



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard Tuesday, 9 September 2008

FATHER JOHN O'CONNER

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (10.20 pm): I rise tonight to pay tribute to Father John O'Conner, who on 30 June celebrated the 50th anniversary of his ordination as a priest in the Catholic Church. I was pleased to attend a celebratory mass at St Clare's Catholic Church on Wednesday, 6 August where the local community acknowledged his lifetime of service to God, the church and the local communities he has cared for.

Born on 6 March 1925 in Toowoomba, John O'Conner was educated at the Helidon Convent, the Coorparoo Convent, Boondall State School and Nudgee College. John was first employed as a clerk in the Queensland department of mines. On his 18th birthday he enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force and trained as a wireless air gunner in both Australia and England. He was posted to 460 Squadron RAAF Bomber Command at Binbrook in Lincolnshire from 2 April 1945. John was discharged from the RAAF on 3 December 1945.

John O'Conner became a cadet forester with the Queensland forestry department in 1947, and in 1948 he graduated from the University of Queensland with a degree in Forestry Science. He resigned from the forestry department in 1951 upon realising that he had a vocation to the priesthood. After studying Latin for six months, John entered the Banyo seminary in 1952 and was, as I mentioned earlier, ordained as a priest on 30 June 1958.

Father John O'Conner volunteered to serve as a priest in far-north Queensland and commenced his service with the diocese of Cairns on 30 January 1959. Father John served as curate at St Clare's Catholic Church in Tully between 1959 and 1962 before being appointed as parish priest in Dimbulah from 24 March 1963. Father John was appointed parish priest at St John's Catholic Church in Silkwood from 1 July 1979.

After 32 years serving as a Catholic priest, Father John officially retired and settled in the Tully district in 1990 where he has for the last 18 years actively supported and assisted the local parish priests. Residing at Tully Heads, Father John is famous for his love of fishing and the sea. He has also been a committed athletics coach for many young people in the Tully district who have achieved considerable success in their chosen events.

At his celebratory mass, Father John spoke about the nature of the priesthood in the Catholic Church and the more unfashionable aspects of it, defending these as the teachings of the Bible. He justified their ongoing practice in the Catholic Church as matters of faith, stressing that faith ought not be subject to the transitory priorities of modern society. Father John has a deep understanding of the teachings of the Old Testament and has always been able to make them relevant to the circumstances of modern society.

Since his retirement, Father John has made a particular effort to extend pastoral care to the elderly residents of the Tully district and indeed has been a valued friend to many families, including my own, at very difficult times following the death of a loved one. Father John O'Conner is a very well respected and valued member of the Tully community, and I congratulate him in the 50th year of his ordination.