

THE SECOND ST. MICHAEL'S MENS PARISH BREAKFAST

St. Michael's school hall was the venue for the second Men's Parish Breakfast held on Saturday 8 March, ironically enough World Women's Day. A group of about twenty five men gathered at the sleep defying time of 7.30am to be fed by a small but enthusiastic group of workers who had arrived at the crack of dawn. Amid much talk, humor and discussion all were provided with a comprehensive menu of cereal, fruit, a hot BBQ, juice, coffee and tea so that nobody had any reason to be hungry when the gathering moved on to the highlight of the morning.

Fr Kevin had invited former Australian test cricketer and opening batsman, Ric McCosker to be guest speaker at the event and his presence proved to be a great draw card. McCosker is known to generations of Australian men (and quite a few women as well) for his exploits in the Centenary Test in Melbourne in 1977, when after having his jaw broken by a Bob Willis bumper in the first innings, he returned in the second innings, head swathed in bandages to aid Rod Marsh in adding 54 runs for the last wicket and thus help ensure an Australian victory. However lest you form the wrong impressions regarding this meal, it was certainly not a sportsman's breakfast. Despite the inevitable cricketing theme, when blokes get together, it was an opportunity for a fair-dinkum, no nonsense, catholic layman to share with the assembled group his role in God's mission as a disciple of Jesus.

Ric is the Stella Maris Chaplain for the River Port of Newcastle, the largest coal port in the world. It is a role he shares with Gary Dodd from the Anglican Church, in a spirit of true ecumenism. He spoke of his journey from young farm boy near Inverell, who played cricket in the backyard with his brothers, to successful Test cricketer, achieved by setting goals which he then strived to reach. He noted that it was only when he set goals and made a commitment to achieving them that he accomplished life changing results. However whilst achieving these sporting goals he referred to himself as "an hour a week catholic"—(or even less if the priest was slick with his Sunday liturgy.) It was a sterile "God and me" faith and nobody else was involved.

He also observed that unplanned events often occur, which can also have life changing consequences. One such event occurred in June 1989 when he accepted an invitation to attend a Cursillo weekend. He accepted not understanding, knowing or realizing what might be the outcomes. The Cursillo movement has always had as one of its aims the identification of potential leaders in the faith. In Ric it turned out that they/God had an iconic example. In his own words Ric "was blown away" by the Cursillo experience. He realized that there need be no separation between the secular and the spiritual and embarked on outreach, within the church, involving himself in various ministries including taking communion to the sick, participation in Antioch for young people and eventually his present role as Stella Maris Chaplain. His life had been transformed. It was now Ric ministering to others as part his role in God's mission. The sterility had gone. Now it was God, Ric and many others.

As the Stella Maris Chaplain he looks after the needs of seaman who come ashore in Newcastle with sometimes with as little as a 12 hour turn around before sailing again. Stella Maris has a bus which picks up seaman and transports them to the shops, assists them with currency conversions, or takes them to the centre where there is free Wi Fi available for them to contact family, wives and children. Often after long periods at sea, away from home, contact with loved ones is a treasure impossible to undervalue. The chaplaincy also looks after seaman with problems of a more personal nature. Ric's talk was followed by a series of questions (some about cricket). Questions are always a good indicator of audience interest.

If asked to measure the success of the event, I can only observe that whilst he was speaking it was possible to hear the proverbial pin drop. As I looked around the hall everybody was transfixed by his delivery. Credit to Father Kevin, his choice of guest speaker was superb. Thanks also to the team who organized the event with special note of thanks to the cooks-they know who they are! A special thanks to Ric for making the effort to come and share some of his life story with us at such an ungodly hour. We offer our prayers for the success of his ministry!

We can only look forward with enthusiasm to the next parish breakfast. May the food be as good and plentiful, the company as convivial and the outcomes just as successful.

Tony Burgin
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