas' in Terang, Christian Brothers in Warrnambool and St Patrick's College in Ballarat.

I first met Dan Arundell at St Thomas' in 1937 and our paths have often crossed since. Our home was about thirteen kilometres from Warrnambool and the journey to school was by bus (until the Catholics were refused passage), then, in turn, by pony, pushbike and gig. It was good fun.



I probably began thinking about priesthood in 1946 when I went to St Patrick's. I think it was the only career that had any attraction for me. By which I mean that no other line of work seemed more attractive. Another thing, quite important I think, was that it was a common thing for Year 12 graduates in those days. I didn't consult anyone. It was totally my own decision.

Towards the end of our eight-year course of studies at Corpus Christi College in Werribee, Frank Monaghan and I were ordained by Archbishop Justin Simmonds of Melbourne. Our own Bishop, James O'Collins, was overseas. The year was 1955.

Although we attended school together at St Patrick's and at Corpus Christi, Fr Frank Monaghan and I never served together in parishes, or even near each other, until our final appointments – mine to Robinvale and his to Red Cliffs and Mildura. In my opinion, shared by many and held for many years, is that they don't make priests like him anymore.

If I were a colour, what would I be? For the first period of my priesthood it would undoubtedly be green. There have been those whose colour was red (usually revolutionaries), blue (usually soul type singers), black (which describes all of us from time to time). I don't know what colour represents blandness. But that's probably me.

The best thing about becoming a priest is like describing the best of anything. The best answer probably is, I don't know. One good thing about it though is that it makes being a Catholic so much easier. Because it attracts so much more of your total energy.

What is the hardest thing? The realisation that those who preach a contrary Gospel have so many advantages of nature and financial resources.

As I am in my 82nd year, retirement should come easily. Summer is the best time to retire to Ballarat. I am learning the skills. Local priests know that I am willing to help with masses and other things. One of the calming things is that I am entitled to say no. After 57 years of priesthood though, the word no doesn't

come easily. I am not sure yet what the biggest change in my life retirement will bring. I suspect it might be the problem of knowing how to fill in my time.

My parishes of responsibility have been Charlton, Hopetoun, Swan Hill, Camperdown, Stawell, Creswick and Robinvale. I don't know about favourite memories, but I am prepared to say that I always enjoyed my latest parish most of all.

If I could talk to anyone from any time, the person would be my great-grandfather, Matthew Melican. I would like to ask him about his decision to leave Ireland in 1854, with his sister, his wife and their four children. About his faith, his expectations, his fears. He was my great-grandfather and his sister, Mary Melican, was Fr Vin Sproule's grandmother.

My fairly long experience as a priest has taught me that I am not a visionary or a scholar, and that our church leaders know more than I do. Since Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, and the church reflects him and is him, then I think changes in the church need to be discussed at a different level.

A parishioner from Manangatang wrote the following poem on Fr Bill's retirement, which we will share with you:

**In Manangatang we are simple people
Don't need a cathedral, don't need a steeple.**

**Just a cosy church, nothing too odd
Somewhere we can come and have a talk with God.**

**For nearly 10 years now we've had Fr Bill
To say Mass on Sundays and to call when we're ill.**

**Hail, rain or shine he'd make the drive
From Robinvale to Manangatang - to keep the faith alive.**

**No fire and brimstone as in days of old
No burning in hell, or out in the cold.**

**He regaled us with Plato and Aristotle instead
A bit heavy for some who'd just rolled out of bed.**

**But there was always a message about everyday stuff
Our blank faces showed when we'd had enough.**

**After vociferous quoting from his beloved 'Tablet'
Next thing you know we'd be talking about Ablett.**

**With his distinctive gestures and expressive shrugs
Every Sunday he'd smile at our ugly old mugs.**

**Through eight years of drought he shared our pain
But we finally had to stop him praying for rain.**

**While we stressed about wars, drugs, floods and drought
He would slyly remind us what "IT's" all about.**



Above L-R: Frs. Bill Melican, Shane Mackinlay, Marcello Colasante, Barry Ryan, Kevin Murphy, Dan Arundell & John Corrigan.



Above L-R: Fr Brendan Davey with Fr Bill

Although our singing is particularly lame
Still at communion time he'd call us by name.

Fr BillYour Manangatang stint is ended. Go in peace.
But your imprint in Manang will not cease.

We will miss your thoughtful, literary mind
We've appreciated you being our spiritual guide.

We'll remember GK Chesterton's donkey so sweet
Who had "the shout about his ears and palms before his feet."

In retirement you'll be able to get back to basics
Googling and researching and reading the classics.

You've been at our beginnings, and at our ends
Baptising our babies, burying our friends.

You've laughed and prayed with our children, our husbands, our wives
Thanks Father Bill for being part of our lives.



*Maureen Barry
December 2011*