



Obituary for The Reverend James Bernard Hurley 19th December 1943-5th March 2023



James Bernard Hurley was born in Brixton on 19th December 1943.

Following his primary and secondary school education, he was accepted as a student and attended Mark Cross Junior Seminary and then St John's Seminary, Womersley. Having completed his studies, he was ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop Cyril Cowderoy at Corpus Christi, Brixton Hill, then known as Brixton, on 16th July 1968.

His first appointment was as an assistant priest in the parish of St Ann, Cliftonville where he served until January 1971 when he was appointed as an assistant priest in the parish of St Teresa, Morden. He served there until the summer of 1973 and in July of that year, he was asked by Archbishop Cowderoy to move into a new apostolate and join the Southwark Catholic Children's Society as the assistant secretary to then Fr Howard Tripp. For the next

four years, Fr Jim worked alongside Fr Tripp and was involved in the day-to-day running of the society. This included regular visits to the Children's Homes, Day Centres and Nurseries and Family centres run by the Society as well as working alongside the staff based at the Society's offices in Purley.

Fr Jim often spoke fondly of his time at the Children's Society and in particular of his working alongside the late Fr Tripp. It was a mark of esteem that they had for each other that when Monsignor Howard Tripp was appointed as an auxiliary Bishop of Southwark at the end of 1979, he asked Fr Jim Hurley to be one of his two supporters at his Episcopal Ordination on 30th January 1980.

After four years with the Society, Archbishop Michael Bowen wrote to Fr Jim in July 1977 asking him to take on a new apostolate as an assistant priest in the parish of English Martyrs, Walworth. In his letter to Fr Jim Archbishop Michael wrote, "I want to thank you most sincerely for the wonderful work you have done whilst you have been in the Children's Society. I know I speak for a great many people in expressing my own gratitude for the great help you have given to the Society".

In February 1978, the Archbishop asked Fr Jim to move once more and to join the parish clergy team at St. Andrew, Thornton Heath. Fr Jim was to serve in this parish for the next six years, including a two-year appointment as Vicar Coadjutor during the illness of the then parish priest, Fr James Furey. He was highly respected and liked by the parishioners at Thornton Heath, who still today speak of him with fondness. During his time, he also was a respected and active member of the deanery. His ministry in the local schools and the Mayday Hospital are remembered with gratitude and deep appreciation and in a visitation report in 1981, Bishop

Howard Tripp wrote, "Fr Hurley works extremely hard in the service of the people. His individual and personal attendance to the needs of each one is, I know, much appreciated".

In April 1984 Archbishop Michael wrote to Fr Jim to ask him to take on a new appointment and return to the Kent area of the diocese and become Parochial Administrator of the parish of St. Peter, Westgate on Sea. In that letter thanking Fr Jim for his ministry in Thornton Heath, Archbishop Michael wrote, "I do want to say a special word of deep appreciation for all you have done for the people of St. Andrew's over the past six years, but especially for carrying the extra burden of the parish in recent years. You have been a tremendous support to Fr James Furey and to so many others who have come to enjoy the warm hospitality at St Andrew's. I know you will be sadly missed from the local scene".

Fr Jim arrived in the parish as Parochial Administrator and served in that role until July 1987 when Archbishop Michael appointed him as Parish Priest and he made his profession of faith before the Dean of the Ramsgate Deanery on 17th July 1987. In the time, he was in Westgate he was a prolific parish visitor, a fact mentioned in the visitation report of 1984 by Bishop John Jukes. "Very impressive indeed" was the response given to Fr Hurley in his care of the sick and housebound. "The parish is clearly delighted in its new priest and is responding well to his initiatives and wise guidance".

In May 1987, following the Confirmation visit, Archbishop Michael wrote to Fr Jim to thank him for his welcome and the preparations he had made for the celebrations. "I came away from St. Peter's, overwhelmed at the warmth of your hospitality and the wonderful welcome given to me by your people. You are putting so much of yourself and your energy into the life of the parish which is deeply appreciated by us all". In July 1987, Archbishop Michael wrote to Fr Jim appointing him as parish priest of Westgate on Sea. In his response to the Archbishop Fr Jim wrote, "I feel very honoured to be asked by you to become the parish priest of St Peter's. I would be pleased to accept the post and thank you for the confidence you have placed in me." In November 1987, Archbishop Michael wrote to Fr Jim to ask him to leave Westgate on Sea and become parish priest of St Mary of the Crays, Crayford. In his letter to Fr Jim, the Archbishop wrote, "I do thank you again, most warmly, for the excellent pastoral and spiritual work you have done at Westgate during your time there. You have established a diocesan presence among the people, and I know that your work will be remembered by them".

