

# NEWSLETTER

## Tribute to Rev. Fr. Joe Inguanez (1943 ~ 2023) Chaplain, Inspiration, Friend

### A stalwart voice for Social Justice

Recently ZHN lost its long-standing chaplain Rev. Dr. Joe Inguanez. Losing a valued member of our movement who has been present and active in it throughout the last 40 years of its history is difficult for the members of the movement and dare say to all those who had the privilege to get to know him.

Most likely I am the least qualified to be writing this article, as I have only known Fr. Joe for a few years – yet I must admit that he has left a lasting

impression - he imparted to me a sense of duty, a learned approach to dialogue and debate and an insatiable urge to keep on fighting for the social good especially in the context of the young worker.



Photograph of Fr. Joe Inguanez. Photographer Jonathan Borg 2019

Fr. Joe was a true scholar at heart and in practice. He had a keen interest in sociological and philosophical arguments which he applied in practice towards his work in the context of social justice, to help foster a social conscience in our society. This interest in social justice was further driven by the fact that he was foremost a man of God, ordained priest in 1970, and a prolific sociologist with academic degrees from various institutions.

As a person Fr. Joe was well read in most areas whether theology, social teachings of the church, sciences, literature, law, political history, you name it – you could tell that whenever he entered a debate, he was coming at it with a backing of facts not mere opinions fed to the masses. He valued debate based on facts and honest, hard truths – what had to be said had to be said, no sugar coating, but not just opinionizing.

He deeply thought about what he read before forming an opinion tempered with life experience and sharing it with others through personal and community action. In a way, he was the living proof of the movement's method of *See, Judge and Act*. He never feared controversy, and always said it as it is – not wanting in any way to belittle others but because of his conviction for a common good for all, were no one in society is left behind and all without exception must be held to account for their actions. That meant that at times he had to put his head on the block, whether in the political, social, or religious context to point out misdeeds, inappropriate behaviour in public office, or lack of action to truly fulfil one's mission. In other words, he practiced what he preached, he preached what he practiced.

#### See - Judge - Act

*"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor"*

*~ Archbishop Desmond Tutu ~*

Above all however he was a man of prayer. In every ZHN National Council meeting, he led an opening short inspirational reflection, generally inspired by something he was reading or researching – but every time the subject pointed to the importance of prayer. In our last meeting on Thursday before his passing away he was very insistent on this, especially to *"never give up to the temptation of giving up on prayer because it feels hollow or futile"*.

The loss of Fr. Joe is not only for the movement, but I dare say for the nation and for the Church. Unfortunately, very few people these days are willing to stick out their necks to speak the truth, to point out the glaring mistakes and blemishes of our society, to call a spade a spade. We need more people of conviction in every aspect of society. A few weeks ago, he sent me this quotation by Archbishop Desmond Tutu *"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor"* to use in a See Judge Act section of one of the ZHN newsletters. He really felt it a must that people stand up to be counted, that people need to have the courage to look their immediate group in the eye and openly and lovingly say I do not agree with this point of view, it is wrong, it is against our principles as a group and as a nation. We need stubborn people to stubbornly keep on banging on the same drum until people realize what is right and what is wrong, that there are no shades of grey when it comes to social justice but just totally good, or totally wrong. The truth is one and must be preserved at all costs, must be spoken of at all costs. Not doing so is being party to injustice. Debate must lead to action that leads to positive change.

My humble opinion is that this is in part what drove Fr. Joe to keep on working in the ZHN, as well as many other forums, at his age. Just a few weeks ago he told us in a National Council meeting 'do not worry I will stick around as your Chaplain as long as I'm alive – I will be your spiritual guide as long as it takes'. And indeed, his email signature quoted St. Thomas More *"You must not abandon the ship in a storm because you cannot control the winds"*. To the ZHN there is no question asked that he was pivotal in keeping the movement alive even in difficult times when membership fell to just a handful. In a difficult situation he put his energy notwithstanding his age and health challenges to help the movement get back on its feet, to realise its goals based on the See Judge Act method.

