

## **PAPER VIII**

# **THE POPE CAME TO BRISBANE**

**25 NOVEMBER 1986**

Joseph Matthews 4-2-97

These thoughts are offered to members, guests and friends of the Brisbane Catholic Historical Society to commemorate a most historic occasion - our first visit by any Pontiff to Brisbane. These are recollections from more than ten years later, and are but a few of the countless facets of gems in the memories of the three speakers on the subject this evening:-

Ms Jean Potter of the Australian Catholic University,

Mr Leo Dunne, Executive Officer of the Federation of Parents and Friends Association of Queensland, and

Myself, Joseph Matthews, then a State Councillor of the Knights of the Southern Cross - one of the many volunteers who played a part in preparing for, participating at, and finalising a wonderful, grace-filled event.

Some other people who played major roles at the time were approached, to recall what they remembered about the day, but they preferred to remain in the wings. However, you may rest assured that those same people worked tirelessly at the time.

Items not touched upon by me include: Liturgy, choir, singing, music, chasubles (the priests were bussed from Wishart), symbol of visit, security, offertory gifts, well-mannered happy crowds, souvenir stalls, food and drink stalls, broadcasting - radio and TV, transport, entertainment, commentaries by presenters, clergy and other faith clergy who were at the Mass.

In February 1986 at a well-attended meeting of the Knights of the Southern Cross at their old Head Quarters, 120 Charlotte Street, Brisbane, there was a request by a senior member for volunteers to assist a group of people who were already working on plans for the historic first visit by a Pope to Brisbane, later that year.

The initial group of clergy and lay people, working under the leadership of our archbishop, Very Rev. Francis Rush, had begun discussions in the closing months of 1985. Rev. Fr John B. Lennon, the Vicar for Administration, had been appointed State Director. His Deputy was Mr Mervyn Fagg of Yeronga Parish, a retired Government Officer. The very efficient manager was our speaker Jean, who had been seconded from McAuley College, Mitchelton - now the Brisbane Campus of the Australian Catholic University.

As I had been retired from the paid workforce over three years and needed something useful to do - I had been for eighteen years a district Manager with General Motors, which included a fair amount of organisational experience - I approached the Papal Visit Office to see how I could help. The first person I spoke to was Jean. She explained some of the jobs to be done. There would be application forms printed soon. Some basic (contact) details were exchanged.

The State Government had made available to the Archdiocese good and spacious office accommodation on attractive terms. It was at 160 Ann Street, Brisbane. There was the usual office equipment, with names of prospective helpers, a lot of hope, plenty of enthusiasm, strong faith and prayerful confidence that the Papal Visit would be well organised.

A former Superintendent of Police, Mr Les Hogan, headed up the Security Sub-Committee. He was also given the task of managing events at QEII Sporting Complex, Nathan, where the Papal Mass was to be celebrated.

Some of the normal office jobs to be covered, included a lot of typing, photocopying many reams of paper, attending to telephones, contacting suppliers, contractors, sponsors, schools, volunteers, various Government Departments, Brisbane City Council etc. One of the first jobs for me was to bundle up the Papal Visit Prayer Cards, which the Knights of the Southern Cross had printed in Melbourne. 200,000 were sent to Brisbane - half to the Papal Visit Office, the balance to the Knights of the Southern Cross Headquarters, where office staff were about to prepare them for distribution.

Perhaps it was with some relief to these two ladies that I collected the stack of cartons from the K.S.C. office and took them to the Papal Visit office to start sending the packs of cards to parishes within the Archdiocese, to cater for the Faithful in each parish. The Suffragan Dioceses of Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton and Toowoomba, as well as cards for Lismore Diocese, were easy to handle. I simply sent bulk lots in cartons, but for the Archdiocesan parishes it took two weeks to pack cards. The initial despatches totalled 160,000 cards. I also

delivered them to some Southside parishes; but the 'Catholic Leader' delivery contractor took most for us.

Several weeks passed when no calls were made from the Papal Office for assistance, but as time elapsed there were plenty of jobs for me to do on copying machines, preparing mail etc. The volunteers increased in numbers - over sixty nominations were recorded. About half those who applied could answer the call when requests for help were made. Not all who volunteered were of our Faith. I long remember a lady who apologetically 'confessed' to not being a Catholic.

