

FR THOMAS JOSEPH O'DONNELL



B/W photograph (reproduction).
Dated: mid-1940s
BCDHC archive collection

Born at Buninyong, Fr Thomas Joseph O'Donnell was a son of Irish immigrants, Moses John O'Donnell and Mary (nee Buckle). The family had several children who attended Buninyong State School and probably Sunday School at St Peter and Paul's Catholic Church.

Fr Thomas possibly matriculated in Ballarat in 1893 and trained initially at the Sacred Heart Monastery for missionaries at Kensington in Sydney. Fr Thomas completed his religious studies for the priesthood at All Hallows College in Dublin. He was ordained in 1907 and although did not work within the Ballarat Diocese, he was very energetic in promoting the Catholic religion, church-building and local issues in Hobart in Tasmania.

Towards the beginning of WWI, Fr O'Donnell was passionate about conscription and created a commotion by joining the A.I.F. as a Chaplain with a rank of Captain. He presented lectures on his support for conscription both in Victoria and interstate. On the eve of the second Conscription Referendum, he declared at a packed meeting in Melbourne that he was going to the Victoria Barracks to sign up as an army Chaplain, and if he could not do that, he would sign up as a private soldier. Fr O'Donnell was highly political in his opinion and often had heated debates with religious and political leaders including Archbishop Mannix.

Fr O'Donnell was finally accepted as a Chaplain to the 11th Battalion A.I.R. and departed for France in February 1918. His battalion faced the last German offensive, on the Hindenburg line. He acted with gallantry, and was recommended for a Military Medal.

Upon his return from WWI, he served a long career in Hobart where he was stationed at Stanley, Latrobe, New Norfolk, Moonah, Launceston and Sandy Bay. Fr Thomas was appointed Archdeacon at Sandy Bay in 1944. Fr Thomas died in 1949.