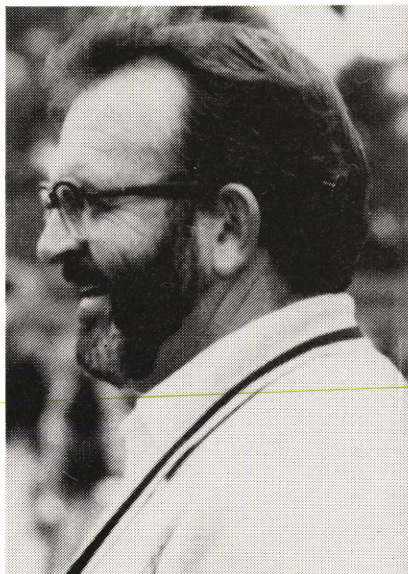
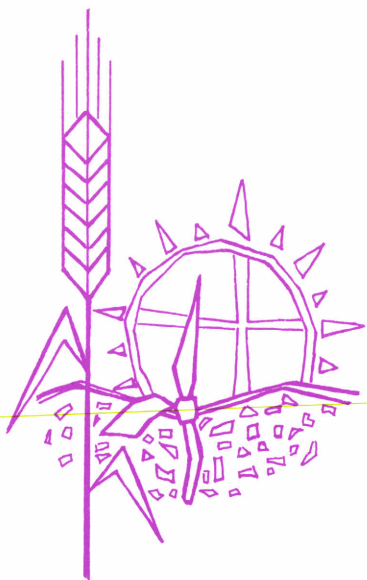
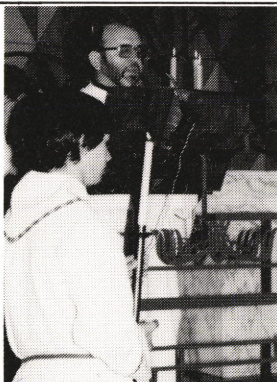
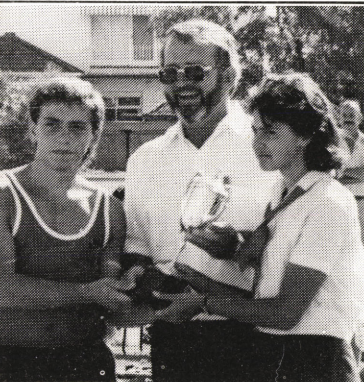


Salesian Theological College,
Oakleigh,
Victoria, 3166



FR. WILLIAM DESMOND FLEMING, SDB
(1932-1986)





The Australian Province has been greatly enriched by the life and the death of Fr. Bill Fleming, who returned to his maker at Caritas Christi Hospice (Melbourne) on the Feast of St. Dominic Savio, 6 May 1986.

Bill was born of John and Elizabeth Fleming of Essendon on 9 November 1932. His youth was spent in the heart of a deeply Catholic family, and in an area of Melbourne outstanding for its lived Catholic faith, made evident by the large number of priestly and religious vocations which it has produced. He was preceded in death by his mother and father and his brother Raymond. He is survived by five sisters: Betty (Mrs. Kean), Helen (Mrs. Adams), Kathleen (Mrs. O'Connell), Barbara (Mrs. Barry) and Frances (Mrs. Quilligan) and two brothers: Kevin and Brian.

Bill was educated by the Charity Sisters at St. Theresa's, Essendon and by the Christian Brothers at St. Kieran's and St. Bernard's, Moonee Ponds. The major part of his secondary education was completed with the Salesians from 1947-1950 in the earliest days of this house at Oakleigh. Bill began and closed his Salesian life in the same house, and how magnificently he has graced the Salesian family in those intervening thirty-five years.

His first years with the Salesians were not easy. He was strong, energetic, practical and a gifted athlete. In those years he had to restrict all the areas in which he excelled to meet the challenges of the life that the Salesians were able to offer. However, his contemporaries cannot recall even the slightest indication of regret or disappointment. From first commitment to his Salesian vocation onwards, he never looked back or expressed regret for the choice made: his future as a Salesian Priest was very clear and important to him.