While today we mourn the passing away of a great chaplain, and inspiration to all of us, we at the same time look forward to a bright future, building on the positive legacy Fr. Joe left through his example, hard work and dedication.

### Lasting impressions

We asked people that knew him to share their lasting impressions of Fr. Joe. Most have only had the privilege to meet and speak with him a few times, but here is what they had to say.

*"Fr Joe was a man of action. Till the very end he was actively taking concrete action to address challenges that the movement faced. He further insisted with the members to take the right action especially when it is the hardest path"* (Xandru Cassar - President National Council)

*"The Lord bestowed on Fr. Joe great wisdom and beautiful talents. He did not keep these for himself, neither did he use them to boast, rather he made good use of these talents so that through them his life and his life work became instruments that benefited all those who turned to him for assistance or worked with him"* (Piju Spiteri - President National Council 1959 ~ 1962)

*"Fr Joe was a true Cardijn disciple, always concerned to promote the life and vocation of young workers, workers in general and the lay apostolate, particularly through his untiring support for the YCW."* (Stefan Gigacz)

*"I met Joe Inguanez many years ago when I invited him to a conference in Italy on 'Ethical tourism' and ever since we exchanged visits and ideas and enjoyed being friends. Joe was a man of hope, always engaged in spreading the Gospel in contemporary society through the promotion of reflection and the identification of new proposals. Letum non omnia finit"* (Vera Zamagni)

*"This sad news came to me like a bolt from the blue. I remember Fr. Joe as a person of profound humanity, with a generous heart and a brilliant intelligence. He invited me three times to Malta to take part in his cultural initiatives. Fr, Joe deserves a memory of great esteem and gratitude. I join in the condolences of his relatives and friends."* (Stefano Zamagni)

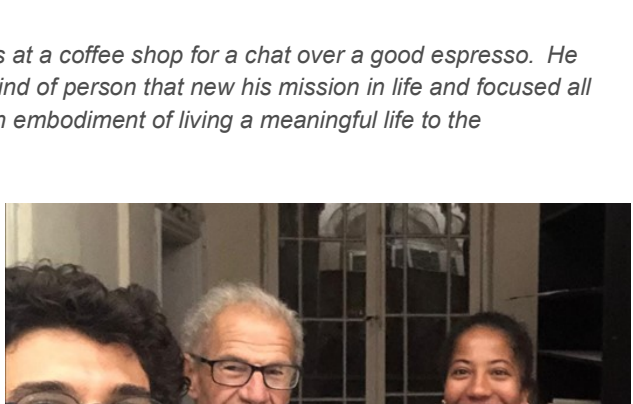
*"I was lucky enough to meet Fr Joe a few weeks before his passing. From the get-go, he immediately struck me as a bright soul with many stories to tell and many lessons to learn from. He will be sorely missed."* (Michaela Camilleri)

*"Although I joined ZHN recently, Fr Joe was always present to share his thoughts, his experiences, and a laugh or two with us. He always made it a point to participate actively and contribute to a group he clearly held dear."* (Natalia Mangion)

*"I personally experienced his profound values of poverty which he lived in a radical way. Fr Joe had a good stipend but when I used to talk to him he always encouraged me to live a simple and poor life. He did so himself. He might have come across as a rough and tough person but in truth he was following Christ's model on the cross as dying in total deprivation."* (David Farrugia)

*"The first time I met Fr. Joe was at a coffee shop for a chat over a good espresso. He immediately struck me as the kind of person that new his mission in life and focused all his energy to fulfil it. He was an embodiment of living a meaningful life to the full!"* (Reuben Tonna)

Some argue that bridging the age gap is impossible, yet Fr. Joe was able in just a few encounters to do just that. We after all, all thirst for the same thing a just society for all, and we all want to be inspired by genuine people that practice what they preach with every fibre of their being.



Xandru (President ZHN Malta), Fr. Joe, Clemence (President YCW) 2021