She said ' but....but, if this good man (the Pope) can help bring peace to this world, then I will help him.' She, like the other volunteers at the Papal Office, was pleasant to work along with. There seemed to be absolute harmony throughout the Office - not that everything went smoothly always - not by a long chalk. My wife Eileen and I were pleased to be part of a great team. We met so many fine people.

As the months fled by, some of us 'regulars' were given not only general duties but more specific ones. Tom Corcoran of Toowong had accepted responsibility for the 'sick and disabled event', which was so moving to us all; especially for the patients and their attendants - 160 people were caringly blessed and touched by the Holy Father. These blessings took place, very soon after the Pope arrived at QEII Stadium, in a big marquee, which was especially erected on the Sports Training warm-up field.

Tom also had a guiding hand in another National Event, which formed part of the heavy schedule for the Pope in Brisbane that day. He helped organise the national Media Event where 400 journalists from throughout Australia and from overseas were invited to the Press Conference addressed by His Holiness. The Pope reminded the Media of their responsibility to report sincerely the events covered by them.

Someone had suggested that an area on the tarmac proper of the Brisbane International Airport could be barricaded off to enclose up to 10,000 people to greet and farewell the Pope. Somehow I was awarded the task of issuing tickets for these two occasions. Ten thousand tickets were printed for the arrival and the same number for the departure. With the help of a family friend, the late Gerry Wright of Stafford Parish, we set about offering the opportunity for people to attend the airport scenes. Despite our efforts only about 7,000 arrival tickets were called for, from schools, both Church and State, parishes and the general public. Approximately 6,000 wanted departure tickets. Unfortunately, we think, only about

half the tickets issued were actually used. Perhaps it was a case of 'If something costs nothing to obtain, it has little value'. It was disappointing that our efforts had not resulted in larger crowds to greet and farewell the Holy Father.

The Pope arrived in Brisbane for a six hours and fifteen minutes visit, during which he celebrated Mass, delivered an inspiring homily, gave three separate speeches, and offered his blessings to more than 150,000 people, including the huge crowd at King George Square in front of the City Hall.

Because the Pope in his popemobile would be seen by the 70,000 people at QEII, and the special synthetic running track had to be protected from a jubilant crowd, there was a call to erect a temporary barrier around the track on which the Papal party would drive. Seven hundred steel star-posts were delivered to QEII and driven in by a team of Qld Government employees. It was my responsibility to arrange this work. These posts were put in place on Sunday 23 November - the earliest date we could get access to perform the work. The following day a group of secondary school lads from Clairvaux College, Mt Gravatt, helped put ropes and bunting on the posts. I had won the job of supervising that operation, and also the removal of them on the day following the Papal Mass. Three friends, the late Ken Chapman of Bundaberg, John Gerard of Camp Hill and Vince Dibella from Holland Park gave generous assistance.

I am not sure how I got the job of co-ordinating Ambulance Services and Supplies at QEII, as I can barely peel a band-aid, but I undertook the task. Thank God we were spared most of the anticipated volume of casualties. On past records and averages, with predicted hot weather conditions, we were advised to expect 500 cases. Only a fraction of that number needed attention.

With an expected crowd of 70,000 at the Mass, there was of course, a great need to have first aid facilities and medical services. Medical care was provided by State Health Department doctors, University of Queensland medical School, private practitioners and nursing people. The St John Ambulance had a big team of first aid personnel on hand from 8am.

Three first aid posts were established around the grounds, and a medical procedures room was prepared in the squash courts area. Fortunately, the heat earlier in the day was reduced by convenient cloud cover about 10am. By 9.30am I checked the supplies of crushed ice to find that most of the 100 bags, which I had previously bought and placed in a mobile cold room, had been issued to first aid posts. After a short discussion with the officer-in-charge of the police command post about the stocks of ice for people who may be in need of medical assistance,

I decided to go and buy another 50 bags of ice. A police cadet was assigned to drive the station wagon which we had hired for such a requirement. (It was also to be available for casualty care if some emergency arose).

So off we went to Sherwood to get the ice at about the time I had planned to rush home to shower, change out of the working clothes I had worn to begin my day's jobs at 6am. Eventually I got home at 11am with sufficient time to have a cup of tea and freshen up to attend the Mass.

