



SM bulletin



Monday, 23 February 2015

BERNARD RYAN SM (1924 - 2015)

Superior General 1977 - 1985

Bernard Joseph Ryan, the ninth superior general, was born in Wellington, New Zealand, on 1 September, 1924. He was professed on 2 February 1944. Ordained on 11th September, 1949, he spent twenty eight years as a highly effective and well-loved teacher in New Zealand Marist schools. His apostolate extended well beyond the school environment to: parents, Old Boy networks, and the Catholic Family Movement. He was one of the first to recognize the need to form lay staff in the Marist vision as Marists began to withdraw from the schools.

At the General Chapter of 1977 Bernie he was elected as superior general. During his term he enthusiastically supervised the re-writing and approval of the Society's constitutions. At the same time he initiated the new mission districts in Africa, the Philippines and Latin America.

Fr. Gerard Arbuckle, who served in Bernie's administration, has written: "*When Bernie Ryan was superior general, visitors were often invited to make a short pilgrimage to trace the steps St Paul in Rome. Bernie had an abiding love of Paul and his epistles. In the weeks before he died, we reflected together on this love and the importance of Paul for Bernie's mission as superior general. I asked him for his favourite Pauline verses. He replied without hesitation: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus..." (Phil 1:5). Christ the healer was the centre of Bernie's life and ministry.*

"Bernie then read: "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others" (Phil 1:5,4). Bernie excelled in looking to the needs of others, be they fellow Marists around the world or the countless visitors from all walks of life, who came to see him at the General House. He was for ever deeply and compassionately concerned for the welfare of Marists in decision-making in council. Council meetings could go well over time because Bernie, hopeless as a chairman, would become deeply worried about the impact of possible decisions upon confreres – their well-being and their ministry. . . ."

At the age of 62, having completed his term as superior general, after a short time back in his home province Bernie moved to Australia where, at the invitation of Aboriginal elders, he initiated a mission outreach among the *Dhaggati*, *Gumbayngirr* and *Bunjulung* Aboriginal people in northern New South Wales. So closely did he identify with his people that he was made an elder within the *Koori* community. Only two years ago did advanced age and associated ill-health finally require his parting from his beloved people and his moving to Sydney. He died there on February 21.

Ministry for Bernie was to be Mary's presence to people, especially those who are disadvantaged. Hospitality for him truly meant being available to people, even if this meant having to break pre-set timetables. He once described himself as "firm in principle and flexible in practice." This defined Bernie's pastorally compassionate approach. He lived the words of the founder: "If I cannot save [people] with the law, I shall try to save [them] without it." Bernie had an incredible gift of empathy. People at every level of society felt he understood them, often without him saying a word. A colleague who has worked with him for almost three decades said of him that Bernie is "the face of God to the Aborigines." Nothing could better have described the power of Bernie's self-effacing presence to people. The words of St Paul ultimately describe the source of Bernie's pastoral strength: "I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me" (Gal 2:20).



MAY HE REST IN PEACE.