A DIAMOND JUBILEE INTERVIEW

On the vigil of his diamond jubilee of profession Jim Dekker graciously allowed himself to be interviewed. Here is what he had to say.

Q: How did you, a Dutchman, come to be in Australia?

I was the eldest of ten children on a farm in Holland. I was drawn by the appeal of contemplative prayer, so I spent a year with the Carthusians in the UK, then transferred to Italy for health reasons. I spent a further three years with them before returning home to get a job. My first job was as sacristan in Nijmegen which I didn’t like, then I worked for two years in a nursery in a neighbouring town. I used to ride my bicycle there.

I had a cousin in Australia who worked for the Dominicans and he arranged for me to take up a position as a gardener at a Dominican Sisters’ school in Moss Vale. My parents were happy to see me branching out as the farm was not big enough for all the children. I came to Australia in 1954 on a former troop ship, the Waterman. I spent a year at Moss Vale, then moved to Sydney where I worked as a mail sorter at Martin Place before being promoted upstairs to parcels.

Q: How did you come to join the SSS?

When I was weeding the garden at Moss Vale Fr Tom McNevin came up and spoke to me and invited me to visit a “lovely chapel” at Bowral. I went there one lovely spring Sunday afternoon; the daffodils were out. There was exposition and it felt good. Then I went to Sydney and used to go to the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament at lunchtime. After a while I called at the office to talk to someone about a vocation as a brother. Bro Benedict first said I needed an appointment but eventually relented and let me in to speak to none other than Tom McNevin. He blessed a medal of the Little Flower for me and told me to come to Bowral in September for the lay brother’s postulancy.

What appealed to me was the contemplative life, not ministry.

I have had a life-long love of the Little Flower from reading her book L’histoire d’une âme (The Story of a Soul). I also had strong Dominican connections – primary school, Moss Vale and later studies at the Angelicum.

Q: How did your life with the SSS unfold?

Because of my formation and studies with the Carthusians, I only had to do a one-year novitiate. But it had to be 365 days so I was professed a day after the others. Fr Thibeau told me I should be studying for the priesthood, and both Tom McNevin and the visiting Superior General, Fr Spieken, agreed. I moved to Templestowe for some philosophy and a year of theology before being sent to Rome in 1960 to complete my studies at the Angelicum.

I was ordained in my home parish of Obdam because it was cheaper than having my family come to Rome. I returned to Rome in 1963, spent six months at St Francis’ and then was appointed
Director of Scholastics at Templestowe, in fact deputising for Fr Len McKenna. Then Vincent Phelan took over as Director and I became Novice Master.

Q: What was hardest and what was happiest for you?

My year as Director of Scholastics was the hardest. I felt totally unprepared for the job, the textbooks were still in Latin and I had to use my day off to prepare classes. Even being Novice Master wasn't easy. It was the time of transition from the Constitutions to the Rule of Life and nothing was definitive. It was difficult to communicate the tradition of the Congregation to young people.

Then I became Provincial by accident when Ed Wood resigned. I was flabbergasted but took heart from the thought that “God chooses the weakest.”

There has been a number of happy times. When I first went to Bowral I felt I had “arrived.” Then I was lucky to be in Rome during Vatican II and attend the canonisation of St Peter Julian. I also enjoyed my time of ministry in Perth with minimal administrative responsibilities and a small community.

I have been blessed with a great sense of vocation, of being called by God. It has been pure grace, a gift, like the angel saying to Mary, “You have found God’s favour.” I have had a good personal relationship with Jesus. I am grateful to God and to the Congregation for the life I’ve had.

Q: Who and what books have been your sources of inspiration?

St Thérèse of Lisieux has been a favourite since my youth, and of course St Peter Julian and the eucharist. In the Province Len McKenna was always positive and supportive. Many people have helped and encouraged me.

Books that have inspired me include The Story of a Soul and more recently Denis Edwards’ Breath of Life and Ronald Rolheiser’s Sacred Fire. I have always enjoyed historical novels – I have read all of Charles Dickens, James Michener, and Edward Rutherford’s books on Sarum, London and New York. Shakespeare too, of course, and short poems.

Q: What is the secret of a long life?

I don’t have one! I was not a strong child, and spent some time at a health colony. But my father lived to 82 and my mother died on the brink of her 90th birthday.

