



## **Franciscan Friars** Provincial Office

Province of the Holy Spirit

Australia

incorporating

Custody of St Anthony

Malaysia Singapore Brunei

Region of St Andrew

Aotearoa - New Zealand

[www.franciscans.org.au](http://www.franciscans.org.au)

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On 5 February 2009 at 7.50 a.m., **Fr Benedict O'Donoghue OFM** died at Star of the Sea friary, Waverley (Sydney). Fr Benedict was 93 years of age ... he would have reached 94 years on St Patrick's Day. He was the senior friar in the Holy Spirit Province of Franciscans by age and years of profession.

At the time of his death, Fr Benedict was preparing for his usual routine of Morning Prayer in the friary chapel, to be followed by community Mass. He had dressed himself in the Franciscan habit, sat on the edge of his bed for a moment of quiet reflection before coming downstairs punctually for community prayer. This was the moment that the Lord called him.

Fr Benedict joined the Order in 1932, two days after his seventeenth birthday. He made his profession of vows in 1933 and was ordained priest in 1937. He was a member of the first Franciscan community in Auckland, New Zealand in 1939 and served the Order as a retreat master and parish priest in his early years. In 1960, he was appointed as Regional Superior of the relatively new Franciscan Mission in Aitape, Papua New Guinea, a position which he held for nine years, a position which would change his life and that of many others.

When Fr Benedict returned to Australia in 1969, having experienced first-hand the acute needs of the mission in its formative years, he devoted his entire energy to fund-raising for and promotion of the Aitape Franciscan Mission for the next forty years, devotedly assisted by Miss Anne Bornstein, herself a former PNG missionary. Without their efforts, many pastoral aspects of the Franciscan Missionary Union (FMU) and fund-raising for the PNG Mission would not have happened so well or so effectively.

With the gentle leadership, astute business acumen and extraordinary zeal of Fr Benedict, hundreds or thousands of people became co-workers for the Mission. The Mission Shops, Housie Nights, stamp collectors and trimmers, parishioners and benefactors who regularly gave small donations or those who gave large amounts all assisted in raising much needed funds for the Mission. Throughout all this practical work and administration, Fr Benedict showed great pastoral care to all who supported the Mission and all who loved St Francis. His personal visits and correspondence with benefactors are well-remembered. In recent years when the Provincial Office made some changes in administration of the Franciscan Missionary Union, Fr Benedict stepped aside from the daily office work but never gave up his devotion to fund-raising for the Mission. Until his last day, he sorted stamps and coins to ascertain their value as income for the Mission. Nor did he give up pastoral care of the Mission's supporters. On the day he died he was due to visit some of the Mission's benefactors. His conversation was often about the Mission and how to continue the support base, his prayer was always in gratitude for God's blessings upon the Mission and its benefactors.

In 1999, Fr Benedict was awarded the Order of Australia medal (OAM) "for service to the Catholic Church as a missionary and as a priest". While proud of this public recognition, he was content to be known as a humble Franciscan who espoused the values of St Francis through his 77 years of religious life and 72 years of ordained ministry – a man who devoted his life to being a missionary for the sake of God's kingdom.

Fr Benedict's Requiem Mass will be celebrated in Mary Immaculate Church, Victoria Street, Waverley (Sydney) on Tuesday 10 February at 1.30 p.m. The funeral will leave the church at the conclusion of Mass for the Franciscan section in Macquarie Park Cemetery, corner Delhi and Plassey Roads, Macquarie Park.

May Fr Benedict rest in peace.

*Paul Smith OFM*

Paul Smith OFM  
Provincial Minister

The Order of Friars Minor  
Celebrating the Grace of our Origins

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OFM  
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