



Speech by

Barbara Stone

MEMBER FOR SPRINGWOOD

Hansard Tuesday, 13 March 2007

DEATH OF FATHER GARY RUSSELL

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (9.52 pm): It is with great sadness that I rise and inform the House of the passing of Father Gary Russell. Gary Ronald Russell was born on 2 September 1950. He was born into a large family that resided at Sandgate. He was one of seven children born to Ron and Elaine, brother to Narelle, Greg, Michael, Teresa, Loretta and Angela. I send my condolences to the family at this very sad time.

Gary attended Sacred Heart school at Sandgate, St Patrick's at Shorncliffe, St Anthony's and Padua College at Kedron. After the completion of his schooling the family moved to Stafford. Gary was ordained to the priesthood on 13 July 1974 in St Stephen's Cathedral. As a young priest he was attached to parishes in Aspley from 1975 to 1977 and in Bulimba from 1978 to August 1980. The honourable Minister for Emergency Services and member for Bulimba speaks very highly of Father Gary Russell. He has told me that he has some wonderful memories of a great bloke.

A great bloke was Father Gary, and that has been said to me by many people in communities all over Brisbane and Logan. When people spoke of this great bloke, they always spoke of him as Father Gary. I hardly ever heard him referred to as Father Russell. He also served in Wavell Heights from 1980 to 1985.

In 1985 Father Gary went to Beenleigh and stayed there until August 1986, when he was appointed as the first parish priest of St Matthew's, Loganholme—a wonderful church in my electorate. From the youngest students at St Matthew's school to the oldest parishioner of St Matthew's, everyone loved Father Gary, and they all had wonderful memories of him. He was a charming, caring and a fun-loving character remembered for enjoying a drink or two and a cigar, and he was a passionate sports supporter. I have heard stories from the St Matthew's P&F members of interesting late-night meetings they had with Father Gary—meetings that went all night. They also advised me that if I wanted to make a meeting time with Father Gary it should be done in the afternoon as he was not a good morning person.

Father Gary is also known for his anchor role in the Brisbane television program *Stinger* seen in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He enjoyed supporting young people with positive messages, and he produced and directed musicals. He was a talented singer and was the force behind the Brisbane performers the Brothers and Sisters.

In 2002, Father Gary announced his illness and his decision to move to Wilston to be with family. Last Friday evening St Matthew's held a moving service to celebrate the ministry of a very special person in the life of St Matthew's church and school and Chisholm College. The large crowd had time to reflect on how they would remember Father Gary. He was a man who touched many hearts, a man who provided leadership and built the thriving parish they know today.

I will always remember the first time I met Father Gary. I can remember thinking about the special qualities that this man had. I found that in my first meeting with him. In the short time that I knew him, he certainly made an impact on me. I remember him with fondness and with great respect. As it was said on Friday night by the St Matthew's church and school and Chisholm College communities: 'Father Gary Russell, you are simply the blessed.'