

Fr Bede remembered...

I first met Fr Bede nearly forty years ago when one of our sons joined the group of children preparing for their First Holy Communion in 1982. He immediately impressed me as “a real Vatican II priest” – a sensitive listener, open to change and with a wonderful sense of humour.

We began a discussion of my own spiritual journey, when I explained that as a pre-Vatican II teenager, I decided that I could not accept the Church’s teaching on contraception and opted not to be confirmed. Suffice to say, that after several months of weekly discussions with Fr Bede, I was inspired to confirm my faith in the Catholic Church of Vatican II.

During this time Fr Bede shared many of his experiences of working in Peru with a desperately impoverished rural community and his passion for social justice. He was an immensely practical man and used his experience of farming and agriculture, to improve the lives and productivity of the subsistence farmers he worked with during his ministry.

In no time, he had co-opted me to help write In Touch and become increasingly involved in the life of the parish, especially in promoting the cause of Justice and Peace.

Fr Bede was a brilliant community-builder; inspiring confidence in parishioners and co-opting parents in teams to prepare our younger parishioners for their First Holy Communion and Confirmation. He then involved others in running a Youth Group for the teenagers, which included never-to-be-forgotten weekends, camping in the Bermondsey Huts on the estate. Definitely not a project for the faint-hearted; but always supported by Fr Bede who would celebrate the concluding Mass for the group.

Once a year we would celebrate the life of the Parish with a “fiesta”, commencing with Sunday Mass, followed by a shared lunch, with games

for the children and music to entertain the adults, provided by parishioners and occasionally members of the Lay Community. It was then that Fr Bede's secret passion for trifle became known - and so innumerable varieties would be produced for his delectation. I will never forget the sight of Fr Bede joyfully carrying away a surplus fruit cake at the end of one of the revels, to be "transformed" into a trifle later on...

After retiring from the Parish, Fr Bede became Estate Manager for Worth and would entertain us with graphic accounts of his experiences while trying to protect the trees (which were a source of income) from the deer, who also contributed to the income.

Other tales would be shared about Fr Bede and his bees, when during a warm summer, he would retrieve a swarm from another part of the county, only to discover that the Queen had eluded him. He would then have to return to retrieve his Queen, in order to ensure that the swarm would all follow!

Truly he was a "man of many parts" and "for all seasons" and we will cherish all our memories of him.

May God rest his Soul