I had a V.I.P. car pass and could get past road blocks and other hazards, right into the QEII grounds car park. Upon my return to the Stadium I went to the Papal Visit Office Control room to check up on a couple of jobs which I had to leave unfinished when I slipped home. The most pressing of those jobs was well under way when I reported in, but another little matter arose. The gifts which were to be presented to the Holy Father had to be examined by the Police Bomb Squad who were waiting for a member of the Papal Visit Committee to be present, to observe the opening. This had to take place away from the crowd. A place was found upstairs in the main grandstand. It just happened to be quite close to where Banyo seminarians were cloistered. (Now, we worry about the shortage of priests!)

Yours truly accompanied the bomb squad and helped to actually open the gifts. Someone asked later, if I was not afraid to be doing such a thing. Well, after all, if anything untoward was to happen it would have simply been that I was, for the time being, only helping to protect the Pope. There were some practical and thoughtful gifts offered, with, I am sure, a lot of tender affection. No nasties were included.

In other places you may hear about the great efforts by others who helped in parish fund-raising appeals, supervising, ushering, gatekeeping and in many other ways. One of our K.S.C. State Councillors, Joe Pyke, who was an ambulance officer and Member of the Order of St John of Jerusalem, was assigned to the Pope's special ambulance car on the big day. Another Catholic ambulance officer, Les Wilson, was in the second ambulance van allotted by Q.A.T.B. Both vans and crews had to remain close to the official party during the entire visit.

After the Papal Mass the Holy Father was to meet thirty-five people who had done their bit to ensure the success of his Brisbane visit. Those were people from the State Government, Brisbane City Council and from the Papal Visit Office. Of the last mentioned presented to the pope three were active members of the Knights of the Southern Cross. The presentation was a private affair with the media excluded (apart from the Papal and official Australian Catholic Press).

Both Jean and I were privileged to be amongst those who would be introduced to the Holy Father - to shake the hand which blesses the world's millions. I was there because I was a member of the Order of the Knights of the Southern Cross - the Order which the bishops of Australia had approached for assistance in staging the Papal visit. - It was a delightful day.

## ***THE POPE IN QUEENSLAND PART 2***

***25 November, 1986***

Leo M. Dunne

The Catholic community were excited by the news that Australia was about to experience a visit by a Pope, the first ever for the State of Queensland.

I was one of several people invited by Father John Lennon to join his organising team. The first time I met with the committee was 13 February 1986, to plan the Papal visit. Father John Lennon, Vicar for Administration in the Archdiocese, was appointed by Archbishop Rush as the State Director for the Papal visit. My fellow speakers will provide you with details of the planning that I wasn't involved in and to that extent, hopefully will complement each other.

It was extraordinary how successful the whole event was when one considers the number and range of matters that required attention. The site for the main celebration had to be decided and after considering other places such as the Exhibition Ground, QEII Stadium was selected. The airport and route to the stadium had to be examined thoroughly to be certain of security. An advance team from Rome would vet the route and every bend, lane, crossroad, would be checked. The government and police were co-operative, but equally insistent on every possible measure to be taken to provide absolute security. Security was a major issue.

Then there was crowd-management, organising seating, ensuring responsible care for the elderly, for the young, and those affected by long hours of travel and waiting. Ambulance and other health care people, along with the police, worked very closely with the teams specially briefed for the occasion. Tickets were allocated to all parishes across Queensland to be distributed by them to enable all parishes and all parish groups and schools to be represented.

I was responsible for the double stand opposite the main stand and altar where Mass was celebrated. Assisting my team were ambulance officers and other health care people, police cadets with some police, all in uniform for the occasion. Our teams included ushers to assist people and to keep 'at risk' people under observation. We were particularly concerned about the sun and the effects of heat over the long period people were required to be seated.

Team members wore large name tags and some special clothing to identify them and make them available to anyone in need. It was simply amazing to realise the distances people travelled. Because of my P. & F. connections, people came up to greet me from all over Queensland: Longreach, Cloncurry, Cunnamulla, Goondiwindi, Cairns and all points in between.

Transport to handle the huge crowd was an issue. Parking also had to be organised. All the workers parked their vehicles at Clairvaux MacKillop College and were ferried to the QEII Stadium by buses.

