

How would you

Describe David?

Thanks to all who have prepared for today particularly Fr Ian, Susanne and Callum, who did the design for the Order of Service. It wasn't very convenient of David dying just before Easter, for those in the 'church business'. Someone suggested that he might have waited until Good Friday, to go. Then we all giggled and thought that could be a problem..... because he might turn up again on Sunday!

I'm not going to talk about where my Dad was born and what he achieved, as most of you know, and it all written, from his own hand at the end of the Order of Service.

I've been asking people "How would you describe David?". I'm the only one speaking today about his life and so I've endeavored to draw together what people have told me, and incorporate it, with what I've learnt from 65 years of association. You will each have your own experiences and memories and I'll be taking a moment later for you to reflect on that. I hope that what I cover will help you to give thanks and say your goodbyes.

Loving and Generous

David enjoyed his family and took interest in the life of each one. Family was important and not just the immediate members like his sister Helen, wives Audrey and Anne and son Jonathan but their whole extended families. Of particular care were the grandchildren and what they were pursuing and where they were travelling. He smiled a lot, really enjoying family gatherings and its been great how he has embraced and has been embraced by Anne's children, and siblings.

Anne has enriched our lives and it was an honour for me when I was asked to take their wedding.I think Dad is the only person I know who can claim that he was married first by the father and then secondly by his son.

Caring and Relationships were important

I recall my cousin Geoff Salter, saying after one of the annual family Christmas gatherings, "Uncle David did it again. He got me talking about what has been happening for me this year, and I never had a chance to hear about what has been going on for him. This happens every year."

I expect many of you, will know how he took a particular interest in you. He was of great encourager, and took a particular interest in the lives of various young people outside the immediate family like Will Stephens.

Relationships and keeping in touch were also very important. Consequently, his Annual Christmas Letter was sent to many.Throughout my life I've had people tell me they just received my Dad's latest epistle, in which he shared not just the doings of the family, but what books, writing, film or person had recently inspired him.

Stubborn and Fearless

Anne described him as 'larger than life', and many of us know that when he got a 'bee in his bonnet', it was hard to shake. He was a bit like a dog with a shoe, who just wouldn't let it go.

This Perseverance inspired some, scared some and it upset some.

But it was the perseverance necessary to build and refurbish churches and to pursue causes that he felt passionate about - like the ordination of women and other matters of justice. Do you remember when he was featured on the front page of The Age newspaper in September 1983, where it was reported that he had disobeyed the Archbishop and invited The Revd. Joyce Bennett to preside at the Eucharist at St Stephens Richmond?

They weren't always reported in the paper, but there was generally a cause to be pursued.

Adventurer

Loved towing things around. I recall seeing photos, from when he was at boarding school of a trailer which he built, to carry his camping equipment and used to tow behind his push bike, when he would ride, often on his own, out to Anakie Gorge from Corio.

Caravanning was a great love. In 1962 we towed a small caravan around Europe for 5 weeks behind the new VW Beetle, including taking it over the St Gotthard Pass in Switzerland. I think he must have had about four caravans, and of course the last one was the Aorolite, which he built himself and lovingly maintained. Made of marine ply it was extremely light and so it has been suitable for every car from the Datsun 1600 in 1970 until the Ford Focus in 2016. His greatest delight was to see what was the best fuel economy that could be achieved; the thriftier the better.....I think this desire was a product of his missionary upbringing. (He could be quite frugal and penny pinching at times and at other times extremely generous- especially with his grandchildren- like most of usa conundrum at times)

Miles of caravanning, often to remote place in Australia and extensive travel overseas has been an important part of Dad's life which he has relished and enjoyed firstly in the company of Audrey and then with extensively with Anne.

Spiritual Person

Dad was the son CMS Missionaries. In his late teens he had a personal conversion experience and took an active role in the League of Youth. With zeal he studied at the Melbourne Bible Institute and then Ridley College, before being ordained in 1951.

In 1962 he travelled to the UK and studied at St Augustine's College in Canterbury, where he was exposed to the breadth of Anglican Communion, with students and staff from around the world.

After nearly two years overseas, including travelling to the USA, he came back smoking and drinking !... not excessively but I think he he came to realise that it was much more important to focus on what you did, rather than what you shouldn't do.

Nevertheless, he continued to read his bible and he never lost his zeal for telling people of the Good News. He was eclectic and inclusive in his spirituality, drawing on the wisdom of his heroes, Anthony deMello, Desmond Tutu, Michael Fox, Rowan Williams, Pope Francis, Michael Leunig and Vincent Van Gough, to name a few.

His participation as a Franciscan Tertiary has been very important and for many years this community has fed his spiritual journey.

Searching For the truth

He was concerned how the Church could be more true and was often critical of hierocracy- of which he had certainly been part. Similarly, his search for how to live authentically never ceased and this included how we as a society can do better. Much of this wisdom he shared and most of us saw the fruit of that search in his Epistles at Christmas

As he and I grew older, we developed a relationship where we were able to talk honestly. He was no longer the infallible father who had to be followed, but a fellow traveller, for whom the world had both its' ups and downs. Part of that growth was our individual journeys to know ourselves.

For some years he had been grappling with finding the right person to write his memoirs, and after a number of attempts, still couldn't find the person he was happy with. Towards the end of his life he wrote to me

“You will be interested to know that I took to heart the questions you put to me. Why don’t you write your memoirs? What’s your purpose in writing them and why a ghost writer?

After mulling these over for a couple of days I came to the following conclusion.

This is the nub of the issue about any life story or memoir. In my soul searching I came across Margaret Atwood’s poem ‘The Moment’.

*The moment when, after many years
of hard work and a long voyage
you stand in the centre of your room,
house, half-acre, square mile, island, country,
knowing at last how you got there,
and say, I own this,*

*is the same moment when the trees unloose
their soft arms from around you,
the birds take back their language,
the cliffs fissure and collapse,
the air moves back from you like a wave
and you can't breathe.*

*No, they whisper. You own nothing.
You were a visitor, time after time
climbing the hill, planting the flag, proclaiming.
We never belonged to you.
You never found us.
It was always the other way round.*

He concluded: "So I have no need to encumber you, myself, or anyone else with stories of God's grace and my perceptions of it. They are superbly told by millions of lives down the ages".

For one who had achieved so much, this was a paradigm shift. He was able to let it goand the stories live on in our hearts and minds.

So in conclusion I'd invite you to take a moment to recall your experiences of David and reflect on his part in your journey. As Anne suggested I expect that there are so many we may lift the roof off the church. Let us reflect together in silence

Thanks Dad for a good life.

Rest in Peace, as you continue to know the love of God