

## THE RIGHT REVEREND DR ERNEST KENNETH LESLIE

### Citation for the conferral of a Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*)

The Right Reverend Ernest Kenneth Leslie is, above all, a man of the people who, through his love of God and dedication to his Church, has served the people of Australia with humility and devotion for more than half a century. Few clergy have ministered in such remote areas or under such hardships as Ken Leslie. However, his perseverance, patience, versatility and, above all, his sense of humour, have always helped him and those around him to cope with the most adverse conditions.

The son of missionary parents who met in Secunderabad in India, where they were both superintendents of Wesleyan boarding schools, Ken Leslie was born in 1911 in Hitchin, England, where his parents had set up home on their return from India. His mother was English while his father was Australian, a factor that contributed to the family's decision to move to Australia in 1922.

On their arrival in Australia, Ken's father was appointed parish priest in Maryborough, some 120 miles from Melbourne. Ken attended Maryborough High School initially and then won a scholarship to Trinity Grammar School in Kew, Melbourne. From his youth, Ken had always loved the outdoors but it was during this time, when he was a boarder that his interest in rowing and hiking developed. From Trinity Grammar School, he went on to Trinity College at the University of Melbourne where he was awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Latin. He stayed on at Melbourne University for a further two years and was awarded his Licentiate of Theology. He rowed for Trinity College and sometimes in the University eights. He still possesses the oars from the winning crew in the inter collegiates for two years in succession.

In May 1934, Ken Leslie was ordained a deacon at St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne and was priested a year later. In 1937, he became priest of the Parish of Tennant Creek, in the Northern Territory. He was to spend the next ten years battling with the rigours of life in the harsh climate of the Northern Territory. When he arrived, there was no church or rectory at Tennant Creek, only a tin shed with no water supply. Ken thought nothing of travelling seven miles to collect water. He came to depend on his car which often broke down in remote spots. Fortunately, Ken Leslie is a resourceful man who became adept at devising original approaches to car repairs.

At that time, in the mining fields of Tennant Creek, there was little religion and only a few faithfuls who went to Church regularly. However, with his usual good humour, Ken Leslie could see the positive side of this:

*Tennant Creek is the only place where I have been in my whole life, where my congregation exceeded that of the Roman Catholic priest He would generally get three....*

In 1941, with the Second World War already raging in Europe, Ken Leslie married Isabel (Bel) Wilson in Alice Springs. By this time, he had moved to Darwin and, among other duties, was an army chaplain. There was a company of signalmen posted along the Kokoda Trail in Papua New Guinea who had not seen a chaplain for over a year. It fell to Ken Leslie to visit

these isolated servicemen by walking the length of the Kokoda Trail, delivering packages and conducting services as he went.

As a married man with two children, Michael and Kathryn, Ken Leslie decided that it was time to leave the Northern Territory so he accepted an appointment as Vice Warden of St. John's College at Morpeth in New South Wales. It was during his time at Morpeth that a second son, Simon, was born. From Morpeth, Ken Leslie went on to become the first Chaplain at the recently established Timbertop, part of Geelong Grammar School. He was to remain there for six years, until 1958, when he was enthroned as the Sixth Bishop of Bathurst. His consecration took place at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney, on February 2, 1959.

The Bathurst diocese is among the largest in Australia, covering 80,000 square miles of central western New South Wales. However, the new Bishop was no stranger to travel having covered vast areas in the Northern Territory. In fact, the long country roads that he travelled while visiting the outlying areas of his diocese constantly reminded him of the Northern Territory. Sometimes he would tow the caravan which he had built for the family behind his car. Travelling around Bathurst and the immediate surrounding countryside, he often used a bicycle which caused one of his flock to reflect:

*If Jesus could ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, why can't the Bishop ride in on a bicycle?*

The Bishop also reached out to his parishioners through a radio program entitled "The Bishop Speaks." He approached these broadcasts with the energy and enthusiasm that are so characteristic. He would talk of personal experiences in such a way that they became common experiences to which his listeners related. He was a man of God who was essentially a man of the people, disliking all forms of pomp and circumstance. Preferring to be called "Bishop" to the more formal "My Lord" and eschewing many of the trappings of his office in order to mix with the people of the diocese.

Since 1927, the diocese had been waiting for the Cathedral in Bathurst to be completed. One of the main problems was a shortage of cash. Despite several fund raising efforts, the cathedral building project was again at risk at the beginning of 1971 with a debt of \$200,000. This burden weighed heavily upon the Bishop who came up with an original solution - The Bishop's Walk. The Bishop agreed to walk from Dubbo to Bathurst, some 130 miles. Such a revolutionary idea caught the imagination of the people and of the press both nationally and internationally. News even reached Buckingham Palace. Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, sent her greetings. Letters of encouragement were received from all over Australia and a message from the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Bishop was now 60 years of age and many were concerned about his well-being. He was confident he would be able to walk twenty miles a day "without much difficulty." The Bishop's Walk started in Dubbo on Sunday, July 18, 1971. It was widely covered by the press. All along the route, crowds turned out to see "The Bishop who Walked." By the time he reached Bathurst on July 24, some \$64,000 had been pledged. The rewards were not only monetary. The walk created greater unity within the diocese and made people more aware of their obligations to their Church. The cathedral was consecrated on 16 October, 1971.

In 1972, Bishop Leslie was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in recognition of his leadership both within the Church of England and within the community. He was to serve the diocese for another nine years before retiring in February, 1981.

In addition to his other duties, Bishop Leslie served on the Liturgical Commission which produced a new prayer book, the Board of Delegates to the Australian College of Theology, and the Boundaries Commission of New South Wales.

It is with pleasure that we recognise the Right Reverend Ernest Kenneth Leslie, Officer of the Order of the British Empire, Bachelor of Arts from the University of Melbourne and Scholar of Theology from the Australian College of Theology, the Sixth Anglican Bishop of Bathurst, a friend and supporter of Charles Sturt University and its predecessor Mitchell College of Advanced Education, humanitarian, devoted husband and father, with a passionate love of Australia and its people, for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*) of Charles Sturt University.

**Dated this Third day of May One Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety Six**