

Father Philip's story

Father Philip Sullivan arrived in the parish in 1989, and quickly became known to us all. A great teller of stories, we were soon made very aware of some of the "goings on" in his previous parish of Dargarville.

In his first week here, he had a meeting of people interested in looking after pastoral needs of the parish. For Father, setting up a pastoral committee to guide the liturgy, social justice, ministry to the sick and caring side of parish life was always of paramount importance, and soon, a Caring Community was encouraged. Father himself ministered to the prisoners, with the help of Sister Joan, a sister of Compassion. In later years, he was helped by Sr. Mary Gaines, a sister of St. Joseph.

One of the first things father noticed was the congestion at our two masses and the parking chaos, caused by the fact that we had had to drop the 8am Mass. At that time the bishop had given instructions that, because of the shortage of priests, we needed to consolidate mass times. He, with the Bishop's permission, reinstated the 8am mass, making him the hero of all those people who liked an early mass.

Father's first big goal was to look at the building of a parish facility for meetings, community gatherings and social occasions, badly needed by a fast growing parish community. Plans were drawn up for a parish hall, but, because of the cost, the bishop vetoed the idea. However, Father Phil persisted, went back to the parish committee and they decided to do the whole job themselves. It took four years, countless working bees, and endless morning teas, but every parishioner, with any profession, trade or talent, helped out. Money raising projects included delivering telephone books, [remember them?], bring and buy stalls and who could forget Norma McGrath's beautiful cakes, which were raffled off. Applying for grants became a major task, with both the ASB and Lotteries board coming to our aid. A parishioner, Sean O'Sullivan, working on the project, who was a professional designer and builder, declared it "the sweetest project he'd ever worked on". That year, the parish had a dinner on June 22nd. to celebrate our Parish feast day, which was a great success.

Father Philip welcomed the first Iraqis' to the parish, and the revamped St Vincent de Paul group, under Michael Kinsella, did a sterling job in helping them and so many others.

Another event that Father remembers fondly, were the breakfasts that the 8 o'clock parishioners put on, usually just before the beginning of advent. We started them prior to father's arrival in our parish and, as a social function, were always a great success.

He has so many memories of the goodness of the people, the sense of community, and the helping hands always ready to reach out. He called us a "faith community". We had debt, plans and each other! Father insists our parish was always very special.

He moved on in 1998.

Clare Russell

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