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**Father Gerard Anthony Remie S.D.B.**

Born at Mook en Middelaar (Holland)  
15 October 1926

Died in Adelaide 16 July 1999  
Aged 72, 39 years of priesthood, 49 years of profession.



Dear Confreres,

At the age of 72, after an intense period of suffering, comforted by the presence of his sister Willemien and his younger brother John, strengthened by the Sacrament of the Sick, Gerard Remie fell asleep in the Lord in Mary Potter Hospice, North Adelaide, South Australia, on 16 July 1999, feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Gerard had not felt very well for some time. He had already been down to Adelaide for a heart bypass, but he said he was now too busy to go and get a check-up. At the gentle prodding of Fr. John Murphy, our provincial, he consented to see his doctor. After she carefully had thorough tests performed, she broke the news that he had bone cancer with the outlook of a six to twelve months life expectancy. The news hit him hard: he had still so many more projects to bring to an end.

He decided to fly to Adelaide for a second opinion. The specialist confirmed the previous diagnosis but added he had arranged for Gerard to be admitted to the Mary Potter Wing of Calvary Hospital since Gerard had no more than six weeks to live. Gerard was forbidden to return to Darwin to say goodbye and put his affairs in order.

The Sisters and the nurses, his confreres and friends saw him struggle to celebrate a morning Mass, resting in a chair in their beautiful chapel while he still attempted to give a daily homily, a thorough exegesis of the Scriptures just read. He was faithful to praying his breviary until his hands no longer could hold the volume. He daily prayed the rosary, slowly, right up to the end.

While in the hospice Gerard realised he could not celebrate the 40th anniversary of his priestly ordination. He decided to anticipate it. Friends even came by car from Darwin. Doctors, nurses, religious, lay persons, his Salesian concelebrants were profoundly moved by this Mass. He spoke of his life as a journey with Our Lady. "She is here; here she is now; here in this room". On return to his room he closed his eyes and rested. Days later, during his last agony, he suddenly opened his eyes and clearly said: "I did not know that dying was such fun".

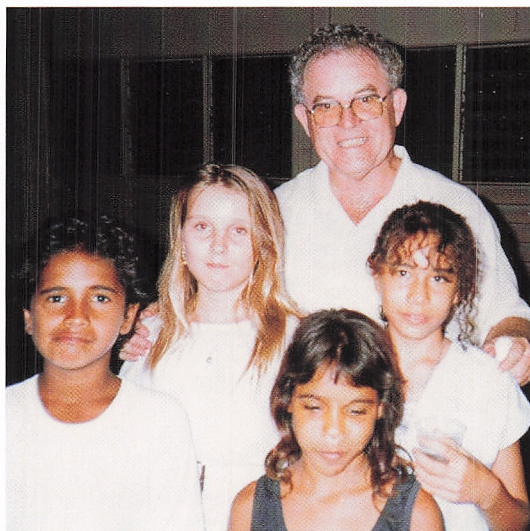
Gerard was born 15th October 1926 in Mook en Middelaar, a little village along the river Maas in the Dutch province of Limburg, one

of the four children of Anthony Remie, a river boat captain, and his wife, Mary Vos. Growing up on a river boat influenced his character: rather independent, stubborn, or as his brother John said: not easy to work with.

As a young man he told his Redemptorist confessor he wanted to be a priest but his family was too poor. "Try Don Bosco", he was told. He went to the Salesians, felt at home and stayed. In his studies he excelled at mathematics, but was never a tidy person. He joined the band as his voice was not suited for the choir. He loved poetry but he stammered. To cure this defect he gladly took part in stage plays.

In 1949 he was one of the 25 who started their novitiate in Twello, Holland. He took his first vows 16 August 1950. Together with two novitiate friends Gerard came to Australia on board the Ugolino Vivaldi, accompanied by Fr. John Gargan Murphy, arriving in Port Melbourne 23 November 1950. Fr. Murphy taught him how to speak Australian, explained what to expect and how to react to the Australian way of life.

After a year at "Rupertswood" for philosophy, teacher training and work in the laundry, Gerard together with five companions travelled to Sonada, India, to continue his studies. Fr. Paviotti accepted the renewal of his vows in 1953. He passed his Inter Arts exam with first class honours. He did his practical training in Boys' Town, Engadine. In 1956 he travelled with his classmates to Bollengo, Italy, for theology. He had taken his final vows in Sunbury 31 January 1956 into the hands of Fr. B. M. Fedrigotti. He asked to be ordained ahead of his classmates, thus





becoming a priest 27 July 1959 in Nijmegen, Holland, in the presence of his elderly parents. Gerard was rather conservative, never influenced by new insights into theology. He spent a year of renewal overseas in 1984, during which time he accumulated catechetical slides which he used to teach catechism, one of his greatest loves.

He fulfilled various ministries, six years as Bursar in Engadine, one year as Prefect of Studies in Glenorchy, five years as Bursar in Sunbury; six years as Rector in Port Pirie; three years as Vice Rector in Glenorchy. After his renewal year he became associated with parish ministry. For a year he worked as assistant priest in St. Joseph's Parish, Katherine, Northern Territory.

From mid 1986 until his death he was on loan to the Diocese of Darwin. One of his parishioners during that entire period, Paul Buckley, has written an account of this time. Paul wrote: "Fr. Gerry arrived in Palmerston in 1986, just a few weeks before the Pope, John Paul II, was to visit Darwin while on his Australian tour. We learned at the Sunday Mass that he (Gerard) was to be our parish priest, in fact the first one for Palmerston. We also discovered it was a learning experience for Fr. Gerry as he had not worked as a parish priest before. He addressed us before the homily. We were asked that if we had ideas and thoughts or if Father should know anything about running a parish to sit down and talk with him, although he had a good number of ideas himself. The parish or group for want of a better word already had a pastoral council but was in need of a priest to work with".