After his novitiate year at Salesian College, "Rupertswood", Sunbury in 1951-52, he set out for India, where he began his priestly studies in the studentate at Sonada. This was a wildly exciting adventure: going to a remote, exotic place, mountains, jungles and an age-old culture. Nevertheless, the regime in those days was rather rigid, and Bill eventually (like most of the Australian students who were with him)

The end came quickly. In the first days of May he began to drift away from us, and it was hard to hold his attention and to keep him awake to what was going on around him. On Thursday, 1 May the whole community gathered for a celebration of the sacrament of the dying. Bill did his best to stay with us throughout, but when it was all over he laughingly said: "I couldn't even stay awake for that!". Even as he faded away from us, Bill desired to live and to die here among his Salesian brothers. It was also our hope that such would be the case. However, in the afternoon of 5 May, the situation became so difficult that he had to be taken to Caritas Christi Hospice, where he was received with love and care.

His brothers and sisters and the major part of the community gathered to pray with him, but he was restful through most of the night. His family stayed with him the whole night through. On 6 May, the Feast of St. Dominic Savio, family and community gathered again. Bill went through a long period of seeming agony, much to the suffering of all who were around him, unable to raise their hands to help this great man who had given his life to alleviate all sorts of suffering in others. Then peace settled upon him, and the praying went on incessantly. At three o'clock in the afternoon his gentle soul started on its final journey back to his Lord and Maker. Bill's two bereft families remained behind. One of his brothers remarked: "It was comforting in the moment of his death, when our hearts were breaking, to look around and see all those young Salesians with tears streaming down their faces".

On Friday, 9 May, the remains of Fr. Bill Fleming were laid to rest in the Salesian cemetery at Salesian College, "Rupertswood", in the company of his Salesian confreres who had gone before him. The Requiem Mass was celebrated by Bishop Mulkearns of Ballarat in the presence of many whom he had loved and served over the years: his sorrowing family, fellow Salesians, who had always found a true "mate" in Bill, friends from all walks of life, students and past pupils.

The reflections of Fr. Provincial are still ringing in the hearts of all of us who were privileged to be at "Rupertswood" that day: "We thank God for the full life and the rich example of this Salesian Priest. A life that spans 54 years, most of them spent in the service of God and young people after the example of Don Bosco. . . May Fr. Bill's life and death which has already affected the lives of so many people, continue to be an inspiration to us, and to all those who knew him".

In your prayers please continue to remember this good and faithful servant, and the needs of this community.

Francis J. Moloney SDB
Rector

Town at Engadine. He loved all that Boys' Town did and stood for. He was in complete empathy and sympathy with the boys who found their way there: love of sport, of animals, of every little thing that interested them. He always appeared to be deeply fulfilled when caught up in the life of his boys at Engadine. In a special way Engadine provided him that chance to live for the boys . . . never for himself. He had a deep compassion for these young people. He talked about them frequently and cared for them with kindness and compassion. Lest it should be thought, however, that his whole life was worked out only with the boys, it should also be noted that it was in Engadine that he formed some of his deepest and lasting friendships among adults — both among his Salesian confreres and the many adults who came into contact with him through Boys' Town. One of them, a hard-working man and a longstanding friend, in tears at the funeral, could only say: "You and I have lost our best mate".

Leaving Boys' Town cost Bill dearly, and it almost caused a "mini-crisis", as he wondered what he would do with his still young life, and where the Lord would lead him. He spent two years at Salesian College, "Rupertswood" (1980-1981), and was surprised when he was again asked to take on the task of Rector, this time in the very new setting of Salesian College, Brooklyn Park, South Australia in 1982. After almost four years there, the Lord let him know that this was his last assignment in the Australian Salesian Province. He had a new and more difficult task for him — to face the final ascent to Calvary with the cross of suffering and death through terminal cancer.

In January 1986 he came to this house of formation to face his final appointment. In the first months he attempted to perform the role of the bursar to the community, but the cancer was taking control of the situation very rapidly. In continual pain, he eventually had to succumb to heavy medication through morphine, and live out his last days totally dependent upon the young Salesians of this community. These were memorable days for us all. His "boyishness" of earlier days never left him. It is hard to find words to describe his attitude. In the homily at the funeral Mass, Fr. Provincial summed up Bill's life when he spoke of his "serenity, simplicity and fidelity — qualities that had characterized all his life". In his short stay here, Bill brought out the best in everyone in this community. It was a privilege to go to him at 2.00 a.m. in the morning, to give him his medication, to pray with him, to laugh with him, and just to discuss times old and new. Again I would like to quote from Fr. Provincial's homily: "His presence in the Oakleigh community these last few months was a blessing of God and an inspiration to everyone". As I said to him a few days before he died: "Bill, it's not fair. I have worked in formation among the theologians at Oakleigh for eleven years . . . you have done more for them in three months than I have done in all that time".

