

A Tribute to Stanley Charles Moss

Christ Church Anglican Church, St Kilda

Friday, 19 July 2016

Early Life

In recounting Dad's early life, my brother, Stephen, referred to Stan's loss of his father. One day, when he was 11 years of age, Stan came home from school for lunch as usual. His father, Frederick, was there for lunch too. Walking back to school, Stan remembered that he had not said goodbye. So he retraced his steps and gave his father a kiss. That evening, the family received the dreadful news that Fred had been knocked off his pushbike, and killed.

Stan missed his father very much and longed to have had more time with him and known him better. One result was that Stan was especially loving and caring of his mother, Margaret, throughout the long time she was a widow.

During his life, Stan showed the capacity for great compassion for others in their time of bereavement. As a priest, he had a gift for conducting funeral services and bringing comfort to those experiencing grief and loss.

Life-changing events

As you have heard, Dad's experiences during WW 2 were extraordinary.

In the course of it all, Dad gained membership of some unusual clubs. One was the Caterpillar Club, which recognised British airmen who saved themselves by the use of a silk parachute. After an air collision of which he was the sole survivor, Stan duly qualified for membership by parachuting from his stricken aircraft into the North Sea.

Shortly after, Dad became a contender for the Goldfish Club. This club was for airmen who preserved their life by using a one-man rubber dinghy. Dad spent three days and two nights in such a craft, enduring high seas and great peril.

After being shot down, and months of recovery in Dutch hospitals, yet another special club beckoned. Stan had become a "Kriegie," which is derived from the German word for prisoner of war, Kriegsgefangene.

These experiences shaped Dad in many ways. Throughout his life, Dad maintained friendships with his "Kriegie" mates who represented a broad spectrum in the community, from dairy farmer to member of parliament.

The “Kriegies” were for Dad and us a group of friends beyond clergy and church circles. We Moss kids spent some holidays with their families, such as on a soldier-settler fruit block at Robinvale.

The “Kriegies” helped each other, as the bond between them was strong. For instance, a son of one of them from country Victoria lived with us for a year of his tertiary study in Melbourne.

Dad’s other ex-service link was with the UK Odd Bods Association, a group of ex-RAAF airmen who had served in the RAF. Dad always attended Odd Bods events, especially the ANZAC Day lunch. Dad used to say the grace before the meal commenced. In Stan, they had one of them as their chaplain. In them, Dad had the company of friends with a common experience.

Towards ordination

So what would it mean to be a person like Dad, who beat the odds when others had their lives cut short? The answer for Stan was clear. God saved him that he might serve.

It all came into an unexpected and sharp focus when, one day in the prison camp, a New Zealand Army padre, Ivor Hopkins, asked Dad, “Ought you not to be preparing for ordination?” By this direct and penetrating question, Dad was, in his own words, “completely bowled over”.

So it was that Stan’s long and fulfilling life was characterised by a strong theme of service. And he had the personal attributes to match. To his credit, Stan repaid many times over the chance he had been given. And underpinning it all was his Christian faith and belief.

Dad’s Christian faith and outlook

Stan’s Christian faith is best understood by reference to the gospel reading we heard earlier. It’s also the passage he chose for today.

When Jesus gave the reply, “I am the way and the truth and the life”, he was unequivocal. Jesus did not say that he was a way or one of several ways. Jesus said I am THE way.

To my mind, this passage encapsulates the essence of Dad’s belief. Jesus is the way. It is the lens through which Stan saw the world. It is the perspective, which gave him his purpose.

Family

Dad cared greatly for his family and extended family.

Stan and Betty raised a family of four children. Then along came two daughters-in-law and two sons-in-law. Eventually eleven grandchildren arrived. To date,

there are 10 great-grandchildren. If you have been counting that's a four-generational family of 31. Nothing pleased Stan and Betty more than to see the subsequent generations develop.

For Stan, the key person was Betty. Dad once told me, "I gave thanks to God every day... for Betty". Well, don't we all!

Stan and Betty's 50th wedding anniversary was celebrated with a luncheon in a restaurant in High Street, Armadale. It was a gathering of family and clergy friends. With the meal at an end, the clergy members sang the Doxology.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise him, all creatures here below
Praise him above, ye heavenly host
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Dad, do you remember that time? It was a golden moment during the celebration of a golden wedding anniversary.

Service to the Church

Another theme of service was the Church, which Dad served faithfully and successfully.

Family life and parish work blended. In those days, Anglican parishes in the Diocese obtained two employees for the price of one. Betty was fully involved. There was even some child labour thrown in! It was a family enterprise.