Art at St Francis’ – a contemporary art space in the heart of the City of Melbourne – is celebrating ten years of showcasing Australian and overseas artists. A series of exhibitions in the St Francis’ Pastoral Centre administered by the Blessed Sacrament Congregation has featured work by many artists in the fields of painting, drawing, photography, printmaking and multi media art who besides creativity have shown concept and quality in their work.

It was in 2008 that the first exhibition was installed at the newly refurbished Pastoral Centre. When the Community Leader asked me if I would take on the curating of art exhibitions at the Centre I was happy to do so as this gave and still gives me an opportunity to contribute to the art scene in the city. I took up the challenge and have enjoyed a most fulfilling ten years.

In that time Art at St Francis’ has become an important forum for bringing diverse and quality exhibitions to the City of Melbourne. The space in the Centre has developed into an important exhibition venue in the heart of the city where throughout the year young artists can present a selected body of work to the public. Often being their first exhibition it gives the selected artists an opportunity to be guided and shown what is involved in presenting their work to a wider audience.

Working together as a husband-wife team, Walter and I share this involvement with the artists. I select their work, guide them into formulating a statement about the content of their art and decide how the exhibition will be presented. Walter involves them in the practical presentation and installation of their work. During those years, until his death in 2016, we also greatly enjoyed the support of Fr Pat Negri who constantly made encouraging comments about the Art at St Francis’ project and the art works themselves. With all this collaboration more than 100 exhibitions have been held.

Artists have gratefully taken up the opportunity to exhibit via Art at St Francis’. They have appreciated St Francis’ engagement with contemporary art and willingness to provide generous conditions to artists who are trying to establish themselves in the densely populated art market. The response over the ten years has been overwhelming. Art at St Francis’ has become a home for many artists as well as their followers and the interested public. Our opening nights have been enjoyed by many people.
who give support to the artists as well as broadening the St Francis' visitor base.

Curating *Art at St Francis'* is a rewarding challenge as I am constantly on the look-out for emerging artists whose work is of high standard, is a coherent body of work and is professionally presented. I have visited many artists in their studios in this past decade discussing their work and making sure a high standard of exhibition can be maintained to create a stimulating environment for the ongoing programs at the Pastoral Centre.

As a result *Art at St Francis'* has become a well known exhibition initiative in the City of Melbourne, not only for artists but also for art institutions, commercial galleries, designers and collectors. Connecting with the wider field of the visual arts in Australia has been a major focus during the past years as well.

Artists regularly advertise their exhibitions with *Art at St Francis'* in the 'Art Almanac,' a monthly art magazine which is distributed Australia-wide.

Ten years of exhibition openings have allowed us to establish contacts that now make up a data base of about 650 recipients of our invitations.

The many artists that have shown their work at St Francis' join me in thanking the community for providing this beautiful space and supporting *Art at St Francis’*.  

*Brigitte Remmen*

Curator *Art at St Francis'*

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**BISHOP GOOLD: ART AND BOOK COLLECTOR**

The mystery of the great Crucifixion painting hanging above the old marble altar at St Francis' remains unsolved. Valiant attempts to identify the artist once and for all have failed. Nothing has yet confirmed the traditional suspect – the Spanish painter Juan de las Roelas (1560 – 1625) – as the true author.

Nor has the story of how the painting came to Melbourne and St Francis’ been unravelled. No proof has been forthcoming for the working hypothesis that the first bishop of Melbourne, James Alipius Goold, purchased the painting on a trip to Rome in 1853.

What has become clear in recent times is that Goold used his voyages to Rome to acquire an impressive array of European books and art. Enough information has been tracked down to justify a recent international conference on the subject. Entitled “A Baroque Bishop in Colonial Australia: The Cultural Patronage of Bishop James Goold (1812-1886)”, it was held in Melbourne last month.

Funded by an Australian Research Council Grant, the symposium involved the collaboration of no less than three academic institutions – the University of Melbourne, Australian Catholic University, and the University of Divinity – as well as the Australian Institute of Art History and the Archdiocese of Melbourne. The majority of speakers were local, but others came from as far afield as Rome, Berlin, Aberdeen and Hong Kong.

It is impossible to give a full account of the seventeen presenters and their papers. The majority focussed primarily on Goold himself – his formation in Ireland and Rome, his mission in Australia (including the ten years he spent in the Campbelltown district of NSW), his enthusiasm for book collecting, his passion for baroque art, the legacy of his patronage of Gothic revival architecture (exemplified especially by St Patrick’s Cathedral), and his remarkable collaboration with pioneering Mercy sister Ursula Frayne.

