
Eulogy for Br Desmond Rooney Crowe



Introduction

We gather at this Eucharist and ceremonies to bid farewell and take our leave of our Brother Desmond Rooney Crowe. Our compassion, our condolences and our sympathy go out to his immediate and extended family, to his community, to his friends and to all who shared life, many happy hours of conversation and laughter and who also sustained Des through times of difficulty. May they be granted consolation and strength to bear their sorrow.

In the booklet you will notice a chronology of Des' appointments and ministry. They remain the structure of Des' life and whilst I refer to them, I do not intend to focus this eulogy around them; rather to do justice to Des, I must speak of his great human qualities and his witness to us.

On Hearing of Des' Death

When his death was announced last Sunday morning, there struck a deep and solemn note in our lives which made us all pause and take stock. The hour had come, as come it will to all of us, in which Des was summoned forth to his eternal destiny. He had learned well the message of the Gospel and he lived, particularly these last months, with his eyes fixed on eternity.

So memories took possession of our consciousness as we confronted the reality of Des' death. We thought of him as a family member and as a Brother. We remembered his youth, his young adulthood, his middle age and the recent times. We called to mind the memory of him when, without ambition or desire, he assumed the role of the Provincial. We thought of him, so faithful in his study and in the discharge of his responsibilities of teaching and lecturing; so strong in his devotion to the Institute and to the formation of young Brothers; so wise and shrewd in judging between what matters and what does not. We recalled the simple dignity of his life, his scholarly outlook, his writings, his manly virtues, his affection for Brothers and communities for which he bore responsibility, his charm and nature. We remembered his passion for golf and other sport, his example as a Brother in community among the Marists and in his own family circle. We remembered his very dear friends with whom he shared that part of his heart which was often hidden from public view.

We thought of the last few days of Des' life, with all the pain and physical stresses that he endured - and yet remaining resigned and undaunted, stricken in body but quite essentially unaffected in spirit. During these last months he walked with death as if death were a companion, not in any morbid way; rather an acquaintance whom he recognized and did not fear. In the end, death came as a friend, and after a "good-bye" to those who loved him best, he settled and eventually passed from this life.

Such memories as these are but an invitation to us all to go further and to look at Des' life, to understand and appreciate a little more about the complex heart, the brilliant mind and the depth of his spirituality.

The Interplay: Presence and Absence... Love and Grief

Des came from an affectionate and staunch Catholic family, faithful to the practice of the faith in the way it was expected in those days of growing up around Port Adelaide. The four boys of his family all attended our Alberton School and then proceeded to Sacred Heart College as boarders. Des used to speak fondly of his family experience and also of the neighbouring families: the Heinrichs, the Stephens, the Hills and the Hopkins. He used to describe it as a kind of Catholic sub-culture in Port Adelaide. Certainly the Catholics were the only ones seen walking the streets very early on Sunday morning for 7.00am Mass. Later there was a similar affection and camaraderie among Brothers who trained with him at Mittagong.

He had tender memories of this period of his life both within his own family and with his confreres at Mittagong, and found it difficult to touch the pain he felt when he lost family and friends. His recounting of the death of his mother when he was 12 was poignant and loomed large in his memory and soul. He suffered agonizing grief at her death and later in life he would speak of similar grief at the death of his Aunty Kathleen and then Jerome in 1996. A comparable distress and sense of loss also took hold when he found, in one community of the past, other members unresponsive to his ideas about community and misinterpreting his pleas and doubts about the quality of their life together. Such anguish clearly indicates not only Des' immense depth of his love for his family and his community, but also to his mystical sense of how "love and grief" and "presence and loss" are intertwined in our lives; that to love much is to risk much.

But as he visited his grief, so too did Des cherish the memory of his friendships and his wonderful community times. Des made some marvellous friends in his life and enjoyed some wonderful communities. They all brought him much joy and delight... Fr Adolfo Nicolas, current superior General of the Jesuits was a close friend with whom he confided much throughout the years. Fr Pepe Calle was another and Des recalled a sublime moment when beside a camp fire (in the Philippines of all places!) they shared faith and scriptural insights throughout a long night and early morning. There were other dear friends and family with whom Des had a particular affection and with whom he shared his deepest aspirations.

