

Father Bernard de Margerie Words of Remembrance

Good morning family and friends of Father Bernard. My name is David Polzen and I am a friend of Father Bernard. I have been asked to share some words of remembrance of our dear Bernard - a brother, an uncle, cousin, a brother priest, a pastor, a mentor, a teacher, a spiritual companion, and a dear friend.

One of the great attributes of Father Bernard is gratitude and appreciation. I would be a miss if on behalf of Father Bernard I did not begin with words of gratitude and express heartfelt thanks. First a big thank you to all who visited and held Bernard in prayer especially in these last few years. He spoke often of how blessed he was to have such loving family and friends. Thank you.

To the doctors, nurses and staff at the three hospitals, to those at Scot Forget Towers, Columbia Manor and St Anne's Nursing Home. Thank you.

Thank you to all who are gathered here this morning, and the family and friends who are joining us via livestream for this time of prayer. Thank you to Father Joseph and Kelly, the music ministry of Pam and Louise, and those that have gathered to form this special choir, to all who are participating in liturgical roles, and to the parish of Holy Spirit for your hospitality and for leading us thru this grace filled time of prayer for Father Bernard. May these graces continue to bring God's consolation and peace to our hearts.

Father Bernard, also known as Father bon bon, or Father bon, or at times even just bon, had a playful side and a wonderful sense of humour. His tender and sometimes mischievous smile would brighten a room. He loved to laugh and to make little jokes and remarks to make others smile too. I recall a common comment after he vested for Mass was to ask the altar servers if the part in his hair was straight. They would look quizzically at his bald head and he would laugh.

Father Bernard touched the lives of many in his earthly journey. He walked with many of us through good times: baptisms, weddings, anniversaries; and in challenging times. In the challenging times his presence was profound, and his little phrase of "courage kiddo" seemed to give one the strength to carry on. You knew you had a companion at your side. And it did not matter who you were: he cared for the many and all he encountered in his ministry. From his mother and other family members to brother priests, parishioners, and to those he met in hospital for the first time. For many, his visits were the highlight of their day and

the beginning of a friendship that would last a life time. Father Bernard's presence, kindness, and prayer brought the love and compassion of Christ to these folks.

Father Bernard had a gift of meeting people where they were at and encouraging and supporting them to grow in their love of God and all things God given.

He was, and I believe continues to be, a man of prayer. He strongly believed and taught that prayer brings us closer together, in the nearness of God.

I am pretty sure we all know that Father Bernard had an intense passion for ecumenism. From the early days of his priesthood he felt the call to be a minister of reconciliation and unity. Cultivating and encouraging conversion of heart and a growth in spirituality to bring us closer together. A ministry and passion which he held right up until his death. Father's ecumenical ministry holds many accomplishments with such things as the creation of the Centre for Ecumenism, the Covenant with McClure United Church, the establishment of various committees and initiating dialogues and conversations with so many groups, denominations and religions, to the publishing of his book: In God's Reconciling Grace a few years ago. And to this I say: well done good and faithful servant.

Bon was a man who loved to write notes, make agendas, and document and organize things beyond compare. He would establish committees and give them titles such as: The Wisdom Committee, and the Brazil Mission Awareness Committee (fondly known as BMAC) to name a couple.

His skills took him to the Brazil Mission to assist, evaluate, and manage the discernment of the mission, of course there were weekly meetings, agendas, and methodical notes made to help in managing this discernment. A fruit of this labour was the creation of BMAC with the purpose of creating awareness of the Brazil mission in the diocese. It was a gift he had and shared.

This organizational gift filtered throughout all he did. Even these funeral services that we are celebrating today are pretty much all organized by Father Bernard. Now I must admit this was a project under constant review and change. I think his funeral file contained at least 4 renditions of his obituary. Each one with a slight change in phrasing, punctuation or a change of word. But this was all pretty much organized by him.

Bernard seemingly had a love of acronyms and abbreviations, and loved fiddling with such. Several years ago, he came up with the idea and logic saying: You know we are all beloved children of God. He suggested that we drop formal titles like mr, mrs, fr, dr, etc and address one another as “Beloved”. And with his passion for abbreviations, he would send messages and address the person as beloved but he would abbreviate beloved to blvd but then quickly noted that he did not mean boulevard. Soon he changed it to the simple bl. Which he used to address others quite frequently.

Father Bernard was a man of humble service. He never flaunted his achievements or his vast academic accomplishments. He was humble and he encouraged that virtue in all of us with his phrase “stay humble”. You would hear these words as you departed along with go in peace, but even more so his words of advice to stay humble came after giving a compliment. You look very handsome or pretty, stay humble. You did a fine job young man, stay humble.

Father Bernard was a man of prayer, of reflection, of pondering and thinking. He was a man of deep unwavering faith which become more evident as his body began to fail.

He had a great desire for learning and was continually delving into the depths of a variety of topics. He was a thinker and learner who thought outside of the box and challenged himself to think beyond. He wanted to know and understand more. And how it all fit into the wonders of God’s creation. He had an intense hunger for knowledge. And he encouraged all to keep studying and learning.

Father Bernard found solace in retreating to his “shack in the woods”. Also known as Subiaco. His little cabin which he had up until a few years ago. It is there that he took in the solitude to rejuvenate, to reflect, to pray, to just be with God and God’s creation. This was a treasured place for Bernard. It was a place to get away on his own but also with others. Family members have fond memories of being with Father Bernard at Subiaco - gathering wood for the fire, cooking hotdogs and marshmallows over the fire, walking on the sand dunes, playing games and sitting around the fire talking and singing.

Father shared in many dinners and special occasions with family and friends. He was always interested in what was going on in your life. He would encourage and ask let’s share, let’s take turns in telling each other something important, or tell me what’s going on with you. He always wanted to know us on a deeper level. He was very interested in what each one was up to.

Another pass time Bon enjoyed was going for drives. Even when he lost the freedom of being able to drive he was so thankful for his friends that would take him out on a drive into the country or around the city. He loved to see how the city was developing and expanding. He was thrilled to see new things such as on a drive a few years ago he saw the migrating whooping cranes for the first time ever. It was a moment of wonder and awe for him.

To conclude I will use Father Bernard's own words:

I have endeavoured to live my adult life as a disciple and minister of our Lord Jesus Christ.

All is grace...

Adopted child of God. Beloved child of God.

A sinner, and a forgiven sinner.

Witnessing to the steadfast mercy and compassion of our God.

Loved all my people, loved the larger (still fractured) Christian community, loved-in-faith the local Muslim community, and all the Hebrew children of God.

Beloved Bernard, thank you; and we thank God for you.

You will be greatly missed.

Let us continue to pray for one another.

We will remember the love, the laughter and the precious moments we shared together.

We love you.

And now may the songs of the angels lead you into the arms of our loving and merciful God. Amen.

Bon