

Obituary - Monsignor Anthony K Toms, EGCLJ



Monsignor Anthony K Toms EGCLJ KMLJ (1938 – 2020)

It is with much sadness that the news of the death on 25 September 2020 of Monsignor Anthony Toms EGCLJ KMLJ has been received. Tony, as he was universally known, had been in ill-health for some years, but over decades was a mighty presence within the Order of St Lazarus at home and abroad.



Anthony Kevin Toms was born in Melbourne on 21 March 1938, the son of Edward Kevin and Alma Elizabeth Anne Toms. His father was a pharmacist. Tony spent his childhood years at East St Kilda and was educated at Xavier College. He attended St Mary's Church East St Kilda. Early on he was called to a vocation in the priesthood. His academic levels were of a high order and he was accepted into the prestigious Propaganda Fide College in Rome. He sailed from Melbourne to Rome on 27 August 1957. Tony was made a Deacon in March 1964 and then ordained as a Priest on 25 July 1964 by the Archbishop of Melbourne, Most Rev'd Justin Simonds at St Patrick's Cathedral.



Father Tony was posted to the Vicariate Apostolic of Thare-Nonseng in Thailand. He then went to the USA where he studied science and then returned to Thailand to become Principal of Vorasarn Pithaya College in Bangkok (1967-78). While in Thailand Tony was appointed as a civilian chaplain to the US MACTHAI and JUSMAG. He then returned to Australia where he became a regular army chaplain in the Australian Army at the 1st Armoured Regiment, Puckapunyal (1978-93). He later served as senior chaplain with Headquarters of the Logistic Command. From 1993 to 1996 Father Tony was Roman Catholic Principal Chaplain of the Australian Army and Vicar-General/Chancellor of the Military Diocese of Australia, achieving field rank of Brigadier. In 1993 Pope St John Paul II made him a prelate of honour (Monsignor). During 1994 Tony organised a military pilgrimage to Lourdes, the Western Front and Rome.



Monsignor Tony Toms went back to civilian life in June 1996 when he became the Parish Priest at Seymour. There, he enjoyed a long, happy and distinguished period at Seymour where he was much admired by the local people. In 2014 (and to note the golden jubilee of his priestly ordination) St Mary's College, Seymour named its new Science Wing in his honour. The parishioners of St. Mary's in Seymour, along with the nuns and brothers, have raised enough money (over \$ 12,000) to install a St. Mary's window in the church dedicated to Anthony. The inauguration took place on Sunday 1st December 2019 and at that time Anthony was still able to attend it himself.

The window in the church of St. Mary's of SEYMORE dedicated to Mons. Anthony Toms

One of the early leaders of the Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem in Australia (and a President of the ACT Commandery), the late Major-General Duncan Francis AO OBE KLJ, introduced Monsignor Tony Toms to its ecumenical aims and charitable ideals. Tony was drawn to these and joined the Order within the ACT Commandery as a Chaplain (ChLJ) in 1995. He was enthusiastic from the start and when posted to Seymour in 1996 he transferred to the Victorian Commandery. He provided spiritual advice to the then Grand Prior (Chev Tony Sallmann) during moves towards reunification and Tony was awarded an Officer with the Order of Merit (OMLJ) in 2002. He became a Deputy National Chaplain in 2003 and that year was elevated to the rank of Chaplain of Jurisdiction (JChLJ). Fr Tony held the post of Commandery Chaplain in Victoria for many years and was also Commandery President (2009-14). He hosted a number of Quiet Days at Seymour and was ready to help in any way he could in his Commandery and with the Victorian Green Cross Project. In this Project Anthony was involved as a Deputy Chairman from 2003 - 2017 and afterwards, despite his illness, he stayed on the committee and attached great importance that this was recorded in the annual report. Anthony was instrumental in the success of GCPI.

Monsignor Toms was highly respected on the international scene of the Order where he served as Vice-Chair of the International Public Relations Committee for ten years. In this role he was a driving force behind the introduction of an internet website for the Order. He did likewise for the Grand Priory of Australia and was its Webmaster from its inception until 2016. The late Grand Master (the Marquis de Almazan) recognised the international roles Tony undertook with a personal award in 2011 when he was made a Knight of Merit (KMLJ). He was also a member of the International Spiritual Advisory Board for many years and in particular during delicate negotiations, which saw the ultimate reunification of the Order.



Monsignor Anthony Toms succeeded the late Archbishop Ian George AO CChLJ as National Chaplain of the Grand Priory of Australia in 2013 and retired in 2016. The Grand Master further recognised Father Tony when he was promoted to Ecclesiastical Grand Cross (EGCLJ) in March 2014 for what the Grand Master said was his “extraordinary commitment” to the Order both in Australia and internationally. That year Tony attended the Walsingham Shrine Pilgrimage in England and visited his sister Jennie in Cambridge.

Increasing mobility difficulties and then a stroke forced Tony to revise his lifetime of service to the Church and the Order. He retired as Parish Priest at Seymour in February 2016 after a record period of twenty years. To great regret he also retired as National Chaplain of the Australian Grand Priory the same year but continued to provide sage advice as a Victorian Commandery Chaplain and to attend as many Order activities as possible. Monsignor Tony lived at East St Kilda, Melbourne for a while in retirement and later moved back to the Victorian countryside at Seymour, the place dear to his heart, where he went into care. In the end he had the urgent desire to return to his parents' apartment in East St. Kilda, where he ultimately fell asleep peacefully.

Anthony's Requiem Mass will be held on October 6th at 11:30 am at St. Mary's in Seymour. Because of COVID19 the number of participants is very limited, but everything is broadcast and the connection is at www.pscp.tv/floydfunerals.

His service to the Order of St Lazarus here in Australia and internationally was exceptional. A warm friend, counsellor and priest – he will be missed by many.



In Santiago de Compostella