Des entered fully into these elements of the interplay: joy, presence and love on the one hand and grief, loss and desolation on the other. Hard and all that it was, this lived experience illumined his understanding of the Paschal Mystery and gave him authenticity in spreading the Good News

The Paschal Mystery in Des' Life

Don't let anyone tell you Des was a "head" person. Des' remarkable intellect was rooted in something deeper than ideas. His total response to the mystery of existence was far deeper than just an intellectual one.

The Paschal Mystery, at the heart of the Church's teaching, was at the heart of Des' life and work. His erudition was made so much more effective because he lived this Paschal Mystery with its joy and grief and with its realistic requirement that unless "the grain of wheat fall to the ground and die, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies, it produces much fruit..." Des was learned and wise enough to know that this phrase was the 'key' to the struggle he and all of us go through. It permeates his writings and his talks. It didn't make it any easier to 'let go' - but that was what he was

doing and in fact he knew deep down - that all of us - as church and as human beings - must let go. Marius reminded the Province at the end of Des' time as Provincial that Des had let go of what was most consoling for him. Marius writes:-

“Des had just completed his fourth year at the EAPI and was happily looking forward to two more years in the groves of academe, doing the sort of work that gave him great happiness. Esteemed by his peers, revered by his students, he could have found half a dozen good reasons for declining. But when the call came, he walked away from it all – simply, generously and with complete trust in God and with the intercession of Mary”

You got that same sense when Des wrote in the Province Newsletter and when he spoke at funerals that there was an echo of a profound experience of the Paschal Mystery going on and he was able capture it in his own words.

Des came to appreciate and understand the rhythm of grace in the ups and downs of life. He entered into it in an authentic way and this made him an authentic witness to the Good News as well as a learned scholar and writer. His prose was balanced, insightful, sensitive and smooth and his thoughts flowed easily to his pen or keyboard. He was in demand as a translator for the Institute and translated articles and booklets sent to him from Rome. His writings were not only learned articles for journals, but simple things like house annals, birthday letters and news and encouragement to those Brothers overseas. But below all this was a great depth of spiritual experience which shaped much of what he wrote.

The Missionary Heart

Des had a missionary heart. He penned the first draft of the Constitutions 90 and 91 on evangelization and had that deep appreciation of what it meant to be a missionary. In these last few years he wrote with great encouragement to our Brothers working in foreign countries. Listen to this as encouragement for someone working in a different culture:-

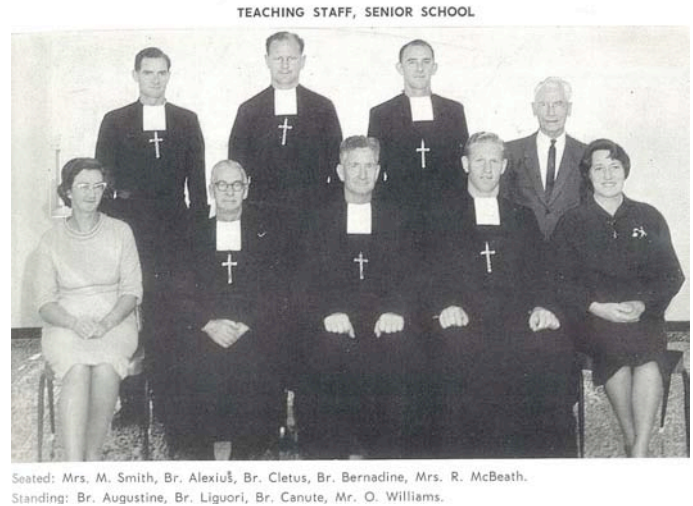
“So I guess there is a special challenge for the expatriate missionary: love the people, maintain a quiet discernment of the world around you, learn what is beautiful and true in their ways, be ready to support them (in no heavy way) with the gifts you bring that can fill the gaps, first through your warm interpersonal relationship with them, and as the way opens, through the gifts of your special education, cultural strengths and so on. But it does make demands on your patience!”

A Missionary Heart indeed.



The Teacher

Des was able to speak about the Good News, because he really believed it was good news and because he was a living witness to it. Many former students will testify to the enormous impact he had their on their lives as teacher and Principal at Marist College Churchlands, as lecturer at the East Asian Pastoral Institute and as Director of the Marantha Institute in WA. In the records at the Provincial House is a letter from a journalist writing for the West Australian Newspaper and who decided to attend Des' talks. She says that:-



Inaugural staff at Marist Senior School,
Churchlands, 1965

“It was at the Marantha Institute that I was first exposed to moral theology and lessons in absolute and relative values. The classes were like waking a dormant power inside my soul.”