Bishop Charles Henderson inducted Fr Jim as parish priest on 15th January 1987 and he served there until July 1989. Fr Jim had requested a few years previously that he be allowed to take a sabbatical and so in July 1989 he was able to step down as parish priest at Crayford and take a year's Sabbatical. During his year, he was able to take up a place at St Bueno's Centre followed by courses in the USA.

In June 1990, Archbishop Michael wrote to Fr Jim appointing him as parish priest of Our Lady and St Peter, Wimbledon Common to succeed Fr Ambrose McLoughlin, the priest who had founded the parish and built the church. For the next ten years, Jim served in the parish where he was appreciated and much loved by the parishioners and the local clergy. He also built up good links with the local clergy including those attached to the Apostolic Nunciature and he was a regular guest of the Papal Nuncio who he regarded as one of his parishioners.

In visitation reports from the Area Bishop and the Dean during Fr Jim's tenure at Wimbledon Common, all point to his sense of welcome, his kindness and the

hospitality he shows to his parishioners. The parishioners are very happy with Fr Hurley and the people appreciate his enthusiasm.

Fr Jim spent 10 years as parish priest at Wimbledon Common. In February 2000, he wrote to Archbishop Michael Bowen requesting a period of sabbatical leave. In his letter of response, Archbishop Michael wrote to Fr Jim saying, "Everyone heartily agreed that you are, and have been, an outstanding parish priest with exceptional commitment and care for your people. You have a great deal to give as a pastor and I know you will be sorely missed. We have been fortunate in having you as a parish priest at Wimbledon Common for the past ten years and I want to thank you most sincerely for the excellent work you carried out there."

Following period of prayer and reflection during which Fr Jim spent time in various religious houses, he returned to the diocese and to parish ministry once more, when, in May 2001, Archbishop Michael wrote to appoint him as parish priest of St. John the Baptist, Westerham. He had only been in the parish less than a year when Archbishop Michael received a letter from a long-standing parishioner who was full praise for their new parish priest. They wrote "Fr Jim is a model of what a parish priest should be, a good and holy man, a man who prepares and gives us each week the most excellent and thought-provoking homilies, a man who is friendly and welcoming and most approachable. For the next ten years, Fr Jim served the parishioners of Westerham with love, care and dedication.

In a visitation report of 2007, Bishop John Hine wrote that "During my visitation people frequently told me how much they benefited from Fr Jim's sermons and indeed some said they came to Westerham from other parishes for this very reason. It was very evident from the home visits I made and from talking with the parishioners, that Fr Hurley is extremely attentive to all the pastoral needs of the parishioners and is very popular indeed with the congregation. Again and again I heard how much his ministry is valued."

In addition to his parish commitments, Fr Jim took on an additional responsibility when in May 2005, when Archbishop Kevin McDonald, after consultation with the Bishops of the Southwark Province invited him to become President of the Interdiocesan Tribunal of Second Instance of Southwark. Fr Jim accepted this post and as a sign of his commitment to the work of the marriage tribunal embarked on studying for an MA in Canon Law. He combined his parish work with a weekly visit to the offices of the Appeal Court, then based in Archbishop's House, where he would spend a whole day dealing with cases, meeting with the tribunal staff and seeing people whose cases were on appeal. He approached his work with the tribunal with a great sense of pastoral care and sensitivity and was highly respected and well thought of by not only his colleagues in the Southwark Tribunal but by colleagues in other Tribunals.

Fr Jim served in this role for two years, until 2007, when he wrote to Archbishop Kevin expressing his wish that giving his own lack of experience he felt it better that a more qualified Canon Lawyer should be asked to take on this role. He also stepped down as a Judge. In his letter to Fr Jim accepting his resignation, Archbishop Kevin wrote, "Naturally I regret that you have taken this step. I felt you did a very good job and I appreciated your presence in the house each week. None the less I do understand your reasons for going and would just like to thank you for all the work you have done". However, Fr Jim did not walk away from the important work of the marriage tribunal and continued to use pastoral and canonical skills. In 2007, he accepted an invitation to become a Judge of the Oslo Marriage Tribunal.

In 2011 Fr Jim wrote to Archbishop Peter asking to be relieved of the parish and requesting that he take on another role in the diocese. During his ministry he had always built up a good rapport with the various religious communities and was often called upon to preach retreats and give days of recollection. It was no surprise then, that in July 2011, Archbishop Peter Smith wrote to Fr Jim inviting him to become the Episcopal Vicar for Religious in succession to Bishop Patrick Lynch.

For the next 12 years, Fr Jim was a very dedicated, visible and devoted Episcopal Vicar. He built up a strong team to assist him in his work and provided a valuable programme of events and gatherings for the Religious, including the establishment of an annual event at the Cathedral on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. In a letter dated August 2014, Archbishop Peter wrote to him saying, "I have spoken to a number of Religious whom I have met on various occasions who speak so highly of you and how much they appreciate your pastoral care of them. I am very blessed to have you as the Episcopal Vicar for Religious".