Building the altar to accommodate all the clergy and to ensure the Pope was visible needed imagination and skill. The speaker system had to be effective. Tents had to be organised for the handicapped, the sick and disabled people. The Pope would also address representatives of the mass media at QEII as well as the main gathering.

Following the end of ceremonies at the QEII, Pope John Paul would proceed to the City Hall where he would be greeted by the Lord Mayor and address the assembled crowd who had gathered especially after work to welcome the Pope to the city.

The enormous amount of preparation that was required to ensure that the Papal visit happened without a hitch was mind-boggling, but to the credit of Father Lennon and everybody associated with the planning, the whole visit to Brisbane went off like clockwork.

Having commented on the organisation that was associated with the Papal visit, I would offer the following thoughts on this special visit and refer to some of the highlights that occurred in Brisbane, and Pope John Paul's address on Catholic Education at the Melbourne Sports and Entertainment Centre.

The powerful impact of Pope John Paul's presence on people of all faiths, young and old, city and country, and from all ethnic origins was quite remarkable. He was able to identify with people everywhere, and even more importantly, people

were immediately at ease with the Pope. Most people who followed his tour on TV would recall His Holiness at the Youth Rally in Sydney or his address to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders or to the industrial workers at Seven Hills, NSW.

The spiritual presence of the man and his genuine and moving concern for people, his sense of humour and his devotion to his Creator and Saviour were compelling aspects of his personality. However, it was his sermons that were most powerful, bringing hope, comfort and inspiration to many. In his address to the sick and disabled in Brisbane, he said and I quote, 'No one born into this world is free from human frailty - whether it be physical, emotional or spiritual. Each of us must personally come to terms with this frailty. Sometimes we may wish for a kind of life that is easier than the one we have. Perhaps some of you who are physically handicapped, disabled or ill may ask God why you have been singled out for a life that is different from the lives of other people. But in the Providence of God, a different life does not mean a less important life. It does not mean a life with less potential for holiness or for contributing to the well-being of the world.'

In his address to representatives of the mass media, the Pope was also delivering a message of responsibility to his audience. He said, 'The Second Vatican Council's Decree affirms the existence within human society of a *Right to information about affairs which affect people individually or collectively*. (Inter Mirifica 6.) Thus, you have a central role in ensuring, on the one hand, that the community is not denied the right to information and, on the other, that the communication of information conforms fully with moral principles, especially those of truth, charity and justice.' A message that could well be repeated over and over again to the media and the information industry.

As a member of NCEC at that time, I also had the privilege of attending a special gathering at the Melbourne Sports and Entertainment Centre. There was a special message for teachers and I quote: 'The life of a teacher, as I know from personal experience, is very challenging and demanding, but it is also profoundly satisfying. It is more than a job, for it is rooted in our deepest convictions and values. To be intimately concerned in the development of a young person, or hundreds of young people, is a highly responsible task. As teachers, you kindle in your students a thirst for truth and wisdom. You spark off in them a desire for beauty. You introduce them to their cultural heritage. You help them to discover the treasures of other cultures and peoples. What an awesome responsibility and privilege is yours in the teaching profession.' What an important message for beginning teachers at a time when young people are questioning the profession.



Also, to parents he said, 'Not only are the attitudes of teachers crucial for the success of Catholic education, but also the attitudes of Catholic parents. Parents must set themselves very definite priorities, such as the determination to have schools in which their children's faith will be respected, fostered and enriched; schools in which their children learn the value and beauty of the Church's teaching. They must also see to it that their homes are places in which these values are first fostered and lived. Parents' own practice of the faith, their own love for Christ, is of course, fundamental.'

Pope John Paul II has been a great opponent to anything that doesn't accord with the teachings of Christ. He has been an extraordinary ambassador for the Church, visiting many countries and their peoples, always exhibiting that indomitable faith that inspires people everywhere. His visit to Australia was a great success, drawing large crowds wherever he spoke and impressing them with his genuine commitment to his Gospel message.

Australians everywhere were greatly impressed with his message. They saw Pope John Paul as a man of courage and compassion. His constant fight against the communist ideology won him admiration and support in all free countries of the world as well as behind the 'iron curtain'. Like Winston Churchill, he was the right man for the era and proved to be a formidable fighter against suppression of any kind.

I was delighted to be associated with his memorable visit in 1986.