This was indicative of the work Des did with many people - quiet, unassuming, erudite, profound in his insights and understanding, sensitive to the aspirations of those who came and always completely respectful and loyal to the Church.

The Marial Heart

We cannot speak about Des without speaking about his love of Mary the Mother of Jesus. It wasn't a sentimental piety, but based, again, on his experience and learning. Des spoke of how losing his mother early in life influenced the way he prayed to Mary and why and how he was drawn to a deep study and reflection on her life. His talks were liberating for the Brothers of this Province and really for the whole Institute. The famous phrase, *“dust on her feet”*, has become an enduring image of Mary for many Brothers around the world. He was greatly consoled and overjoyed by the direction of the recent General Chapter in developing Marial Hearts. It was as if much of what he had written was being understood. He certainly taught me and presumably many about praying to Mary, speaking to her, rather than simply reflecting about her. Mary was indeed a model for Des; but much more was she a mother to whom he spoke with ease in times of pain and in times of joy.



The Classical Scholar

Des was a classical scholar with a very light grasp of matters scientific, mechanical and technological. So many of his talks and lectures were peppered with classical references and he took great delight impressing the ignorant among us with his classical insights. The story was written in the Publication *“Eureka Street”* by Ray Cassin, a former student at Churchlands, of how during the now famous moon landing, whilst the school was watching this breathtaking event on TV, Des chose to spurn the excitement and walked the verandas in true classical

style reading Horace's Odes - no doubt reminding all and sundry about the timelessness of human endeavour. So when Armstrong was taking 'One small step for man; one giant leap for mankind', Des was reading the Ode III.30 "Exegi monumentum aere perennius" from Horace (65-8BC) which translates as

*I have completed a monument more lasting than bronze
and far higher than that royal pile of Pyramids,
which the gnawing rain and furious north wind cannot destroy,
nor the chain of countless years and the flight of time.*

There was something impish, creative and liberating in this gesture, which reveals another aspect of Des' character.

The Sportsman

For one with outstanding intellectual achievements it is easy to forget Des as a sportsman and Cricket Coach. Our amazement is that he still played golf until the middle of this year. He used to look forward to it and was quite competitive. In WA he took great delight in beating the sportsman extraordinaire in Bill Dillon and was so desolated when Bill outplayed him. He was particularly competent at those sports, which required a sense of rhythm and hand-eye co-ordination:- Tennis and Cricket as well as Golf. He gave up football when during a "kick- to-kick" session with other community members, he pulled a muscle whilst walking backwards to take a kick...an event which caused some mirth and warnings about walking backwards from an unsympathetic community. He was an avid Cricket fan and could sit for long periods watching every move of a Test Match. In the early days, when his religious name was Brother Liguori, he coached cricket teams. The best a Public School Cricket Coach could do, having seen the signature "Br Liguori", was to address a letter to him as Brigadier McGourie.

The Story Teller

Des was a great story teller; he would probably prefer that I use the word "raconteur". His stories were always embellished with rhetorical flourishes and a liberal use of poetic licence. Some would say "exaggerated". What facts were missing Des would easily supply from the realms of his imagination. It was great fun and entertainment around the table when he got going and meals would go on and on. But he was focussed and when talking about Brothers; he spoke with great insight and in a most affectionate way. Des was keen about community, understood its nature and was most active, whether as superior, bursar, archivist, purchaser, cook for Saturday night or organizer for the annual New Year's Eve celebration usually commencing at 9.00pm.



The Critic

Des was also able and sometimes was disposed to offer a critique of writings and events. Putting aside our famous argument about the use of semi colons, I have to say that his outstanding

capacity for intellectual rigour, even when it wasn't initially welcomed, was really a gift to me, to the Province and the Institute and to the Church for that matter. Irrelevance, unsubstantiated generalizations, pious platitudes, sloppy discourse or psychobabble were the bane of his life and his critique of such works were particularly sharp and pointed. He certainly kept us on our toes. It occasionally got him into strife and grief; but he freely admitted that this was a grief of his own making.

