

FATHER KEVIN FLANAGAN (1928-2017)

Howard Jones

For 40 years, Father Kevin Flanagan was North Albury's Catholic parish priest. He reached far beyond his Sacred Heart parish to be friend, counsellor and comforter to many not Catholics or even Christians.

His death in December 2017 brought an outpouring of sorrow and a flood of tributes reflecting the wider community's great love and admiration. He was known to be open and gentle in character but a devoted Melbourne Demon when it came to football! Everyone agreed he was "a good bloke."

Kevin Flanagan was not your usual priest. Like many other Catholic priests of Irish heritage, he attended a Catholic boarding school and spent seven years studying at seminaries. However, he spent his late teens and twenties in business at Tocumwal.



Fr Flanagan's parents ran a grocery, ironmongery and drapery store and had four children before Kevin was born. His father part-owned a cinema. Kevin worked in the store in school holidays and after he left school, but played sport or swam in the Murray whenever he could. He had plenty of friends and learned to box and dance. In short, he lived life abundantly.

He and his sister Kath continued to run the store before and after their father died in 1954 and until the business was sold. The 28-year-old Kevin then chose to become a priest.

Ordained in 1963, a time of the Second Vatican Council, he welcomed reforms towards Christian unity, the new English liturgy, the opening up of personal conscience and a greater appreciation of other peoples' religious beliefs.

Fr Flanagan served at Narrandera, Albury and Wagga and for four years was a missionary in Papua New Guinea. In 1977, he took charge of North Albury parish, where he remained until he retired on 23 July 2017, aged 89.

In Albury, outside his work for the church and St Anne's and Xavier schools, he might be seen kayaking on the Murray River or following horseracing. He tackled the Murray River Marathons with Fr Gerry Iverson and others, and became president of the Mitta Mitta Canoe Club.

A big challenge came in 1998 when six friends he knew through kayaking were killed in an air crash. He conducted their funerals and none was Catholic. Fr Flanagan also earned the trust and mutual respect of the Aboriginal Community, and introduced their customs and traditions into services.

His friend, Fr Bernie Moylan, said of him: "His was a ministry of welcome, not exclusion. He worked with people as they are, not as they ought to be."