

Tony PHILPOT, our dear brother



Former Diocese of East Anglia Vicar General and Spiritual Director at the Venerable English College in Rome, Mgr Tony Philpot, has died at the age of 81. Mgr Tony Rogers pays tribute.

Anthony (always known as Tony) John Philpot was born on March 24, 1935 in Croydon, the eldest child of William and Josephine. When war broke out his father's office was moved to Bedford, and he subsequently went to Bedford School, alma mater of John Bunyan.

In 1953 Tony began his studies for the priesthood at the Venerable English College in Rome, and was ordained in 1959 at the Basilica of St John Lateran, completing his Licentiate in Theology the next year, and returning to the Diocese of Northampton to serve as assistant priest, first at St Joseph's, Bedford and then at Northampton Cathedral.

His first pastoral charge was in Leighton Buzzard, and, thereafter all his parish appointments were in what later became the Diocese of East Anglia. He took over the parish of St Mark's in Ipswich, when the Franciscans left, and was later moved to Newmarket, following a short spell working with the Society of St James in South America.

In 1980, Bishop Alan Clark asked him to move to Our Lady and the English Martyrs in Cambridge, where he remained for 14 years. His time there, where his gifts as a talented preacher and a gentle pastor were much appreciated, was one of change. Though the liturgical wars which had dogged his predecessor, Canon Paul Taylor, were over, Tony was involved in major reorganisation of Catholic state secondary education in Cambridge, as well as a major and much needed refurbishment of the rectory.

When the Diocese of East Anglia was established in 1976, Bishop Alan Clark asked him to take charge of religious education, and later appointed him as one of his vicars general. The 1980s was a time when mutual support for the priests of the diocese was given high priority and Tony was given responsibility to head up the Ministry to Priests programme.

He had also become involved in the Jesus Caritas Fraternity, inspired by the spirituality of Charles de Foucauld, for which he eventually became the worldwide *responsable*. This took him out of the country for a considerable time each year, and as a seasoned traveller to all corners of the globe, he soon learnt the perils of delayed and lost luggage. So, in keeping with his own simple lifestyle, it was his proud boast that he could be away for three weeks at a time, just taking hand luggage with him and washing and drying his clothes on a daily basis.

He was also elected to the Old Brotherhood of the English Secular clergy, a body which had, in penal times, been responsible for the governance of the Catholic Church in England and Wales until the appointment of Vicars Apostolic, and which has continued as a fraternity of 24 priests ever since.

Following his time in Cambridge, Tony took the unusual step of returning to St Mark's in Ipswich, where he had been parish priest some years before, and after a relatively short time there, he was asked to take over the running of Palazzola, the country villa of the English College in Rome, on the edge of Lake Albano.

He was increasingly in demand as a retreat giver, and there can be few dioceses in England and Wales that did not benefit from his accessible wisdom and deeply-rooted personal spirituality. His way with words was put to good use in an excellent booklet on the sacrament of reconciliation, called '*Clearing the Site*' and two books – '*Priesthood in Reality – living the reality of the diocesan priest in a changing world.*' and '*You Shall be Holy – spiritual basics.*'

Perhaps, unsurprisingly, he was asked to move from Palazzola, to become Spiritual Director at the Venerable English College, a post which he held for about five years.

Retirement from the College took him to Peterborough, where his phenomenal gifts as a linguist were put to good use in ministering to the large Portuguese community in the city, whose language he had made it his business to learn before leaving Rome.

But even his retirement was interrupted, when he was asked to return to Rome and help out at the Beda College for a year. Contact with seminarians in formation, and priests in active ministry in his own diocese and beyond meant that there can be few who wouldn't at least have recognised his name, even if they had no personal encounter with him.

After some years in Peterborough he took the bold decision to move to London when an independent flat became available at St Anne's home in Stoke Newington. Living in London meant he was much nearer to his sisters Margaret and Cathie.

Cancer eventually took over and he was transferred to the nursing home section of St Anne's. Tony struggled bravely, and died on July 16. May he rest in peace and rise in glory!