Health



Although dogged by ill health through much of his life, starting with tetanus when he was four, it was during these last 15 years that Des began to experience serious health problems and a host of them at that. He was prone to infection which caused numerous post operative complications. His sabbatical had to be curtailed through ill- health and he returned home. We nearly lost him in 2000 and at one stage he spent 57 days in Hospital. Eventually it was discovered that he had a malfunction of the auto-immune system (a lupus condition which meant healthy organs and joints were affected). For a time he had to use an electric wheelchair; but unexpectedly he went into remission, felt better and in no time he was his usual chirpy self. You couldn't keep him down and although he looked death in the eye on a couple of occasions, it didn't diminish his zest for life.

The Resurrection

The optimistic prospect that life is not taken away but changed is grounded for us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and in the promises God has made. Christ has prepared a place for us where God is. All the resurrection stories attest to the fact that Jesus did not leave his humanity behind when he rose from the dead. He didn't return to his state before the incarnation; Jesus rose in his humanity. So too for Des. His resurrection will not be some thinned out version of his 79 years of life on earth; it will be infinitely richer than his experience; the frontiers between himself and others will be fully open. He who has, in his own small way, borne a portion of the sufferings of Christ will share in the fullest possible sense in the divine nature. Nothing of Des' humanity will be denied or ignored and he will carry into eternal life everything in his life which is genuinely human. That is why it is important to reflect on Des' life as a human being with its joys and grief, with its valleys and mountain tops, with its achievement and limitations. It is with confidence that we proclaim that Des shall find his fullest and most personal life with God, and be re-united with all who have gone before him, in a place where there will be no pain of separation, but the fullness of life for ever. May Des' life and experience inspire us to accept our own humanity in all its ambiguities so that, in a manner beyond our imagination, we too can become full sharers in everlasting life with God. May Mary our Good Mother welcome Desmond Rooney Crowe into the fullness of life.

Amen

Br Julian Casey
Somerton Park
20th November 2009



A Message of Thanks to the Marist Brothers from Constantino Correia dos Santos

I am very happy that the Marist Brothers decided to come and help us in the work of educational capacity building within our new Nation of East Timor.

We had never even heard of the Marist Brothers nor of Saint Marcellin Champagnat but today the whole community knows about the Marist Brothers and the great educational opportunities that they facilitate for us. Our students come from all of the thirteen districts of East Timor and are encouraged to relate to one another in the 'spirit of Champagnat' and to practice a genuine love for each student in their care. Together we are working to make sure that the Institute is an East Timorese Institute rather than a foreign Institute. It is a very challenging and at times a very difficult task because we have so many things to learn about education, time management, self-discipline, educational administration, etc.

My first job at the Institute was that of being a member of the security staff. People are so poor in East Timor that they will sometimes steal if they know that the people do not have security people looking after the property at night. At that time I felt very privileged to have a job at all because most people in East Timor are actually unemployed.

Today I am one of the lecturers at the Institute. The Marist Brothers encouraged and assisted me in completing my degree through the University of Darwin and I am now nearing the completion of my Masters Degree in Education from Australian Catholic University.

There are at this moment in time eleven members of staff who are studying for the

Masters in Education. We need these qualifications so that we will be able to look after the Institute ourselves in the future. It will take some time, but it will happen.

As a teacher at the Institute I am now able to share what I have learned with the younger people of my country, and share with them the need for 'life-long learning'. Our Minister of Education, Dr. Joao Cândia, is very pleased about how our Institute has been developing over the past few years, as he told everyone at the graduation ceremony in October 2008. He knows that the graduands of the Institute are very well trained and qualified to be teachers who can teach from grade 1 until grade 9 (the period of basic (i.e. compulsory) education in East Timor). Our students graduate with an internationally recognised Bachelor of Teaching Degree from Australian Catholic University which provides the necessary quality assurance for the programs we offer.



Constantino

We have also set up a 'model' crèche in Baucau and my daughter attends the crèche (i.e. "Champagnat Crèche"). The crèche is totally run by local East Timorese who were trained in child welfare through Brisbane TAFE and completed part of their work placement in Brisbane. The children attending the crèche are now healthier. They have put on weight, have

been to the dentist, have been to the local parish clinic, and have already begun to speak in Tetun, Portuguese, Indonesian and English. Their favourite is the Wiggles because there is plenty of variety and action for the children to follow. All of the children know a little about Saint Marcellin Champagnat.

