

Tribute by Raymond Perrier, Director of the Denis Hurley Centre

at the Civic Memorial Service for the late Paddy Kearney
to be delivered at Durban City Hall, Thursday 29 November.

Embargoed until 18.00 Thursday 29 November.

I would like to start by thanking the honourable Premier and Her Worship the Mayor for hosting such an illustrious and impressive gathering here at the Durban City Hall. Paddy, I suspect, is rather puzzled but nevertheless smiling - that sweet, toothy, slightly cheeky smile of his.

He would be reluctantly smiling in the face of all this fuss. He hated anyone to make a show of him or to promote him - for Paddy it was always the project not the person that mattered. Many comments have been made in the last six days about his humility and modesty. Paddy was one who knew that his importance in society was not defined by the size of the memorial service - or by the kind of car he drove or the clothes he wore.

He would have smiled to see so many of friends and former comrades re-united here: co-conspirators standing with him at the barricades from the last time. So many of you, I know, had deep and lasting connections with Paddy and the avalanche of tributes that have come in and continue to come in bear testimony to that.

He would have smiled to see the broad range of people here. Paddy had a unique ability to be comfortable with who he was - a white, English-speaking, South African Catholic of Irish heritage - and yet still reach out to people with very different backgrounds. He was at ease in a room full of people his colour and in a room where he was the only white person. He would enjoy the company of priests and politicians, journalists and dancers. And he treated everyone with the same quiet dignity - Cardinal and cabinet ministers but also homeless people and refugees. He could draw strength from the rites of his own Catholic tradition but also enjoy the rituals of other Christian traditions and all other faiths (and tomorrow evening at Diakonia there will be a chance to put that into practice as different religious leaders say prayers around his body).

But he would have especially smiled because we are here *inside* City Hall. After all, it was *outside* this building on so many occasions in the bad old days that Archbishop Hurley stood illegally and defiantly defending the rights of those who were oppressed by the old regime. It is also the square outside City Hall that was the end-point typically of the annual Diakonia Good Friday Service, an enduring part of the city's calendar which Hurley and Paddy first created.

I want to reflect on a principle which exemplified Hurley's mission; it is one that Paddy continued in his own quieter way; and one which we at the Denis Hurley Centre - Paddy's younger child - also seek to pursue: that is to be 'a voice for the voiceless'.

Since Liberation, Paddy was less likely to be demonstrating *outside* and more likely to be *inside* City Hall (or inside the Premier's Office). But he still knew that he played a critical role: to bring into these corridors of power the many important voices that are not being listened to in modern South Africa. The voices of homeless people who are being harassed or abducted or beaten by the police; the voices of refugees stuck in a quagmire of bureaucratic systems which do not seem to care; the voices of residents of Glebelands fighting for their lives; the voices of poor people in the CBD struggling to make a living and not getting the help they need. All of these are voices that Paddy felt must be heard.

And not just heard but then acted on.

For Paddy, discussion and committees were necessary but they did not count unless they resulted in action to help those in need. It was the failure to turn good intentions into concrete projects that so often frustrated him - in the world of politics, and also in the worlds of religion and business and even NGOs. It is no wonder that the collection of his writings that he reluctantly agreed to publish is called 'Faith into Action'!

Paddy felt that we all have a duty to act to help improve the lives of others. Paddy, like many people in this city, was remarkable because so much of what he did, he did unpaid. For those of us who are paid to serve others, the obligation is greater; and for those who are paid well, the obligation is greater still.

So I know for example that he was pleased that finally there is a high level taskforce meeting here at City Hall to address homelessness - but I also know that he nagged me (and will continue to nag me from above) about when such task forces will bring about some real change.

So he would especially be smiling to see some of those homeless people, and refugees and Glebelands residents sitting inside City Hall today alongside some of the politicians and public servants and religious leaders who do not always listen to their voices. And he would have asked each of us to pause and think.

To pause and think about what I personally can do to bring about change. To think about the mission I have been given - from my party, or from my community or from my employer, but ultimately from God - to help improve the lives of those around me. And to have the honesty to admit - as he did - that whenever we think we have done enough there is more that we should do. That whenever we think we have given enough - of our time, our talents and our resources - there is more that we should give.

That is a request that he would make. I want to end with a request that he would not make.

Just outside the Denis Hurley Centre there is a mis-named street called Cathedral Mall. In fact, it was originally called Cemetery Lane and Paddy's coffin will be brought along it on Saturday. It is a street that so symbolises who Paddy was. It is in the heart of the city. It starts by running parallel to Denis Hurley and then intersects with it. It connects the Muslim and the Catholic communities. It provides a safe place of welcome for the homeless people and refugees who gather there. It is a public and democratic space where Durban citizens of all backgrounds can gather for celebrations. And, like Paddy, it is quiet and modest, sometimes a bit shabby, and occasionally overlooked.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if it became 'Paddy Kearney Street' - or better still 'Paddy Lane'?

It would be a constant reminder to us of how much Paddy contributed to this city. And it would also be a reminder to us that we now need to continue his work.