As Episcopal Vicar, he also attended national events and conferences of Vicars for Religious both here in the United Kingdom and in Rome. He was highly respected and much sought after as a preacher and retreat giver, and from time to time as a canonical visitor to Religious houses. His regular letters to the Religious of the Diocese combined with his visits and attendance at celebrations earned him much love and respect from the consecrated Men and Women living and working in the diocese.

Fr Jim continued to serve in this role, been reappointed by Archbishop Peter in 2016 and again by Archbishop John Wilson in 2019. In May 2021, Fr Jim wrote to the Archbishop to request that, having served in the post since 2011 he be allowed to step down at the end of the year. "I have really enjoyed my time as Episcopal Vicar for Religious, since I have always had the greatest respect and affection for those in consecrated life, but I think the time has come for new blood. In his response accepting the resignation, Archbishop John wrote, "It was with mixed sentiments that I read your letter of 11th May, the first sentiment was one of profound gratitude and esteem for the wonderful work you have done these past years as Episcopal Vicar for Religious. It is far from being an easy office to hold and I am grateful, on a personal level, for your diligence and loyalty".

Upon leaving Westerham Fr Jim combined his role as Episcopal Vicar whilst also serving as chaplain to the Sisters of the Visitation in Heathfield. He continued in that role until 2018 when he moved back to the diocese living in the parish of Dockhead where he was able to offer Mass and celebrate the Sacraments in the parish, as well as offering Mass at the Convent of Mercy.

Fr Jim was never comfortable with accolades and awards that were bestowed upon him. He was invested as a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre for the Eastern Lieutenancy (NY) in St Patrick's Cathedral, New York in recognition of his work and support for the work of the Lieutenancy and the Cathedral and particular for his support for the cause of the late Cardinal Terence Cooke.

Fr Jim celebrated his Silver Jubilee of ordination to the priesthood in 1993 and his Ruby Jubilee in 2008 and his Golden Jubilee of Ordination in 2018. In his Jubilee card, he quoted a great spiritual hero, Terence Cardinal Cooke, the Cardinal Archbishop of New York who wrote the following about a priest.

"A priest is called to be a servant, giving up a family of his own so that he can minister to those who need him more. A priest is called to be a victim, ready to share

in the suffering of his people and not hide from them and ever ready to bear their sufferings in their place if God asks him to do so. A priest is called to be a brother, who shares the worries and fears and the frailty of those around him..., a priest is called to be a listener, to learn prayerfully from the way in which God has worked in the lives of his people and full of faith to carry that message to others. A priest is called to be a friend, conscious of the needs of justice and brotherly concern in our society, a friend to people who have few friends in their hour of need. The anointing that Jesus give us is to carry him into our world, not to carry us out of it”.

In October 2022, Fr Jim finally stepped down as Episcopal Vicar for Religious upon the appointment of Abbot Hugh Allan O.Praem. In his letter he wrote that now, he was to begin his “novitiate for heaven”.

Fr Jim’s health began to give cause for concern towards the end of 2022 and in late December, he was diagnosed with inoperable cancer of the liver. He continued to attend diocesan events, and at a gathering at the Cathedral on 2nd February for the Religious, Archbishop John paid tribute to him and the whole cathedral rouse in spontaneous applause that lasted some 5 minutes, a real mark of love and affection for Fr Jim. His last public appearance was at the Episcopal Ordination of Bishop Philip Moger on 27th February 2023, when, he was asked to greet the newly ordained bishop on behalf of the priests of the diocese.

Throughout his life and ministry, Fr Jim had always requested prayers and had been a person of prayer. His life and ministry were centred on his love of the Mass and the Sacraments, his devotion to Our Blessed Lady and his dedication to the people he was sent to serve. He never asked for thanks, just prayers. Quoting again his spiritual hero, Cardinal Cooke, “Prayer is the greatest gift that one friend can offer another”

Fr James B Hurley, priest of the Archdiocese of Southwark, friend to clergy, religious and laity, servant of the Lord Jesus, a brother priest and labourer in the Lord’s vineyard, died peacefully at St Peter’s Residence, Vauxhall on Sunday 5th March 2023 in his 79th year and in the 54th year of his priesthood.

May he rest in peace and rest in glory.

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Fr Jim requested no flowers, but suggested if people want to donate in his memory please give to the Ecclesiastical Education Fund. Please send your donation to: The Most Holy Trinity Church, Dockhead, London SE1 2BS. For cheques please mark on the back of the cheque ‘In memory of Fr Jim’. You can also pay online:

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