In the past Gerard had often relied on his own ideas. He was a very strict but first class mathematics teacher. He had qualified as a cricket umpire and knew how to make very firm decisions when he had to.

in Palmerston the NT Government had allocated some land on the corner of Emery Avenue and Harrison Court. There was no money to build the proposed school, church, presbytery. The small community of Palmerston had put about \$8,000.00 together. On at least two occasions the Government had intimated they would take the land back unless building was begun. Bishop O'Loughlin had been able to obtain an extension of two years each time.

Palmerston parish included Adelaide River

and Batchelor (a uranium mine centre), both 85 km from Darwin, Humpty Doo, about 45 km, while Palmerston was some 30 km from Darwin. There existed a fallen down chapel at Batchelor, a small chapel at Adelaide River, a new church at Humpty Doo, nothing at Palmerston. Gerard lived in the Darwin Cathedral Presbytery for the first twelve months, travelling each week 1000 km through his parish to visit the Mass centres.

He taught religion in the State Schools with the help of his slides and summaries he had made. He had Bible study in family homes open for anyone to attend. The Sisters of Charity of St. Anne opened their convent in Palmerston for the daily 6 p.m. Mass, and for any meetings that might be necessary.

After twelve months Gerard asked Bishop Ted Collins for some money to build a residence at Humpty Doo. While waiting for its completion he moved into a caravan on site at the back of the church while making use of the public toilet block. As this made him the first resident priest in Humpty Doo, Paul Buckley made a tabernacle and two holy water fonts for the church. On Saturdays he would celebrate the 6 p.m. Mass at St. Barbara's, Batchelor, Sundays the 7.30 a.m. and 6 p.m. at St. Francis of Assisi, Humpty Doo, at 9 a.m. at the Driver (suburb of Palmerston) Community Hall. This hall was used for Mass until 10 March 1991.

In April 1987 he appealed to the "high-rollers"



for money to build a church in Palmerston. The only reply to this appeal was a gift voucher from Coles. Bishop Collins permitted him to make an appeal throughout Australia. There was a generous response. Some parishes, e.g. St. Joachim's, Victoria Park, W.A., were



saving for projects of their own but put them off and donated in this way to the building of the already named "Our Lady, Help of Christians Church" in the Top End. He also advertised in Catholic papers. He personally acknowledged every donation until he got too sick to carry on. His sister Willemien who had won a sizable prize in a national lottery, gave him the money for a computer and kept updating it. His brothers from Holland visited him and did electrical and other installation work to keep things ticking.

Palmerston's population in February 1983 was 1,400, in February 1999 over 20,000. Fr. Julian Fox as provincial convinced Gerry to reduce his travelling load. Gerry moved into a Housing Commission Home in Palmerston around August 1989. Other priests were to take care of the Mass Centres he had previously administered. Around July 1990 he moved into the newly built presbytery. He obtained a mini bus to drive youngsters after school and during the holidays, to the beach.

In April 1990 plans were finalised for the building of the church. He had raised some \$140,000.00 by this time. It was opened and blessed 24 May 1991. "However", Paul Buckley wrote, "the first Mass was celebrated on Saturday 16 March 1991. I remember very clearly that day. Not a very big number of people but it was exciting and a feeling of achievement was present on that day. Fr. Gerry started out with the opening prayers and when he came to welcome everybody with only about six words out he became speechless with emotion but he finally calmed down and continued with the Mass". Fr. Julian Fox and his sister Willemien were present for the opening. However, during the night, someone broke into the church looking for the collection, leaving only damaged doors and locks. On top of this, a few hours later a phone call from Holland broke the news that Willemien's only child had tragically died. It was all too much. Gerard collapsed. Fr. Jack Ayers supplied for him while Gerry recuperated in Broome. Fr. Leo Heriot came then as assistant priest. Meanwhile Gerard had started a St. Vincent de Paul conference. As the demands for the members' service was endless, he opened a food and clothing centre about the end of 1987 in rented premises, and a new purpose built shop was opened 6 March 1991. Gerard was also made the St. Vincent de Paul State Chaplain.

His last project was to be the building and

opening of the Sacred Heart Primary School. Before the staff and children moved to this new school they operated in a closed down Government School in Berrimah under the leadership of the Brigidine Sisters. The annual rent was \$50.00. The total cost of building the new church had come to \$500,000.00. As this debt was paid off in twelve months, he commenced Stage One of the new School Building alongside the church and presbytery quadrangle. This was opened 11 September 1994. Stage Two began in 1995. When it was finished it had a capacity intake of 480 students.

His enormous capacity for work was supported by a solid life of prayer and fasting, devotion to the Sacred Heart and Our Lady. He talked with parishioners, especially children who loved him as a father and friend. He loved the Salesian Congregation and showed his gratitude to all who helped him build up the parish plant out of the long grass.

His funeral took place in the chapel of Salesian College, Sunbury. His coffin stood alongside that of his friend, Adrian Wenting, who had shared his life since their days in the Don Rua aspirantate of Ugchelen, Holland. More than thirty priests concelebrated, Bishop Collins from Darwin had come over for the funeral and took part. Past pupils, religious, his sister and brother all prayed for Gerard to enjoy his eternal rest. On his return to Darwin Bishop Collins arranged for a diocesan Mass for Gerard in his Cathedral, and his parishioners came together for an open air Mass on the day of what would have been his fortieth anniversary of ordination. Gifts brought up in the offertory procession were his breviary, his rosary beads, his Collingwood Football Club scarf, a cricket umpires' rule book.

May God send us good and solid vocations to take Gerard Remie's place.

Please remember also all the confreres of this Province.

Fr. Tony Moester SDB,  
provincial secretary.