Others dealt with complementary topics: the suitability of baroque art for mediating the divine, “bibliomania” in 19th century Australia, the influence of a world-wide network of Irish-Roman bishops, and the life and work of architect William Wardell. One of the speakers, art conservator Helen Gill, used her work on the Crucifixion painting at St Francis’ as a springboard for an explanation of conservation techniques.

The key co-ordinator of the Goold research project, Professor Emeritus Jaynie Anderson from Melbourne University, illustrated Goold’s passion for late baroque art with reference to Jacques Stella’s altarpiece *Jesus in the Temple found by his Parents*, located in the

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Jacques Stella’s *Jesus in the Temple found by his Parents* in the Baptistery of St Patrick’s Cathedral.
baptistery just inside the main entrance of St Patrick’s Cathedral on the left-hand side.

In a 2016 article Professor Anderson cites evidence suggesting that Stella originally created the work for the church of the Jesuit novitiate in Paris. As with the Crucifixion painting, there are tantalising hints that Bishop Gold purchased the Stella on his 1853 trip to Rome but no conclusive proof. In naming these clues, Professor Anderson threw in a reference to St Francis:

The words ‘gorgeous’ and ‘colossal proportion’ certainly match the Stella as well as the large Crucifixion, an enormous late Italian Baroque painting of c. 1680, in the Church of St Francis, Melbourne. The church of St Francis was the oldest Catholic church in Melbourne, and Stella’s altarpiece would have been shown there before St Patrick’s Cathedral was completed.

Dare we say that that St Francis’ loss was St Patrick’s gain?


Remembering Uncle Laurie - Anne Sullivan

Father Sullivan was my Uncle Laurie, younger brother of my father, Frank, and younger brother also of John, who died as a baby, Marge, Freda and Geoff.

Given the fact that he lived 92 years, on two continents, I have had to ruthlessly edit my reflections on his life. Much has been left out.

If his were a normal Sullivan funeral, we would gather in the Sacred Heart church, Tatura, and after his Requiem Mass, we would proceed to the beautiful Tatura cemetery, surrounded by paddocks on a quiet country road. Uncle Laurie’s parents and all his brothers and sisters are buried there, along with both sets of grandparents and countless aunts, uncles and cousins.

My uncle, however, took a decision when he was about twenty years of age which changed the course of his life forever and had a major impact on his family.

He came from a farming community in the Goulburn Valley. The nearest town was a little place called Merrigum and the family farm was about equidistant, as the crow flies, from Tatura and Kyabram. His Irish grandfather was among the very earliest settlers in the area, having selected land in 1870. Sullivans continue to farm in the area to the present day. We are still primarily a country family, with only me and one cousin living in Melbourne.

Uncle Laurie was on track to be a farmer like his grandfather, father and his two older brothers when he had an experience which he recounted to us for the first time a couple of years ago. The story affected me greatly. He said that one evening he was walking across the paddock to attend to a farm chore and was tossing around in his mind the idea of a religious vocation. He had been grappling with the thought for some time and he had finally come to a decision. He said to himself: “No, I don’t want that.” Almost immediately he sensed an inner voice saying “You don’t want that, but I want that”. Straight away he thought: “Right. I’ll do it!” And so began his journey to ordination.

Reflecting on that later, I was very struck by the parallel with Jesus calling Peter and Andrew, James and John to leave their nets and follow Him. They did. And Uncle Laurie did.

First he needed to finish his secondary school education. He had been mainly educated at the state school in Merrigum but, like his brothers before him, had spent a year at Assumption College in Kilmore. He applied to re-enrol there but was told, at the age of 20 or 21, that he was too old. In the end, he was accepted at St Stanislaus College in Bathurst, which was a very long way from home.

Not long before he died, he told me that it used to take 3 days to get there. On the first day, he would go by train from Merrigum to Melbourne, where he would stay with his mother’s sister’s family, the Mackeys, in Raleigh Street in Essendon. On the second day, he would take the train to Sydney where he would stay overnight at a boarding house in Pitt Street, and finally, on day
three, he would travel from Sydney to Bathurst. Naturally, the three day trip had to be done in reverse when he returned home for the school holidays. This went on for three years, during which time my grandfather provided the necessary financial support, hoping that his son did indeed have a vocation. It would not have been unheard of for my uncle to have eventually decided that the religious life was not for him. I realise that my grandfather was not unique in his willingness to do this. Many Catholic families around Australia did the same and we have all been beneficiaries of their generosity.