Stan's time at St George's Malvern provides the most vivid recollections for us. The Parish was busy. The phone rang constantly. Visitors came and went in regular succession. There were meetings, marriage preparation, baptisms, weddings and funerals. These interactions often centred on the vicarage, our home, because Stan's office and the parish office were part of the house. Dad was at the centre of it all, with Mum providing constant support.

Dad and Mum both worked incredibly hard together and the working day was invariably long. In the midst of all this activity, Mum and Dad were bringing up four children.

At one point, Dad asked us kids to keep statistics on such activities as phone calls answered, attending to the front door etc. Dad carefully compiled these figures. Little did we know that he was developing an industrial case. Some weeks later, Dad emerged from a vestry meeting and announced, "I've got a pay rise!"

Until his last year, Dad served the Church. In this most beautiful place of Anglican worship, Christ Church, Dad assisted Fr Jim Minchin and Fr Turi Hollis. I acknowledge and thank them both, and the people of this parish, for that wonderful period in Dad's life when, in his retirement and despite advancing years, Stan was able to play an active part in the worship here.

Community service

Through the church, Dad also served the community. Hence, Anglican education was another theme of service. As the inaugural Chair of St Michael's Grammar School, Dad - together with others - started the transformation of a girls' school, established by the Sisters of the Church, into the thriving coeducational institution it is today. There is Moss House in the junior school.

Stan served too at Trinity College as a part-time lecturer. At Trinity, Stan became a Board member and later its Bequest Officer. Family members of Stan attended Trinity College as residents, amounting to nine in all.

Personal Attributes

Academic ability

Dad had a good intellect. He did well academically and was a graduate of Melbourne and Oxford Universities. It was a fine achievement for someone who started out as a clerk in an insurance company. At Trinity College, Stan shared a study with the Revd Dr Barry Marshall, who was a brilliant scholar. And Betty typed their lecture notes.

Love of sport

Stan liked playing sport. When he was young, he participated in Church cricket and basketball competitions. He also played basketball in prison camp and later was a member of the Trinity College squash team.

Tennis with Betty

At St George's Malvern, on summer evenings, Dad and Mum would play tennis on the Church court with us kids. With doubles, Mum and Dad would be at opposing ends. When they played singles, it was fun to watch. Both had won school and college tennis championships in their day - Dad with his big first serve and strong forehand: Mum with her consistent all-round play and indefatigable backhand.

Dad and Mum loved playing tennis together. It was another happy aspect of their partnership.

A man of principle

Dad was a man of principle. Here's an example.

On the morning of 3 February 1967, I was about to leave to go to school. Dad asked me to accompany him and led the way to the church bell at the side of the parish hall. There, he checked his watch and we waited a short time. At precisely 8.00 am, Dad started to toll the bell. For five minutes, the bell tolled, above the

hum of the morning traffic, across the suburbs of Malvern and Armadale. At that exact time, the last man to be legally executed in Australia, Ronald Joseph Ryan, was hanged at Pentridge Prison.

Stan was prepared to state his principles and stand by them.

Relaxation

One of Stan's great relaxations was gardening. He was good at growing vegetables and always had fruit trees. Flowers too, with red dahlias being a favourite. Dad was gardening until the last days of his life.

Often, Dad would start the dinner conversation by telling us what on our dinner plates he grown himself. He was proud to produce fresh fruit and vegetables for the family and at the same time save money, with which he was careful. He was in that sense a child of the 1930s Great Depression.

Dad had little tolerance of food going to waste. As a Kriegie, he had experienced hunger and uncertainty about the next meal. When we were young, if there was food left on the plate, Dad would often say, "Pass it over, I'll eat it".

Food being thrown out in our society is a major moral issue when so many people in the world go hungry. At one point, the sticker on Stan's car bumper bar stated, "Live simply, so that others may simply live."

Another of Stan's relaxations was to listen to music. He had a fine collection of classical music LP records. He would also tune in to concerts on ABC radio.

Mum's care for Dad.

Mum, all of us are immensely grateful to you for your constant love, support and care of Dad, not just in recent years, but throughout the 66 years of your married life together. I can express it no better way than that beautiful and, to my mind, relevant passage. "Her children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also."

Conclusion

Stanley Charles Moss was a man of many aspects.

We recall the example he set. The fun we had with him. We remember with gratitude the assistance he gave others, for his commitment to the Church and for his service to his community and his country.

We thank God for him, as a husband, as a father, as a father-in-law, as a grandfather and as a great-grandfather. We thank God for Stan as a true friend.

Philip Stanley Moss AM