



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

September 10, 2009

Founding Director of Catholic Enquiry Centre dies in Melbourne

One of the great evangelisers of the Catholic Church in Australia, and the founding director of the Catholic Enquiry Centre, Fr Tom White, has died in Melbourne, aged 86.

The Irish-born Fr White, a priest of the Melbourne Archdiocese, died on Sunday and his funeral will take place in Melbourne on Friday.

On 5 March 1958 Fr White answered the call of the Bishops of Australia to undertake work to establish the Catholic Enquiry Centre. The Bishops of that time intended that the Centre would reach out to non-Catholics who wished to learn more about the Catholic faith, with a particular focus on non-Catholics who were marrying Catholics. After spending some months in England, working with their enquiry centre, upon which the Australian centre was modeled, Fr White became the founding Director of the CEC in 1959.

Archbishop John Bathersby, the Chairman of the Bishops Commission for Mission and Faith Formation, which oversees the CEC, said that it was particularly poignant that Fr White had died in the year that the CEC is celebrating its 50th anniversary.

“Through his dedication and leadership, Fr White inspired many to join the work of the Catholic Enquiry Centre and left a legacy that continues the work of Evangelisation 50 years later,” Archbishop Bathersby said.

“The Catholic Enquiry Centre today continues to reach out to all people who are interested in learning more about the Catholic faith. Whether it is through initiatives like cinema advertising, or by providing information online, in newspapers or on television, the evangelising work carried out by the Centre today has grown from the seeds sown by Fr White.”

Thomas Augustine White was born in County Tipperary, Ireland on 17 August 1923. He was ordained to the Priesthood on 6 June 1948 in the College Chapel, St Patrick’s College, Carlow when he was 24 years old. The following year, Fr White arrived in Melbourne on 11 March 1949 to begin his long ministry in Australia.

Fr White had two appointments as Assistant Priest. Firstly at St Joseph’s Northcote in March 1949 followed by Our Lady of Victories at Camberwell in January 1955. In March 1972 Fr White returned to the Archdiocese of Melbourne and was appointed as Parish Priest of St Raphael’s West Preston on 4 March 1972. This was followed in September 1973 as Parish Priest of St Mary’s Dandenong. In 1973 and 1974 Fr White had two brief appointments as Assistant Priest in Sacred Heart Newport and St Cecilia’s South Camberwell before returning to St Joseph’s Northcote as Parish Priest on 3 August 1974. Fr White was appointed Parish Priest of Stella Maris Beaumaris on 22 January 1977 and while continuing this role took on the role of Administrator of – St Joseph’s at Black Rock.

“As Pastor Emeritus since February 1999 Fr White has continued his interest in the work of the Catholic Enquiry Centre,” Archbishop Bathersby said. “The Catholic Church in Australia will always be grateful to him for the important evangelising work he started and which continues today.”

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