

Mgr George Hay RIP

George Hay was born in British India in 1930 (at Marden now in Pakistan) and retained many happy memories of his childhood there. Later the family returned to Britain and George was educated at Ampleforth College. He opted for military service in the Navy prior to going up to Oxford. He commenced studies for the priesthood at the Venerable English College in Rome, where he was ordained on 5th July 1959. The following year he returned to the Diocese and began pastoral ministry at the Sacred Heart Church in Exeter. He was to spend many happy years in Exeter, as it was not long before he was appointed chaplain to Exeter University and he was instrumental in setting up Boniface House as a Chaplaincy Centre from 1966. His duties also included being priest-in-charge of the Catholic community of Crediton where he was involved in the building of the existing church and the setting up of the National Shrine to our patron, Saint Boniface, for whom Fr George had a heartfelt devotion. Students at the University and parishioners at Crediton soon came to appreciate the talents and the pastoral care of Fr George, and many friendships were made that have endured to this day.

In 1978 came the call to return to Rome and take up the task of Rector of the English College, helping to guide a new generation of candidates for priesthood towards ordination. Affection for this wise and gentle leader who gave such a positive example of priesthood to his students has also been enduring. Monsignor George loved Rome and so many aspects of Italian life, and always welcomed opportunities to return. However, a first spell of health problems led to a return to the Diocese in 1984, a little sooner than may have been expected.

Back in the Diocese and after a few months of welcome recuperation in healthy Dartmouth, Mgr George was appointed to Sacred Heart Paignton, where he immediately applied himself to the usual tasks of a dutiful priest. He was a happy priest sharing the life of his people, always diligent in preparing homilies and catechesis, always devout in the celebration of the Liturgy. He was appointed a Canon of the Chapter and subsequently

became Provost. Other Diocesan duties included being responsible for the support of the newly ordained clergy, and the ongoing formation of all priests. In 1991 Bishop Budd felt it was time for lighter duties, and Mgr George went to the smaller parish of Okehampton. There he was as zealous as ever, and appreciated as much as ever, but felt he was rather cut off from brother priests and other friends. So in 1997 he came back to Torbay, this time to St Marychurch where he stayed until 2003 and a final parish appointment at Bovey Tracey and Chudleigh. Finally, well beyond the canonical age of retirement, a bungalow was found for him near the church of St Gregory in Kingskerswell where he was to live out his final years, and died peacefully on 1st April 2024.

Mgr George Hay was one of the priests of the Diocese respected by fellow clergy, parishioners and many non-Catholics who had contact with him in various capacities. He was a gentleman through and through, and he was a priest to the core. He was humble, amiable, sincere in his devotion. He had come to know Christ as “The Way, the Truth and the Life” and he never tired of helping others to come to Christ and discover for themselves the riches of the Faith. He will be mourned by many and he will not be so easily forgotten.

Adrian Toffolo