Br Fons recently spoke about Marcellin Champagnat and Marcellin's focus on the crib, the cross and the altar. We are continually

thankful to everyone (Marist Brothers and volunteers) who have been able to come to East Timor since 2000 and be actively present at the crib of the educationally disadvantaged of East Timor, be a compassionate presence at the foot of our cross of national and personal suffering, and live their lives at the altar of service towards their 'neighbour' in a country that is not their own.

Constantino Correia dos Santos



"Education is fundamental to the country's development but inappropriate teaching methods work against this. Helen says the entrenched methods of learning by rote and choral shouting need to give way to more productive and creative teaching methodologies."

"These new approaches are happening very slowly across the country," she says. Recently, a

mother told Helen that her child in kindergarten knew more than her other child in grade 3."

[Stephanie Thomas in *Bilum, the Magazine of Mercy Works, Inc.*]

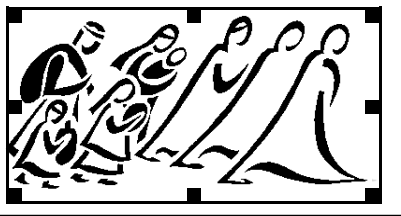


Photo above: Sr Helen Norem RSM with President Jose Ramos Horta.

TIMOR LESTE: AT A GLANCE

- * population 1.1 million
- * life expectancy 59.7 years
- * adult literacy rate 50.1%
- * under five mortality rate 97 per 1,000 live births
- * maternal mortality rate 380 per 100,000 live births
- * about 60% of population under 18 years
- * about 49.9% of people live on less than \$1 a day

Source: 2007-2008 UN Human Development Report, UNICEF



EXODUS COMMUNITY

WEST HEIDLEBERG

The Exodus Community logo, drawn by a previous member, represents the people of old on the journey to new possibilities. Members of the Exodus community identify with people of the West Heidelberg Olympic Village and travel with them in their quest for justice, especially in issues of housing, a safer living environment, compassion and understanding from Centrelink, opportunities for work and alleviation of poverty.

The opening and use of the Exodus Shed, built in the back yard of the House where Br. Harry and Sr. Sally of the Exodus Community live, has provided a wonderful space for activities with families and children especially. Our weekly Drop in and lunch happens in the Shed and a new after-school learning and play time for primary school aged children each Tuesday is so popular that a second session is planned. Friday morning Story Time for pre-school children continues to offer support to parents as well as the children who attend. Our weekly bread delivery happens from the Shed and the newly-installed data projector and computer offer new opportunities, especially for youth and training programmes.

The water tanks enable us to keep some lawn green and gardens fresh while the air conditioner (Federal Government Grant) along with the insulation and fans make the place quite comfortable.

The Victorian Government operates under a *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities*. Exodus members have been active in working with local people and our West Heidelberg Legal Service in confronting the appalling state of much public housing in the area. At a recent meeting with the Minister of Housing we were able to present a case for more action in dealing with lack of public housing, the poor maintenance done on some existing properties

and the faults in the Office of Housing in dealing with residents' complaints.

A recent volunteers thank you after our regular noon Sunday Mass, celebrated in the local Health Centre, was an opportunity to acknowledge the contribution of 50 Exodus volunteers. These volunteers work in one or more of the nine Exodus Teams that minister with and for local people.

An emerging work is to help connect the rich with the poor. Many in surrounding relatively wealthy suburbs and parishes are very supportive of the ministry of Exodus and we are attempting to establish an ongoing health engagement. To this end, we anticipate being a part of a Soup Van to be established in the area serving residents of several Housing Estates and supported by neighbours.

We look forward to our annual back yard carols and barbeque. This is a great community celebration of the Christmas event and a rounding off of another year before we begin our January round of Camps. This year the parish of Gisborne and students from Our Lady's at Heidelberg are collecting gifts for distribution to our families. Such acts of thoughtful kindness and care are greatly appreciated and often are the only gifts local children receive at Christmas.

Exodus Young Adult Community members are now members of the Remar Team and these young people, along with Simone, the Remar Coordinator, make an impact with local people. The added Marist presence is a bonus for our ministry here, especially amongst poor families and youth.



Br Harry Prout