



Fr. **John Rovers** was born in Made in Drimmelen (South Holland) on 1st January, 1928. As a young adult, he entered the religious community of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and was officially accepted as a member on 24th September, 1949. He continued his studies for the priesthood and was ordained on the 29th August 1954.

Fr. John was assigned to the Cook Islands. In preparation for his missionary experience, he was sent to London for 4 months and New Zealand for 6 months to learn English. He travelled to the Pacific on a boat filled with immigrant passengers.. Fr George Kester, Fr John's superior, was the chaplain on board. Fr John arrived in Rarotonga on the *Maui Pomare* on the 11th November 1957. A month later, he was appointed to Atiu. Then in 1958, he was assigned to Mangaia, to replace Fr. Placidus. He remained there less than a year and then he went back to Atiu. In 1965, after 8 years in the Cook Islands, Fr. John was able to take a holiday back to his homeland of Holland. The year 1966 brought another change, with Fr. John going to Mauke.

From 1970, Fr. John was appointed Vicar General, first to Bishop Henry de Cocq (1964 – 1971) and then to Bishop John Rodgers, until 1973. Thereafter, he was appointed Director of the Sacred Heart Fathers in the Cook Islands.

Eight years after his previous visit home Fr. John again, went for a holiday with family in Holland in 1973. On returning to the Cook Islands, he was assigned to St Mary's Parish, Arorangi, where, from 1975-1977, he was responsible for building a new presbytery and church. He stayed on in Arorangi for another year. In 1978-1979 he was given the opportunity to study at the East Asian Pastoral Institute, Manila, Philippines.

During the 1980's, Fr. John was appointed Director of the Catechist Centre using the facilities at Arorangi. He was again appointed Vicar General of the Diocese, and

rebuilt the church in Rakahanga (1985). In 1986 he was appointed to Mauke where he has been for the last 30 years. Recently, he continued with his building projects by building a new presbytery on Mauke.

Six months ago, late 2015, Fr John was admitted to hospital on Mauke with serious heart related problems. He came through this incident and was able to continue as parish priest on Mauke, although we were aware he had reduced the amount of work, such as only celebrating one mass on Sunday instead of two. In August of this year when the priests and sisters gathered for their retreat at Arorangi, Fr John took ill and was again hospitalized. Extensive tests were done and it was made clear to Fr John that his heart had been damaged at some stage. It was pointed out to him, that this damage was permanent and beyond intervention from even overseas hospitals. This was not devastating news to Fr John as he was set on traveling and there was only one destination to consider and that was to return to his "beloved island of Mauke and its people. So he recovered enough in late September to return to Mauke and take up pastoral responsibility again.

It was only last Monday that it appeared he was unwell again; it was noticed he was off his food. I understand on Tuesday he stopped smoking!!! He was admitted to hospital and died at 1.00 pm on Thursday.

I quote from an email Fr Freddy sent me re the funeral, which took place at 5.30 am on Friday the 12th of November. The early start was necessary because at 9.00 am the people of Mauke and many visitors from Rarotonga were gathering for the investiture of Teau Ariki. This meant a very large funeral for Fr. John.

"Fr John has been laid to rest and his grave is right up against the side of the church here by seaside parish (St Michaels). Just about everyone turned out for the funeral Mass and burial. Prior to leaving Rarotonga I had asked Fr Damien if he wanted to come with me to Mauke.....it was a decision quickly made by him and I am very happy he is here with me. "

While I only arrived back from Auckland late last night, tributes are already being paid to Fr John. I know only too well, how far a field he was well known and respected as a priest. Tributes are quick to acknowledge, "Fr John was my good friend."

To this beloved priest we now bid farewell and offer our sympathy to:

His family back in the Netherlands who mourn him.

The Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (ss.cc) of which he was a member for 67 years.

To his life long friend, Fr Damian Marinus ss.cc.

To you the people of the Diocese of Rarotonga, particularly the two parishes on Mauke, St. Michael's and St. Mary's. He ministered here in the Cook Islands for 59 years. He was still active in ministry when he died.

To Fr John's many friends here in the Cook Islands and overseas.

+Bishop Paul Donoghue sm 12th November, 2106