

Fr. Ivan Szewciw 1926 - 2012

Fr Ivan Szewciw was born 1 November 1926 in the village of Harbuziv, not far from Zboriv in the Lviv region, Ukraine. After two years his parents relocated to Lukavec near Brody. It was here that Ivan began his education in the small village school; his teacher was Denis Lada a former Sitch Rifleman. Unable to continue his education in Javoriv, Ivan enrolled into the Lviv Minor Seminary, thanks to the encouragement of the rector Bishop Joseph Slipy. As war raged in Ukraine, Ivan returned home in 1944 only to find that it was occupied by a patrol of Ukrainian freedom fighters (UPA). In time Ivan enlisted in the First Ukrainian Division "Halycyna". He was deployed to Slovakia where he trained as a signalman – telegraphist. In 1945 he was captured by the British and together with many other Ukrainian soldiers was imprisoned in the Rimini POW camp in Italy. His time in the camp was to be short as by November 1945 he was accepted as a seminarian of the Pontifical Ukrainian Seminary of St Josaphat in Rome where he studied at the Pontifical Urban University and completed a Licence in Theology.

In May of 1951 Ivan was ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop Ivan Buczko and in March of 1952 arrived in London to begin pastoral work amongst Ukrainians in Great Britain, He served in London and surrounding areas and from 1956 – 58 was the Pastor of Bradford. In England he founded and published the journal "Our Church".

Responding to the invitation of Bishop Ivan Prasko, Fr. Ivan arrived in Sydney in March of 1959. As curate to Mgr Petro Diachysyn he was responsible for implementing a religious education program amongst Ukrainian youth. He also founded the newspaper "Church and Life" which in time became the official publication of the Australian Exarchate – Eparchy. From 3 January 1962, Fr Ivan served the parish of Adelaide and in February 1963 was assigned as the Parish Priest of Perth, where together with parishioners he built the Church, presbytery, school and hall.

On the 3rd of October 1967 Fr. Ivan took up his position as the Parish Priest of Saint Andrew's in Sydney, a position he held until his retirement in 1995. During that time he served as an Eparchial consultor and trustee. In Sydney he was responsible for the construction of the convent, presbytery, School and hall as well as the parish apartments. He also built the Millennium Memorial and was responsible for the construction of St. Volodymyr's Church and community centre in Canberra.

In 1968 Fr Ivan was made an Honorary Cannon and in 1979 he was raised to the dignity of Mitred Archimandrite by Patriarch Joseph. He served for many years as the Head of the Priestly Society of St. Andrew and in 1975 travelled to many eparchies to encourage support for the establishment of a Ukrainian Catholic Patriarchate. He was very active in his support of Patriarch Joseph and often published articles defending the faith and the Ukrainian nation against attacks. He was a member of the Taras Shevchenko Scientific Society and the Theological Society. He was a great supporter of the Lviv Theological Academy of the Holy Spirit and the Ukrainian Catholic University. For his great philanthropic work he received many awards.

On his retirement he said, "We have done the best we can to safe guard our faith, our Ukrainian Catholic rites, culture and national identity for older and younger generations. For the Church and people I have devoted many years of my life."

In his final years Fr. Ivan's health declined. He suffered the loss of his sight which left him unable to read or write. For such an avid bibliophile and author this was a difficult cross to bear, yet he never lost interest in the religious and political situation in Ukraine and would often ask for news about the parish which he served for so long. He was well looked after by the staff of Canberra Nursing home where he was to spend the last two years of his life as well as the Basilian Sisters and close friends. He received the Holy Eucharist every Sunday and feast day and was present for the Christmas Day liturgy in Saint Andrew's Church in January of this year.

Having received the Holy Mysteries for the last time, Fr Ivan Szewciw fell asleep in the Lord on the 21st March 2012 in the 86th year of his life and 61st of his priestly ministry.

We give thanks to Almighty God for the gift of life and service of Father Ivan Szewciw and pray that God grants him a place where there is no pain, no mourning, only life eternal.

Fr Ivan's funeral will take place in Saint Andrew's Church, Lidcombe. The date and time will be advised as soon as arrangements are made.

Eternal Memory!