

Desmond Parsons

Priest - Pioneer in Christian Adult Education - Peacemaker

Revd Desmond Parsons, former general secretary of Moor Park College for Christian Adult Education and co-founder of the Farnham Christian Council in 1962, (re-branded the town's Churches Together network in 1992), passed away in his sleep at home, aged 88, due to bronchial pneumonia, on Monday 20th January, leaving his widow Thea, son Benedict and daughter Francesca.

After ordination training at 'The College of the Resurrection' in Mirfield, West Yorkshire, and 25 years of parish ministry in Southwark Diocese, at West Dulwich and Limpsfield, Desmond retired to Crondall in 1995, where he served as honorary assistant priest to All Saints for a further 16 years.

A former colleague, Archdeacon Jonathan Lloyd commented: "Most clergy tend to slow down with age (and get boringly conservative) but not Desmond! His commitment and passion for social justice was deep-rooted and led to real action for the poor and oppressed. He was an inspiration and a role model for me and many other clergy."

Padre Barry Burbidge, delivering the eulogy at Revd Parsons' Thanksgiving Service at St Andrew's Parish Church on Friday 31st January,

assisted by Revd Tara Hellings, vicar of All Saints who led the service, shared congregants' similar recollections, of Revd Parsons being a proactive vicar: "One of his parishioner's was ill and spending a great deal of time upstairs in her bed" afflicted by cancer. "Unfortunately, she had no telephone beside her, and her daughter was about to give birth. It took a matter of seconds for Desmond to collect some wire and a pair of pliers, and in a trice, a bedside phone was installed. Real practical Christianity!"

Revd Parsons is renowned for having rebounded from a serious stroke, sustained on 6.6.2006, to save Churches Together in Farnham from closure at the 2007 AGM, stepping in as Vice-Chair until 2009, alongside a band of lay volunteers, when the Chair's and Secretary's positions were left vacant.

Moor Park College was birthed in 1950, after a substantial volunteer-led refurbishment of the former Canadian WW2 troop billet, originally Jonathan Swift's workplace. Desmond's father, Canon Richard Edward Parsons, (formerly Director of Religious Education for the Central Council of the Church of England), further aided by his wife Hester and two of his daughters,

Betty and Anne, had been inspired by the example of the post-war Christian Education Houses in Germany. Desmond had himself served as an administrative officer to these Allied initiatives, which taught the skills and values necessary for leadership in civil society to former members of the Hitler Youth.

When the Trust lost the Moor Park mansion, more due to political decisions in the economic climate of the 1980s, than to a failing in provision, Desmond was instrumental in developing alternative partnerships with Surrey University and the Diocese of Guildford, for the sponsorship of collaborative projects. The Trust's vision and funds for Christian adult learning were entrusted to the Diocese in 2011.

Desmond will also be fondly remembered by colleagues in the Irish Peace Process, and United Nations Association. In an excerpt from a letter read out at the Thanksgiving Service by Revd Parsons' son Benedict, Dr Roddy Evans, a member of Clonard Monastery's Bible Study Group since the 1970s, in commenting on the vicar's impact in Ireland, told his widow Thea: "We owe so much to Desmond. The Good Friday Agreement, which brought the conflict to an end in Northern Ireland, was born in the

Clonard Monastery in West Belfast. At one stage in the decades of civil war, what was urgently needed was an opening to England. The Government in London, for such a long time, continued to treat the situation as a matter of law and order.” Revd Parsons, he claimed, had played a pivotal role in breaking “the impasse by opening a dialogue with Clonard.”

A Clonard colleague of Dr Evans, Mr Jim Lynn, spoke from his own experiences, - also shared

at the event: “Revd Desmond Parsons made many visits to Belfast, as he was always interested in having dialogue with those whom no one would speak to. He was an explorer of truth, and had a lifelong yearning for peace between England and Ireland.

Jim closed: “How would I sum Desmond up? That's easy; he was a man with no malice; a prince amongst men who cared for my nation. When he goes to the Judgement Seat, and God asks him for his talent, I envisage Desmond

opening his hand and saying 'here is your talent; I have multiplied it as best I could', and God will reply, 'well done my good and faithful servant.' Revd Desmond Parsons was truly a Peacemaker and Bridge builder, and it was our privilege to walk for a time with him.”