When plans had been made for Uncle Laurie to leave the farm and go to school in Bathurst, my father drove him to the station to begin that first long journey. A couple of years ago, my uncle told us that after Dad had driven away and as he sat alone on the train, he thought to himself: “What have I done?”

There was such vehemence in his voice as said those words. I can only presume the question was prompted by his awareness that he was leaving an area he knew and loved, his family, his future as a farmer and stepping out into the unknown.

However, he also said with even greater emphasis when reflecting on 60 years of priesthood: “I have never, never regretted it”.

At this point, I might mention a great tragedy which befell the family early in my uncle’s life. When he was a little under two years of age, his mother died unexpectedly, leaving five children. Her death changed family life forever.

I would like to take the opportunity to pay tribute to his two sisters who, in my view, were the unsung heroines of his life. Margaret and Winifred, universally known as Marge and Freda, were 16 and 15 when their mother died. Marge had just started her first job in Kyabram and Freda was still at school in Tatura. They were required to come home and look after their three little brothers and to keep house for their father, which they did faithfully for the next 42 years until my grandfather died at the age of 89.

I knew them well and, for me, they were the very embodiment of the Beatitudes, especially Blessed are the poor in spirit..., blessed are the meek... and blessed are the clean of heart... They forewent any dreams they may have had of homes and families of their own. Between them, they were the only mother figures Uncle Laurie ever knew and he owed them a huge debt. He was aware of this and was very solicitous for their welfare in their old age when he finally returned to Australia.

My uncle was ordained to the priesthood in January 1956. I was one year old at the time and none of my brothers and sisters and cousins were even born. We grew up with very little acquaintance with our uncle. He left for what was then Ceylon in 1956 and was not to return for 10 years.

I have a memory from 1966 when he returned for that first period of leave. My parents had taken my siblings and me to Port Melbourne to pick up Uncle Laurie from the ship. We arrived back at the farm late at night and, as we pulled up, I saw my grandfather come out onto the verandah with my aunts. He was an austere and uncommunicative man, of whom I was always a little bit scared. I was surprised to see an eagerness in his demeanour. Uncle Laurie got out of the car, walked up to his father and they shook hands.

It was only in adult life that I reflected on what a touching a moment that was: a father re-united with his son after 10 years. The modern parent in me, however, finds it strange that all they could muster after such a long time was a handshake! Of course, a hug would have been anathema.

My uncle never saw his father again after that visit home. He was already an old man of 87 and he died two years later. Uncle Laurie was not at his funeral and nor was he at the funeral of my father who died as the result of an accident in 1990. I know it was painful for Uncle Laurie to be absent at the time of his brother’s death and I can only assume it cost him a great deal to be away when his father died.

I feel very much for the family members left...
behind when Uncle Laurie began his priestly ministry. Of course, they supported his decision to enter the priesthood, but they saw very little of him in the second half of their lives. I think, in particular, of his father and brothers and sisters, but also of his mother’s family, the Hearns, whose neighbouring farm had always been like a second home to him. I think also of how much Uncle Laurie gave up when he answered the call to the religious life. In addition to separating from family, he moved away from an area loved. Right to the end of his life he retained a strong attachment to the place where he grew up. He spoke of it often and returned there whenever he could.

After that first trip home, my uncle returned periodically to Australia – every 3 to 5 years. We came to know him a little better but it our relationship was still only at a level of acquaintance until I decided to visit him in Sri Lanka in January 1984.

I only had vague plans for that trip but, when I arrived in Colombo, I discovered that Uncle Laurie had arranged to have two weeks off so that he could drive me around much of the country in an old Volkswagen beetle which the Blessed Sacrament community owned. That holiday was a watershed in our relationship. It was the beginning of a long friendship that lasted to the present day. I know exactly how long it was: 34 years. I celebrated my 29th birthday in Colombo and today is my 63rd birthday. While it is a sad time to celebrate a birthday, it somehow feels strangely fitting that it should fall at this time.