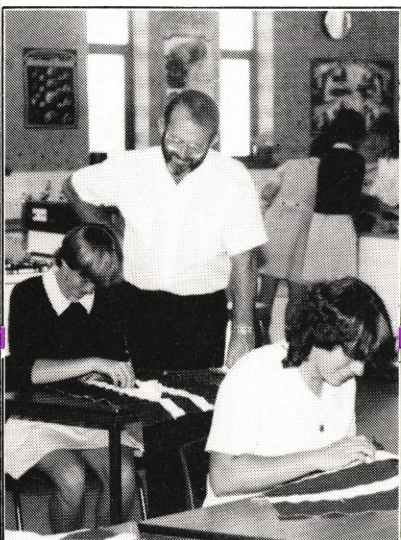
longed to be back home. His extraordinary commitment to the apostolic life, which was the hallmark of his priestly career, developed at Sonada as he worked in the Oratory there. In those days Bill would write home for sweets, for a football, and for anything else that would help him touch the lives of his young people.

He returned to Australia in 1954, and was posted to Brooklyn Park, Adelaide, for practical training; he was a member of the staff there until 1958. During these years he lived an active life as a teacher and an assistant in a growing school. His years at Brooklyn Park brought Bill to a Salesian maturity, evidenced by one of his contemporaries: "By the time we came to theology, he was a mature, enthusiastic Salesian. True 'Cagliero-type', he never warmed greatly to certain aspects of student discipline, but enjoyed 'theology'." At the close of his years in Brooklyn Park, his superiors had only one complaint to make. At times, they claimed, he tended to be very "boyish" in his ways. Fortunately, this "boyishness" was part of Bill's character till the end of his life.

He studied theology at Castellammare di Stabia, Italy, from 1958 till 1962, and was ordained to the priesthood in Naples on 25 March 1962. His years in Italy were marked by a dedication to the immediate preparation for priesthood, and a continued involvement in an apostolic life which was now part of his lifeblood. He spent all his free time working in the Salesian Oratory at Salerno, even spending his summer holidays there. Many Salesians from the Neapolitan Province still cherish fond memories and look back with deep respect to Brother Fleming of those days.

Priesthood was a long awaited moment. After many years of preparation, he now was ready to give himself totally to his beloved young people. From the beginning he was exact about his priestly duties. In his last days he struggled to pray his breviary, and found his inability to celebrate the Eucharist daily a great cross. His prayerful and suffering presence, seated in the Oakleigh Chapel for Sunday liturgies until the week before he died, was something that made a lasting impression on all who attended. He found preaching difficult, and spent long hours preparing his homilies. This gave his preaching a particular simplicity and direction, which came into its own when he was speaking to young people.

After ordination Bill's first appointment was to Salesian College, Chadstone where he served as Religious Coordinator and Deputy Principal from 1963 till 1966. In 1967 he was sent to Boys' Town, Engadine, New South Wales, and it was here that he was to spend the next thirteen years of his life as Deputy Principal, Bursar and Rector. He will always be especially remembered for the great contribution which he made to the genuinely poor and abandoned youth of Boys'



Rev. Father William D. Fleming, SDB

Born at Essendon (Vic.)	9th November, 1932
First Profession	31st January, 1952
Ordained Priest in Naples (Italy)	25th March, 1962
Religious Education Coordinator and Deputy Principal at Chadstone (Vic.)	1963 — 1966
Deputy Principal at Engadine (NSW)	1967 — 1971
Vice-rector and Economist	1972 — 1973
Rector at Engadine (NSW)	1974 — 1979
Rector at Brooklyn Park (SA)	1982 — 1985
Died in Melbourne (Feast of St. Dominic Savio)	6th May, 1986