



Speech by

Jann Stuckey

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Hansard Thursday, 11 September 2008

CLARKE, FATHER BENJAMIN ALBERT OAM

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (9.35 pm): On Monday, 8 September I attended a deeply moving service at St Peter's Church, Coolangatta, to celebrate the life of Benjamin Albert Clarke OAM, who passed away on Tuesday, 2 September 2008 aged 85.

Born in Nanango on 18 August 1923, Ben Clarke grew up in Brisbane and attended Cannon Hill and East Brisbane state schools, playing soccer and cricket in which he retained a lifelong interest, and as a teenager joined Morningside Scouts, a movement to which he was to devote 30 years. During his teens, Ben's mother underwent a serious operation and he was required to leave high school after just a couple of months to assist her at home. Ben's father found him an apprenticeship with a well-known Brisbane upholsterer.

Aged 18 Ben enlisted with the Field Ambulance of the Army Medical Corps, and served four years in New Guinea during World War II. After the war he met and married the love of his life, Gwyneth Myatt, in 1948 and started his own upholstery business which flourished until he received a calling from the Lord and decided to study for the Anglican ministry.

After seven years of study Ben was ordained as a deacon at St Francis church at Nundah in 1973 and served a number of parishes until his 'retirement' to North Kirra on the Gold Coast in 1986. But for the next 20 years Father Ben never stopped working for the Lord and the community. He voluntarily undertook planned giving programs for 35 parishes throughout Queensland and became a 'gypsy' priest for about 15 years. In addition, Ben served the Currumbin RSL as padre for 20 years, moving all in attendance at the nationally acclaimed dawn service at Elephant Rock, Currumbin, with his skilful speeches that touched hearts and reminded us all of the enormous sacrifice made by those who fought for our country to be free. Fittingly, Ben was awarded the Order of Australia Medal in recognition of his voluntary services in 2003 which also included 20 years as a Rotarian.

Father Ben will be remembered as a truly remarkable man, a living treasure, one whose actions have brought a new dimension to the term 'community service'. St Peter's Anglican Church is small, quaint and traditional with leadlight window panels. For the past five years it has transformed when Wintersun comes to town, and this little church literally rocks with the sounds of Johnny O'Keefe and pals of that era. People are packed like sardines and stream out onto the streets. Father Ben is up the front in his waistcoat covered in guitars rocking along with everyone.

His ability to connect with people, his wisdom, advice and friendship I will carry in my heart forever. When I met him I knew I had encountered a special friend and like countless others will miss him dearly. When closing Ben's eulogy, his sister-in-law Betty said—

I am sure Jesus welcomed him last Tuesday afternoon with these words 'Well done thou good and faithful servant.' May his example live on for us to try to emulate.

May he rest in peace and rise in glory. I say a very special thank you to Father Ken Spreadborough for carrying this service so reverently.