We got on very well. He was great fun and was a master of the lame joke. But I also learned much from him. He was the most encouraging and non-judgmental person I have ever known and I loved the fact that his zeal for ministry remained undimmed.

Whenever I hear or read St Paul’s reflection on love in his first letter to the Corinthians, I think of Uncle Laurie. He was patient and kind, and he wasn’t boastful or conceited or rude. His first instinct was to make allowances for others and to endure whatever came.

I will admit to experiencing some frustration at his stubborn refusal to accept the limitations of his physical frailty but, at the same time, it was inspirational to see that the faith still burn brightly within him. He was zealous to the last. I’ll miss him and I look forward with hope to seeing him again one day.

Anne Sullivan
(Niece of Fr Laurie Sullivan SSS)

KUMQUAT

After growing for so long in the quiet corner of the garden, people hardly notice anymore the presence of the kumquat tree which keeps producing all the year a copious crop of fruit and flowers.

Its cheerful golden oranges are glowing among the glossy dark green leaves, putting a smile on the face of the garden. Not many bother to gather its fruit with its sour and bitter taste. Only those who know the secret of making tasty tangy marmalade, turning sourness into sweetness.

Although so bounteous and always present in good times and bad times, one can still be taken for granted as even God knows all too well.

Fr Jim Dekker SSS
Melbourne, July 1988
CONCORDANCE TO THE ROL COMMENTARY

The Rule of Life contains 120 numbers. The original Concordance of the Rule of Life by Fr Justin Sequeira SSS of the Province of India is sixty pages long and dated 24-30 October 1993 by the author. It was re-issued by the Curia in 2005 in a 60 page format. The Commentary on the Rule of Life by Fr Tony McSweeney SSS is 1,000 pages of A4 text. To date it is unpublished in book form but available in multiple downloads on the SSS Curia web-site. The Concordance to the Commentary on the Rule of Life has now been published in book form by Fr Sequeira. The length is 204 pages.

There is a foreword to the Concordance to the Commentary on the Rule of Life (Companion-Concordance) written by the former Vicar General of the Congregation, Fr Bong Luistro SSS. In a one page statement Fr Luistro commends the work as assisting busy religious to grasp the consequences of Peter Julian Eymard’s spiritual legacy. Its usefulness to formation personnel and spiritual directors is highlighted.

Fr Sequeira speaks of the Companion-Concordance as a treasury of resources for deepening our understanding of the Eucharist, Prayer before the Eucharist, religious life, Eucharistic mission and formation. He points out that his work is intended not just for the formators but for all the religious of the Congregation.

He mentions the pages of the Commentary when listing references. He refers to the “code” on the bottom of page 5. “The first number at the end of the summary refers to the page number of the Commentary: e.g. 402”. However the pages in the on-line Commentary are not sequentially numbered. Each section begins with the number 1. Until the Commentary is completed, it is impossible to have sequential referencing as the pages numbers will change with any additions.

For me the word Buddhism leapt off the analytic index of themes. The references to the Commentary were 475 and 477b. True enough, the Commentary does provide insights and clarifications, especially the section The great Asian religions. The Companion-Concordance mentions Islam as does the Commentary. The cross reference is to The Mission of Unity [465-480] ROL 38. The word Eunuch also is arresting, being listed among the 191 themes in the analytic table. The Commentary speaks of it as a paschal image used by Jesus.

The great strength of both the Commentary and the Concordance is the treatment of major themes such as Word of God and Eucharist. In Australia, the Church faces a time of purification in view of the challenge to respond to the prevalence of sexual abuse of children by some clergy and religious and the Royal Commission mandate to investigate, report and to make recommendations. I checked therefore to see what kind of treatment is provided by the Commentary and the Concordance. The key words are: sexuality, clericalism and vulnerable persons. The Concordance does have ‘Sexuality, out of control’ listed, but not clericalism or vulnerable persons. There is however a topic listed as ‘Women’, pp. 188/89 in the Concordance to the Commentary. ‘Pornography’ is another topic that is listed, but is given only a very brief treatment. An exceptional commentary is provided for No 16 of the ROL on celibacy; twenty nine pages in length!

Fr Sequeira is to be commended and congratulated for this resource to explore the vast commentary on the Rule of Life.

Jo Dirks SSS
4 February 2018
## BIRTHDAYS

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## ANNIVERSARIES

### FIRST PROFESSION

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### IN REMEMBRANCE

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