

Fr Bryan Jones 1945-2020



Bryan Jones was born 28th September 1945 in Pinner, Middlesex. As a boy he lived with his grandparents and uncle in a village in South Wales near Bridgend, Glamorgan. Around the age of seven he moved back to live with his parents in the East End of London, and it was there that he celebrated his eighth birthday. They lived in Shadwell, in a house in Dock Cottages, down an alleyway off the Highway. It was right next to St Paul's, with just a wall in between. During the 1950s, when the docks were still working, there was a gate giving access to the docks (Shadwell Basin), but whenever it was open a policeman stood there to prevent unauthorised access and pilfering. Bryan attended St Mary and St Michael's School which was then operating at Heckford Street,

and did sufficiently well there to be selected for secondary-level education at St Bernard's Central School. He could have gone further with his education at that stage but – as was quite common with boys from the East End – as soon as he reached the school leaving age he decided to get a job and start earning some money. He spent many years as a warehouseman.

Since returning to London Bryan had belonged to the Parish of St Mary and St Michael's, Commercial Road, and had essentially grown up there. He'd been in the cubs troop, and was present on the terrible trip to Whipsnade Zoo when one of the boys got into the lion's cage and was fatally mauled, despite Fr Ronald Aylward risking his own life to try to fight the lion off. Bryan continued to be very involved with St Mary and St Michael's Parish. Around 1970 he joined the St Joseph's Workers, a group started by Fr Cedric Stanley for men and women in their twenties and thirties, which held regular meetings and engaged in social service. He was also a regular at the Vaughan, the parish's social club, and performed in the productions staged in Our Lady's Hall by the operatic society that was started by Canon Carr – though never in one of the star roles.

Bryan had been an only child, and after his father died continued living with his widowed mother. In 1979 they were persuaded to move to a brand new council maisonette in Whitton Walk, off Malmesbury Road. This brought them into Guardian Angels Parish. In January 1980 he was invited to attend a catechesis given by parishioners belonging to the Neocatechumenal communities at Guardian Angels.



He recalled later that he must have been keen, as it was a very cold winter, and "I don't think I missed a catechesis." The community that was formed in 1980 collapsed, but when another try was made in 1982 a viable community was formed. Because Bryan by then had some experience in knowing how Neocatechumenal communities were supposed to work, he was elected responsible and carried out that role for the first few years, after which someone else took over. After his mother died the community became

the nearest thing he had in London to a family, although he continued to keep in touch with his cousins and other relatives, and visit when he could. Bryan also became involved in other ways with Guardian Angels Parish: he was commissioned as a Minister of Communion, and he was one of the many parishioners who, in 1986 when scaffolding was put up inside the church, piled in to give it a thorough

scrub in preparation for reordering and the installation of the walk-in font. He liked to keep fit, and used to go on long hikes and walking pilgrimages with the St Francis of Assisi Catholic Ramblers Club: he served on the committee as membership secretary 1989-92. He made a point of qualifying for the special licence needed to drive a minivan, as it was useful for the parish to have some people who could do that if needed.

In 1993 Bryan attended a one-day event held at Fawley Court, Henley-on-Thames, for “young people” from the Neocatechumenal communities. It was actually for anyone interested in going on the next World Youth Day with the Pope, and for that there wasn't a specified upper age limit, though some people joked that it must be 80. Some of the Guardian Angels parishioners went there in a hired minivan driven by Bryan. During the convivence there was a vocational call in which any unattached men present were asked to indicate if they were willing to consider the priesthood, and very much to his own surprise Bryan stood up. On the way home he was so flabbergasted about what had happened that he had two minor accidents, and also forgot to notify the hire company about them or explain why the paintwork was scratched, so the parish got an angry phone call the next morning. In August, at the World Youth Day in Denver, Bryan stood up again and confirmed that he felt called to the priesthood.

In October 1993 Bryan was invited to enter the Redemptoris Mater seminary in Bangalore, India. He'd purchased his maisonette under the right to buy, so his community helped him clear it out, getting rid of most of the stuff and finding places to store the rest, so it could be let to tenants. On arrival in Bangalore Bryan did his best to settle in, but was completely unable to adjust to Indian food: he actually had to be hospitalised because he couldn't keep anything down. Some of the other non-Indian seminarians were in the same boat, so the seminary reserved one table in the refectory for them, and the cook, much to his perplexity, was instructed always to serve that table with unspiced food. It was also not easy for Bryan to start studying again after so many years. Despite those and a great many other difficulties and hardships for someone as thoroughly English and untravelled as Bryan, he stuck it out and came to love his new life, in which he made a great many new friends.

