

A tribute to Paddy Kearney from The Grail

Paddy has been part of our Grail Family for at least 50 years and probably longer. Way back in the late '60s Ines Ceruti taught with him at St David's College, Inanda, Johannesburg. They developed a friendship around common social justice concerns. Ines was very sad when Paddy left the Marist Brothers, little realising that what great things his Star was leading him to.

In Durban, Paddy discovered new Grail members with whom to share and tease out his dreams. He and Ann Moore, the Cathedral parish worker, night school and Sached organiser in the old Parish Centre, bounced ideas off each other and formulated plans together.

As Archbishop Hurley and Paddy brought Diakonia to birth, Grail members, supported them all the way. Loek Goemans and Julia Khanyile served on the Diakonia Board for many years. Diakonia became the Grail "home from home." We attended many meetings, took part in programmes and used Diakonia for our own events, the most memorable one being the 80th birthday celebration of Jane Ngobese's mother, Nokukhanya Luthuli, in 1984. Carmel Rickard's interview on that occasion provided the seminal material for the biography the Grail later produced, "Nokukhanya, Mother of Light."

Thoko Makhanya remembers being part of Diakonia's Bridge Building that brought people together from across the racial divide. These meetings were so profoundly deep at times that one person literally vomited up her past prejudices.

Paddy was a frequent visitor to the Grail Centre in Chapel Street where Mary Emma Kuhn, Emilia Charbonneau, Kathy Bond, Thoko, Ann and Loek lived at various times. He took part there in study groups, grappling with others to contextualise various challenging documents like Albert Nolan's "Jesus before Christianity."

He also brought Diakonia visitors to stay with us, enrich our lives and widen our horizons. The late Mildred Nevile, former director of the Catholic Institute for International Relations, was one of these. Paddy and Mildred struck up a great friendship and Paddy stayed with her on his trips to London.

In 1978, after Loek's return to Durban from Port Elizabeth, Paddy invited her to work for the Archdiocesan Justice and Peace Commission which he chaired at the time. Loek's J and P work dovetailed very well with Paddy's work at Diakonia and they remained firm friends till the end.

Paddy and Gandhi's grand-daughter, Ela Gandhi, as trustees of the Gandhi Trust, organised Satyagraha Awards dinners in the City Hall to honour people who embodied Mahatma Gandhi's ideals and values. Grail members attended two of these events, sitting at family tables, sharing a simple vegetarian meal and drinking water.

When Archbishop Hurley received the award posthumously, Grail members, Sbongile Mtungwa, Yenziwe and Tusiwe Masuku and Marilyn Aitken were honoured to be part of "Hurley's family." And when Nokukhanya Luthuli became a recipient, Paddy asked Marilyn to motivate her award. Grail members Jane Ngobese, Setha Gcume, Anelisa Shamase and Agatha Modise were part of the "Luthuli Family" on that occasion.

Paddy gave Thoko a lift home after Janet Talbot's funeral two weeks ago. They discussed Janet's sudden death, and dying in general. Paddy told Thoko that he would like to die quickly like that, adding with a smile "as long as I am ready!"

A few days later, Loek, Emilia and Ann all shared with Paddy the highly successful Johannesburg launch of Hurley's Letters, two days before he died. Loek was one of the last people Paddy spoke to as he was concluding his arrangements to be "ready to die."

It is difficult to think of Paddy without remembering Archbishop Hurley. Their complementing skills, different world views and life experiences bore excellent results. The Archbishop had a great admiration for Paddy and was astounded at his achievements which went way beyond anything the Archbishop had ever dreamed of when he established Diakonia. When Archbishop Hurley passed on, Marilyn arranged with Paddy to bring a group of her young colleagues in the Women's Leadership and Training Programme, from Underberg, to lead a half-hour tribute during the funeral vigil in the Cathedral. They sang, "eGalilee, siyohlangana eGalilee." Paddy was there sitting on his own towards the back on the right of the Cathedral and that picture of Paddy remains with us as we conclude this tribute with that same song, "We will meet again in Galilee." Paddy go well!

The Grail family joins all Paddy's other families, Carmel, Jack, Brian and the Kearney clan, the Cathedral Catholic parish, the faith communities of Durban, and the Denis Hurley Centre family as we mourn Paddy's sudden departure. At the same time we celebrate his life and give thanks that he shared so much of his life with us.

Thoko Makhanya and Marilyn Aitken
29 November 2018