



## **Tribute to Fr. Peter McGrath CP**

**By Fr. Pat Munroe**

**Chaplain to Family Groups in England and Wales**

Fr. Peter has had an amazing impact on the Parishes in England and Wales in which he inspired the setting up of Family Groups. His easy and at times 'unholy style' of communication set aside barriers of British reserve in Church. He raised awareness for the need of friendship, support and love in the Parish. Through his wealth of stories and anecdotes he enkindled a new desire for **love and belonging**.

From small beginnings Family Groups have and continue to create more welcoming parishes in our countries in which more people are made to feel that they belong. The seeds that he has sown will continue to flourish. We can take fresh heart from the wisdom of his words that, '*numbers don't matter and whoever is meant to come will be there*'. His great mantra '*it is what is in the heart that matters,*' will continue to inspire and encourage us.

Our hearts are one with the Passionist Family Group Movement as they gather round the Altar at St. Anthony in the Fields Church, Terry Hills, to give praise and thanks to God for the life and Ministry of Fr. Peter. He spoke of St. Anthony's with such warmth and love, that we all felt that we belonged there. In truth we do, through the same love of Jesus that can make a spiritual imprint in our lives.

Fr. Peter has been instrumental in lighting a flame of faith and love that will burn brightly and will not be extinguished by the dampening clouds of pessimism or cynicism. Wherever we gather in simple friendship and kindness, concern and support - inspired by the command of Jesus to love one another, we will keep the spirit of the Movement that he founded alive. A message needed more than ever in a world that is

broken through suffering and where many feel the pain of isolation and exclusion.

The charism of the Passionate Order to which Fr Peter devoted his life is that of making incarnate the passionate love of the risen Christ in wounded hearts.

We read in Proverbs that '*without a vision the people perish*'.

Fr. Peter, our prayer is that you use the style that is unique to you in asking Jesus to help us, who love you, to enable your vision to become a reality.

Fr. Pat Munroe

Chaplain to Family Groups in England and Wales

---

### **Fr Pat Reflects on How Family Groups Started in his Parish of St Wilfrid's, Northwich**

Occasionally you meet some one with a dynamic personality whose memory lives through what they can inspire, ***when the dream becomes the reality.***

Such a person is Fr. Peter McGrath, an Australian Priest, who has had an amazing impact in St. Wilfrid's School and Parish recently. Rarely have I experienced so much spontaneous joy and laughter, especially in the Church, shedding new light on aspects of God's love, and raising our awareness for the need of friendship, support and love in the parish. Through his wealth of stories and anecdotes he enkindled a new desire for ***love*** and ***belonging.***

He started what is known as the *Passionist Family Movement* shortly after moving to his first parish in Sydney, Australia in 1972. It grew out of the realisation that people who came together as a community at Mass did not know each other. From small beginnings, Parish Family Groups, have and continue to create a more welcoming parish with a real sense of belonging.

Family Groups are not prayer or spiritual groups, but a group of people from a range of backgrounds: single, families with children, more mature

people, and those who live alone. The purpose of a family group is to create a *sense of community in the Church* and a *sense of parish within the community*. There are usually 10/12 families in a group, with a Leader couple and a support couple. The job of leaders is to nurture a feeling of belonging and welcome, and not to be organisers of all that happens.

Each group is encouraged to arrange for a monthly get together that is simple, low cost and where people share their food and drink. The overall aim and purpose is for people within the group to mix with each other, celebrate special events such as birthdays, support people in times of sadness, and treat everybody as you would Christ. Simplicity is the key. The philosophy is that of having a positive outlook, where an event is never cancelled, and whoever comes are the right people to come, whether it is twenty or one.

Fr. Peter generated a real enthusiasm and fervour when he spoke at the Masses, and given that many were away for half term, the response was tremendous. As a vivid illustration of how people do not know each other at Mass, there was a real buzz of excitement when he got people speaking to each other during the homily. With humour, through story, and not so gentle persuasion sixty registration forms were filled in.

He invited everyone to come together in the Parish Centre on the Sunday, at 4.30 p.m. and to meet in their Family Group. With the help of Gwen, who is Family Group Director for Queensland, five groups were formed, and a leader couple identified for each group. During the week I invited five couples who generously agreed, one couple even cancelled a social engagement, to help with this new venture. I also sent a letter of invitation to each family who completed a form. I was left wondering: what if people do not turn up?

Much to my delight that surpassed all expectation about 100 people ranging in age from 1 to 90 gathered, some sent apologies, new families registered so that there was need to form a sixth group. One man who came full of doubt to 'investigate' what this strange pheromone was about ended up singing a song for everyone. Eric, whose wife of 60 years died two weeks ago, came along with his cartridge of oxygen strapped to his side. He is a non Catholic who simply wants to be part of

the extended family of St. Wilfrid's where he feels he belongs. It was all so amazing – just wonderful to be part of.

After a time of meeting and mixing people met in their assigned group, and were given the task of arranging a simple function within the next two weeks.

Each group has set a date, and that the event takes place is of far greater importance than the number taking part. The recent Family night at the end of the previous half term was a great success, with people of all age groups enjoying a wonderful night together. Fr. Peter who visits many parishes in different parts of the world truly enjoyed his time at St. Wilfrid's and experienced great warmth of welcome and fraternity in the school and St. Wilfrid's Parish. He looks forward to returning.

I feel that Fr. Peter has been instrumental in lighting a flame of faith and love that will burn brightly and not be extinguished by the dampening clouds of pessimism or cynicism. The charism (gift) of the Passionist Order to which he belongs, is that of making incarnate the passionate love of the risen Christ in wounded hearts where an increasing number of people feel isolated and long for a true experience of community ***where the dream becomes the reality.***

---

Fr Peter McGrath CP, founder of the Passionist Family Group Movement, passed away on Saturday, 3 March 2018 at 11.25am at the War Veterans' Nursing Home in Sydney, Australia. Fr Peter was 78 years old and had been an ordained priest for 53 years