

Obituary: The Ven. Hedley Ringrose

04 JUNE 2021

Canon Michael Irving writes:

HEDLEY RINGROSE was a rare and very gifted man who discovered his vocation early in life. He was only 15 years old when, encouraged by his RE teacher to offer himself for ordination, he went to the Society of the Sacred Mission at Kelham for pre-theological studies and later to the Bernard Gilpin Society in Durham, before going to Salisbury Theological College in 1965. It was here that he found energy and vision for the ministry of the Kingdom, and a compelling understanding of priesthood.

He served two curacies, the first at Bishopston, in Bristol,

and the second at Bracknell, in Berkshire. He was blessed with wise and inspiring



training incumbents who enabled his abilities to flourish. Each were excellent role-models when he himself became a training incumbent. He also fostered many vocations to the ministry. These were exciting years for Hedley and his wife, Rosemary, who was so much a part of his ministry in the coming decades. She was his greatest support, encourager, and critic throughout their 52 years together, and she undoubtedly enabled him to be the man and priest that he was.

In 1975, they came to the diocese of Gloucester, where he was to serve for 35 years: first, at St George's, Tuffley, a suburb of Gloucester, and then the market town of Cirencester. These were two very different communities. In both places, however, Hedley was a builder in every sense: a builder of community, of worshipping communities, and also of the physical community of church plant.

In Tuffley, he reordered the church in a striking and imposing way and organised the building of two properties for extra parish clergy. He was also responsible for creating both a housing association with 12 flats for single mothers and a night shelter for the homeless.

In Cirencester, he instigated the purchase of a different property as the vicarage and created a church bookshop, church coffee shop, and church offices, all very close to the parish church in the centre of the town. A disused Unitarian chapel near by was purchased and later transformed into a parish centre.

With Hedley's phenomenal drive and outgoing vision for taking the Church into the heart of communities, it is little wonder that he became Archdeacon of Cheltenham. He could connect with anybody, whatever their background or their upbringing. He had an infectious laugh, great smile, and warm personality. Whenever he was in a room, people felt drawn to him. His inclusivity touched many. Even at college, we knew that he would have a remarkable influence for good wherever he went, and it was so. Wherever he exercised his ministry and priesthood, be it parish or archdeaconry, it was rooted in place and people. He had unflagging good humour, wisdom, patience, and grace.

Hedley had the unique distinction of serving as archdeacon in all three of the dioceses in which he had been a parish priest, as, in retirement, Hedley covered the vacancies as the Acting Archdeacon of Malmesbury and subsequently Acting Archdeacon of Oxford. He was indeed an outstanding and godly archdeacon.

Throughout his ministry, Hedley was a school governor at both state and independent schools. His presence and wisdom were always valued. He had the great gift of being able to stand back and see situations and issues in their entirety. Indeed, he was at a Zoom meeting of school governors only three weeks before he died.

Hedley was immensely proud of his family, and they provided him with a deep stability and lasting joy. Rosemary and the children, Chris, Emma, and Louise, all shared in a ministry of welcome and hospitality, besides giving their musical expertise in worship and in the wider communities in which they lived. There are countless people, both lay and ordained, who have cause to be immeasurably grateful for the Ringroses, and especially for Hedley's part in their lives. It is with great gratitude and affection that he will always be remembered.

The Ven. Hedley Sidney Ringrose died on 15 April, aged 78.