

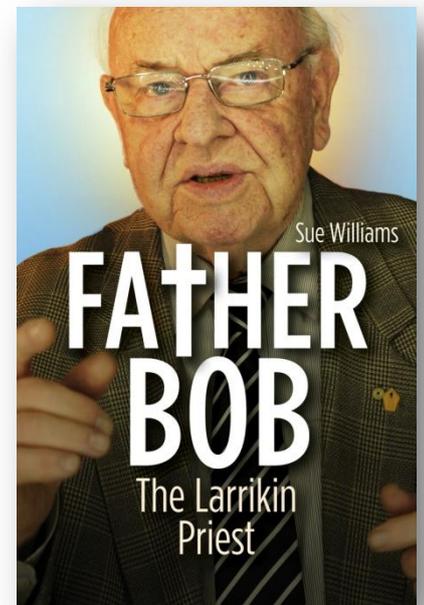
Father Bob

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Extract

Foreword

**Father Bob Maguire
AM, RFD**



There's been a lot said, and written, about me over the years.

Some people have said I'm a saint; to others, I'm more the devil incarnate.

I've been called the 'sad' priest because so much of my work has been with the poorest, most marginalised, most desperate people in Australia today. To some I'm a 'bad' priest, because many of my ways of doing things are quite unconventional, although my interpretation of the gospels has always been absolutely orthodox.

And to many I might seem, at times, quite mad. They're the ones who only see me on TV, hear me on radio or read about me in newspapers, sounding off about the sorry state of my beloved Catholic Church around the world today, calling for those of us in religious life to be much more inclusive, and pontificating on the kinds of subjects priests don't usually dare to go near: sex 'n' drugs 'n' rock 'n' roll, abuse by clergy, contraception, gay marriage, crime, forgotten Australians and the dangers of hidebound clericalism.

Since I was ordained as a priest in 1960, I've seen many changes in both society and religious life. Vatican II has come and almost gone, and the Catholic Church has become mired in controversy over the abuse of youngsters in its care and its treatment of both offenders and their victims. For that, I apologise wholeheartedly, with every strand of my being. Nothing will ever wipe out the pain of those who suffered, or excuse their sickening betrayal by the Church, although I hope the Royal Commission can go even a little way to helping those victims.

At the same time, society has doubtless become more secular, more stressed and a great deal less forgiving of those who fall between the cracks.

My time as a priest, up until I was forced out of my church in South Melbourne after thirty-eight years working there, was all about creating a caring, sharing church, working in partnership with the neighbourhood and community to design a new model of collaboration and support. It was about a church working for the people, and by the people.

As a result, everything achieved during those years was never done by me alone, but was a real and meaningful expression of teamwork. That includes the pioneering work with street kids through Open Family, the formation of the Emerald Hill Mission to help older people who were struggling, the galvanisation of the parish to feed, clothe and assist the poor and, finally, the Father Bob Maguire Foundation to help those at both ends of the spectrum: granting scholarships to disadvantaged kids, helping with a refuge in Nepal for child victims of the global sex trade, and looking after those older Australians who otherwise might have given up all hope.

Of course, I've made mistakes along the way, but we've also enjoyed great successes.

Finally, as I still strive to continue my work, now without my parish but instead as part of a church without borders, harnessing technology to build a whole new pop-up congregation online through Church.tv, Twitter and my blogs, using traditional media to send my message and travelling around Melbourne to say mass and hold baptisms, weddings and funerals, I felt it was at last the right time to tell our story.

That's the good and bad, and warts 'n' all – both, as you may say, the saintly and the devilish.

And for the love of Jesus, now here it is.

Bob Maguire