

Father Michael Morley celebrates 40 years of ordination

Father Michael Morley was born in 1944 in Moonee Ponds, the fifth child of six born to Thomas and Kathleen Morley.

Life in the Morley household was always busy - and loud - with the comings and goings of six children. Kathleen Morley excelled at hospitality and all his siblings' friends enjoyed visiting the vibrant household, especially with the hope of securing one of his mum's baked treats.

Father Michael attended St Monica's Primary School in Moonee Ponds then St Bernard's Secondary College before finishing his secondary education at St Joseph's Technical School in South Melbourne where he enjoyed the practical subjects taught there.

In 1961 at age 16 Michael was introduced to Adrian O'Loughlin – a young man who went to school with his brothers Kevin and Brian – who suggested he come and meet a man named Gordon Stone who owned a successful electrician business. Michael thought this could be an ideal job opportunity for him as he was interested in working outside and not being confined to a desk.

That Saturday, a ten-minute "interview" in Gordon's driveway was all it took to convince Gordon to hire him and on the following Monday Michael started work.

Gordon's electrical business was the biggest in the North Essendon area employing ten electricians who worked on faults, houses and businesses such as the Brown Gouge chain of drycleaners. Michael loved his work and did so well that in later years Gordon would groom him to take over the business.

Michael had a deep respect for Gordon who he said was a demanding employer but an incredibly fair man. They developed a great friendship and had many long and frank conversations about faith, Catholicism and life. Gordon could see that Michael was a dedicated and hard worker and so extended his work hours to include Saturday mornings.

During these early years as an electrician Michael started attending Mass at 7am every morning with his mother Kathleen. Each day he would park his electrician van in the middle median strip across from St Monica's in Moonee Ponds attend Mass and then go off to work. Michael says that if they had a job that required them all to be onsite by 7am Gordon would instruct Michael that he didn't have to get to worksites until after he had attended Mass.

Gordon had a huge impact on Michael's life and this friendship endured until Gordon sadly passed away from cancer just four years after Father Michael's ordination. Even though they weren't Catholic Gordon's family was adamant that Father Michael conduct the funeral service. Father Michael said even though this was incredibly difficult he was honoured to do this for his treasured friend.

Michael worked 60-70 hours a week but on Sundays he put on the boots to play football for YCW in Moonee Ponds. He played football until he was 21 and enjoyed the camaraderie on Saturday nights with his teammates and his girlfriend that he went out with for three years.

Electrical work paid well and as he started saving his paycheques Michael's brother Brian advised him to not worry about buying a car but instead to buy some land. He bought his first block in Niddrie and designed a house that he wanted to build there. He later bought a second block in Keilor.

Life was good. Michael was working hard, playing football, spending time with his family and friends and had bought himself a 1964 Falcon.

It was during this time that Michael felt the first stirrings of what he says were little "niggles". He remembers talking to clients as he worked on electrical jobs and thinking wouldn't it be nice to be able to help people.

The Morley family had a great family friend Monsignor Ted Tehan who was parish priest at Rushworth and then at Yarrowonga who would come to stay with them in Moonee Ponds who was also an influence on Michael. As was Mons Tehan's assistant Father John Curtin. The Morley family was a loving, committed catholic family who lived their faith.

Increasingly, Father Michael felt he was being nudged towards considering the possibility of entering the priesthood. During this time his sister Aileen was a very important confidante that he talked things over with a lot. Aileen had been in the convent when ill health required that she leave the Order. Aileen is a talented poet and wrote many poems about her brother – one the day he was ordained is printed alongside this article.

Through discussions with his family and private reflections Father Michael says that he reached a point where he thought is it even possible that I might get accepted into the priesthood? Especially, given that he had not attained year 12 that was a entry requirement.

Michael first applied to the Sacred Heart Fathers in Sydney and went to an interview in Croydon where they advised that he could do a bridging year and then do a further four years. As part of this Order he would have to be a missionary and the thought of being away from home and that he couldn't own anything of value directed him towards the Diocesan Priesthood. With the Diocese Priesthood your parish would pay you a stipend and you could still own property or other interests.

Bishop Bernie Stewart of Sandhurst endorsed Father Michael's application and he went off to an interview where later that day it was confirmed he had been accepted.

Father Michael joined the priesthood in 1969 at Werribee Manor – which is now the home of the Werribee Open Range Zoo and says that he really battled as a student and found the study and Latin quite daunting.

Michael made great friendships with the other thirty-eight students of his year and says they all supported each other to understand the lectures and subject matter. After the first year he was delighted that Latin was taken off the course list!!!

Sadly, Father Michael's father passed away during his second year when he was 66 years old. They had a very close bond and his dad had a huge impact on his spiritual journey. Father Michael tells a wonderful story of how his father would recite the rosary in the driveway at home and would be so intent on what he was praying that he would not notice his boys who would love to sneak up on him and give him a fright.

During the time Michael spent at Werribee he said he never once doubted that he was meant to be there. He felt he had found what he was meant to do. After three years at Werribee followed by one year at Glen Waverley and then three years at Clayton Father Michael was ordained at St Monica's on Friday 23rd May 1975.

Father Michael began his ministry under the watchful eye of the Bishop of St Kilian's in Bendigo.

After twelve months Father Michael was shipped off to Wodonga where he was the assistant priest to Father Les Ring. He laughingly says that he must not have passed his apprenticeship to be shipped off after just one year.

You can see from his parish timeline that Father Michael has had a rich and diverse life as a priest. He is incredibly grateful for the time he has spent in the numerous parish communities throughout the Diocese.

Father Michael would like to thank the hundreds of people who attended his celebration in the Brigidine Centre at St Augustine's in Kyabram. He is extremely grateful to everyone who has supported him in the past 40 years, particularly his family and friends.

Father Michael Morley Timeline of Parishes:

1975 – Ordination and doing weekend supply work from the seminary

Assistant Priest:

1976 – St Kilian's Bendigo

1977 – 1979 St Augustine's Wodonga with Les Ring for three years

1980 – 1983 St Joseph's Benalla for four years with Mons Michael O'Reilly

1984 – 1986 St Therese's Kennington for three years with Mons Frank Owens

Parish Priest

1987 – 1992 Our Lady of the Snows, Bright for six years

1993 – 2003 Sacred Heart Yarrawonga for 11 years

2004 – 2005 Sacred Heart Tatura for two years

2006 - Sacred Heart Tatura and St Augustine's Kyabram now in tenth year

Aileen's poem for Father Morley's ordination in 1975

"Thank You"

My heart has grown lighter as each day passed by
For a brother of mine has aimed very high.
He's followed God's call, worked so hard towards his goal
The highest in which man can enrol.

With the help of the Spirit his guiding beacon
He has been serving God as a Deacon:
But what joy when he takes the bread and the wine
And changes it to the Body Divine.

On this wondrous day of his ordination
As he reaches the peak of his vocation
May he be sustained with God's endless grace
So he many endure life's ceaseless pace.

Thank You, Dear Lord, for all You have done,
For the graces You've given, for the web that You've spun
Your call has been answered; he'll serve You alone
To help You bring us all back home.

Aileen Kelly