After completing his studies and passing his exams in 1998, Bryan became an itinerant catechist and travelled all round India and also to Sri Lanka for the work of evangelisation. In February 1999 he underwent the Admissio whereby the elderly Bishop of Karwar, Rt Rev William D'Mello, officially accepted him as a candidate for ordination. As is normal practice in the Redemptoris Mater seminaries Bryan had been placed with a local community at Bangalore Cathedral, and shortly before Easter 1999, together with that community, he finished the Neocatechumenal Way. (That was well before any of the communities in this country reached that stage.) Later that year Bryan and his community made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Most of them couldn't afford it, so Bryan sold his maisonette to subsidise



the trip. Bryan had truly put his faith in the words of the Gospel: “everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will be repaid a hundred times over, and also inherit eternal life.” (Mt 19:29)

Bryan was ordained to the priesthood on 15th December 2004 by the Bishop of Karwar in Bangalore Cathedral. Fr Tony Sacré and four lay parishioners from Guardian Angels went out to be present at the ceremony, and at Fr Bryan's First

Mass which was celebrated at St Anne's Church, Bangalore. He managed to get back to London in

time for Christmas, and celebrated an unofficial First Mass at Guardian Angels on the evening of Thursday 23rd December, with only about 50 people present (because it was organised at very short notice). A more official First Mass at Guardian Angels for all the parish went ahead as scheduled on Sunday morning 2nd January 2005, and was followed by First Blessings and a light reception down in the hall.

As a priest, Fr Bryan continued his itinerant evangelisation in India and Sri Lanka, but had to return to England at intervals to renew his visa. While in London he often stayed at Guardian Angels and helped out with Masses, but during a visit in July 2011 he was asked to go instead to St Charles Borromeo, Ogle Street. Help was urgently needed there because Fr Alan Fudge, who'd been parish priest for 33 years, was seriously ill with cancer. Fr Bryan looked after Ogle Street throughout July and up to 5th August when Fr Alan died, and then stayed on until January 2012 when he handed the parish over to the new incumbent and returned to India. Later in the year, however, he was asked by Westminster Archdiocese to return, and with the Bishop of Karwar's permission he came back to London to take charge of Ogle Street. He was there to welcome Archbishop Nichols when he came to celebrate Mass for Ogle Street's 150th anniversary on 4th November 2012, and remained for nearly six years up to 2018. It was then agreed that Fr Bryan, now aged 73, should officially retire and come to live at Guardian Angels. Even in retirement he continued active as a priest, working closely with Fr John Elliott at Guardian Angels and also filling in during priests' holidays and other absences at St Joseph's Hospice, the hospital chaplaincy, St Catherine's Bow and elsewhere. He came across as someone who knew himself well and had great humility – no pretence or mask for the world – and always with a ready greeting and smile. He was greatly loved.

At Easter 2019 Fr Bryan finished the Neocatechumenal Way all over again, this time with his original community at Guardian Angels which had by then been merged with the parish's first community. In the same year he made a pilgrimage to the Middle East with all the priests from the Neocatechumenal communities in India, visiting the Holy Places in Israel, Palestine and Jordan, and going up Mount Sinai. In recognition of Fr Bryan's having been such a late vocation, and not knowing what shape he'd



be in by the time his Silver Jubilee rolled round, it was decided to organise a big celebration for the 15th anniversary of his ordination in December 2019. This took the form of a special Saturday night Mass with his community, and another with the whole parish on Sunday morning, both followed by parties and both with a large anniversary cake to slice up and share. In January 2020 Fr Bryan made another pilgrimage to the Holy Land with his community at Guardian Angels. It's as if God arranged specially for him to have those times of gladness with those whom he loved and who loved him.

On 4th March 2020 Fr Bryan began to feel seriously unwell, and on 9th March was taken into the Intensive Care Unit at the Royal London Hospital with a probable diagnosis of pneumonia. It was shortly after this that the UK began introducing progressively more serious precautionary measures against the spread of coronavirus, and in due course it was learned that Fr Bryan had tested positive for COVID-19. No visitors were allowed, and after he had been placed on a ventilator and sedated, phone conversations were also not possible, but parishioners of

Guardian Angels, and other friends, supported him through their prayers. On the evening of Saturday 28th March Fr John was notified by the hospital that Fr Bryan was failing to respond to treatment and was to be moved onto palliative care. Shortly before 10.00 pm Fr John was again contacted, and the nurse put the phone near Fr Bryan's ear; Fr John was then able to give the absolution, pray with him the Our Father and Hail Mary, and ask God's blessing upon him as he passed into eternity.