

**ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE
WESTMINSTER
Fr Bernard James Crowe R.I.P.**

It has been said that 'you can take the man out of the Redemptorists but you cannot take the Redemptorists out of the man.' That has been said of Fr Bernard James Crowe who was ordained as a Redemptorist Priest but who later requested, and was accepted for, incardination as a Priest of the Diocese of Westminster. St Alphonsus Liguori, who lived from 1696-1787, founded The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, the Redemptorists, in Italy in 1732 with the purpose of spreading the Gospel through parish missions and service of the poor by Priests living in community with an apostolic life rooted in prayer. This was Bernard's vocation, and after studies at the Redemptorist novitiate in Perth and their seminary at Hawkstone Park Bernard returned to the north east to be ordained at St Benet's, Sunderland on 13 March 1955 by Bishop Joseph McCormack.

Bernard Crowe was the youngest of eleven children born to Leo and Mary Emma, formerly Robson, Crowe. Born on 8 October 1930 and educated at local primary and secondary schools in Sunderland, Bernard went from secondary school to the Redemptorist novitiate in 1947. His first appointment after ordination was to Erdington Abbey in Birmingham, to teach in the junior seminary. In 1964 he was appointed Parish Priest at Erdington Abbey, where he remained until 1970. He then spent time with the Welsh Travelling Mission until he was appointed to the Redemptorist parish of St Joseph and the English Martyrs, Bishop's Stortford in 1971 as Assistant Priest and then Parish Priest. He was popular with the parishioners and a regular visitor to peoples' homes. He formed enduring friendships, helped by his charm and humour, and his ability to relate to the concerns of family life and the desire of parents to bring up their children in the Catholic faith.

In June 1981 Fr Bernard wrote to Cardinal Hume, Archbishop of Westminster, letting the Cardinal know that he had been discerning his future in conversations with Bishop Christopher Butler OSB. He wrote, '...I felt my vocation was to be a parish priest and, at the same time and perhaps because of it, I had a growing dissatisfaction with community life. Father Provincial was not too surprised...I would like to join the Westminster Diocese if you can find me an appointment for a few years while I pray over and think about my religious vocation...' In reply, Cardinal Hume was characteristically gracious: '...I express my willingness for you to exercise your priestly ministry in this diocese. We know and respect you well enough...' Fr Bernard took up an appointment as Assistant Priest at the Church of The Blessed Sacrament, Copenhagen Street for a year of vocational discernment, working with Fr Reginald Fuller who was Parish Priest. All went well, and in September 1982 Fr Bernard was appointed Parish Priest at St Paul the Apostle, Wood Green where he remained until 1986. It was during this time that he formally left the Redemptorists, with a decree from the Superior General in Rome, and joined the Diocese. He was then appointed Parish Priest at St Erconwald's, Wembley and remained there until 2001 when he retired to the parish of St Richard of Chichester, Buntingford to live in the presbytery and give assistance to the Parish Priest, Fr Michael Roberts. In June 2002 Fr Bernard moved to the Carmelite Monastery in Ware, Hertfordshire to serve as Chaplain to the Sisters. The Sisters welcomed Fr Bernard, having known him when he was Vicar for Religious in Hertfordshire from 1974-1981 while a Redemptorist Priest in Bishop's Stortford. He was pleased to be with the Sisters, describing the community as a 'joyful and happy group of Carmelites' and writing 'It is marvellous to be here, the Sisters are an inspiration and I am going through a spiritual renewal – long overdue!' In 2008 Fr Bernard wrote to Cardinal Cormac, Archbishop of Westminster, to let him know of health issues that required surgery with up to six months convalescence. In 2011 it had become evident that Fr Bernard's health concerns had increased. In August he had major surgery at Basildon University Hospital. After a period of convalescence, he returned to Ware Carmel.

Fr Bernard endeavoured to celebrate Mass and to preach at every Mass for as long as his health permitted. He was faithful to his promise to pray the Prayer of the Church several times during each day. His gentleness and serenity endeared him to many other Priests, Religious and Lay People. Sunderland Football Club remained close to his heart, as did his family. He enjoyed many family holidays with his brothers and their wives, and later with their children, driving in Europe to pilgrimage destinations and tourist locations taking in the scenery and enjoying the local produce. Fr Bernard – uncle Bernard – became the focal point of the family, with his faith and dedication at the centre.

By the end of 2016 Fr Bernard's need for care necessitated periods of time in hospital and living in care homes, finally Nazareth House, Finchley from April 2019. Even though unable to say Mass, Fr Bernard remained a man of prayer with his breviary by his side, along with books written by Redemptorists. His desire was to return to Bishop's Stortford when the time came. He died on 19 December at The Whittington Hospital; his Funeral Mass and burial will be at his beloved Bishop's Stortford. Fr Bernard would have known this prayer by St Alphonsus Liguori: 'Let us then fix our minds in the ways of God. Let us resolve to meditate each day on the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us resign ourselves in peace to God's plan for us. Let us endeavour, in the time remaining to us, to give all to God. Jesus has given himself to us; may God help us to give ourselves to him.'

We now commend the gentle soul of Fr Bernard to God, and we pray that he may rest in peace.

**Mgr Martin Hayes | Vicar General | Diocese of Westminster
29 December 2019**