

## **Fr John Joseph Morton SSS (1925 – 2017)**



<b>Born</b>	2 January 1925, Albury, NSW
<b>First Profession</b>	5 February 1955, Bowral, NSW
<b>Ordained Priest</b>	16 July 1960, St Patrick's Church, Albury, NSW
<b>Died</b>	27 August 2017, Concord, NSW
<b>Burial Place</b>	Rookwood Cemetery, Rookwood, NSW

**Fr John Joseph Morton** was born at Albury, New South Wales on 2 January 1925, the son of Hugh Wilson Morton and his wife Ellen Margaret née Cummings. He was educated at St Brigid's Primary School and Christian Brothers' College in Albury.

At the completion of his secondary education, he began a cadet engineer's apprenticeship with the Albury Municipal Council. His work involved drafting, survey, water, sewerage and general office duties.

On reaching the age of eighteen in January 1943, he enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), where he served during the Second World War as a wireless assistant and radar mechanic, eventually attaining the rank of Leading Aircraftman. On discharge from the RAAF in April 1946, he returned to civilian life in Albury as an engineering assistant.

In the aftermath of the war, he began to talk to his parish priest Mgr Barry about a vocation to religious life. Together, they explored the possibilities of several religious orders. John was familiar with the Redemptorists, but the Redemptorists were based at Ballarat in central Victoria. He did not think he could tolerate Ballarat's notoriously cold winters.

Mgr Barry suggested he might consider the Blessed Sacrament Congregation at St Francis' Church in Melbourne. When John was temporarily stationed at Melbourne's Exhibition Building during the war, he had often visited St Francis' Church to attend Mass and confession.

After making enquiries, the Congregation's vice-provincial Fr Len McKenna invited John to 'come up and see' the Congregation's novitiate ('Mount Eymard') which was then located at Bowral, New South Wales. He took a week off work to travel to Bowral in mid 1952.

John liked what he saw and learned during that week, and he returned to Bowral a few months later to 'brush up on Latin', as he recalled, preparatory to entering the novitiate on 5 February 1953, when he was clothed in the habit of the Congregation and received the religious name of Brother Matthew.

At the end of his period as a novice, he made his first profession of religious vows at Bowral on 5 February 1955. He then moved to the Congregation's Seminary of Christ the King at Lower Plenty (Templestowe) on the outskirts of Melbourne, where he began the scholastic phase of his formation which led to ordination as a priest. He made his final profession of vows at Lower Plenty on 5 February 1958.

On 16 July 1960, John was ordained to the priesthood at St Patrick's Church in Albury. His ordination occurred at the high point of a glorious period in the history of the Blessed Sacrament Congregation in Australia. John was one of nine men first-professed in 1955 who all proceeded to ordination. His death in 2017 marks the passing of the last surviving member of the 'nine', as this distinguished group had always been known.

About six months after his ordination, John was posted from Lower Plenty to the Congregation's Church of the Blessed Sacrament at Haymarket in Sydney (now St Peter Julian's Church).

A report from John's superior noted his many fine qualities: his faithful observance of the rule and religious principles, his generosity and hardworking nature, and his 'attention to detail'. He was described as 'a credit to the community'.

Between 1962 and 1972, John served in the Congregation's Melbourne community at St Francis' Church. As early as 1963 he was appointed a house consultor. By 1965, he was assistant-superior; and in 1968 he began the first of several terms as superior in Melbourne (1968-1972, 1975-1978, 1987).

In other positions of leadership, John contributed to the Australian province as a provincial consultor (1972-1975); as parish priest at Kensington in Perth, WA (1979-1983); and as the provincial treasurer (based in Melbourne) over many years from 1984 to 2002. At different times, he also ministered for short periods in the Congregation's communities at Bowral, NSW and Toowoomba in Queensland.

During eighteen years as provincial treasurer, John steered the Australian province finances through challenging times when major building and restoration projects were undertaken in Melbourne. His experience, diligence, and financial abilities were valuable assets for the province.

He also maintained a generous but prudent supervision of finances and administration in the Congregation's communities in Sri Lanka and India, when both countries were progressively advancing towards independent province status. He visited India thirteen times.

In 1994, the superior general of the Blessed Sacrament Congregation invited John to join the Congregation's international finance commission, which advised the Congregation's general council and treasurer general on financial matters.

Following his retirement as Australian provincial treasurer in late 2002, John was posted to regular ministry at St Peter Julian's Church in Sydney. He remained a member of the provincial finance commission. He also served on a province ageing and health care committee, which was formed to address the needs of increasing numbers of province members who were aged, retired, or in ill health.

His own health began to deteriorate in 2003 and sometimes prevented him from attending finance committee meetings in Melbourne. Late in 2005, he underwent surgery to receive a pacemaker. The ravages of cancer also began to affect his health over the next few years, and required many visits to hospital for surgery and treatment.

In September 2012, provincial leader Fr Graeme Duro reflected that Fr John Morton not only held the province record for the greatest number of trips to Asia, he also held the

much less desirable record of the 'greatest number of hospital admittances'. John's toughness and determination, as well as his faith, assisted him to endure a great deal of suffering in his final years.

At the age of eighty-nine in 2014, he survived the amputation of his lower left leg and knee. He was obliged to move from his retirement residence at The Sister Anne Court in Surry Hills to the adjacent Gertrude Abbot Nursing Home. He remained cheerful and in good spirits, despite the demands of his rehabilitation and the significant physical disability he had to accept.

To address severe hearing problems, he received a cochlear implant early in 2015. The implant had to be replaced within months due to an infection. By mid 2015 he was back at Gertrude Abbot Nursing Home, his hearing much improved, and he was using the computer once again. He was also able to celebrate Mass from his wheelchair.

Late in 2016, he moved to the Opal Cardinal Freeman Village at Ashfield. Unfortunately, around this time he became more isolated due to further deterioration in his hearing and eyesight.

On 23 August 2017, Fr John Morton was admitted to Concord Hospital. In failing health, he was anointed by his confrere Fr Graeme Malone early on Sunday 27 August. He died at around noon that day, at the age of ninety-two, after fifty-seven years of priesthood and sixty-two years of religious profession.

May he rest in peace.

**Damien Cash**  
August 2017