

# Fr Jack Dewes



A few weeks ago we were informed of the passing of Father John W. Dewes. Father Jack, as he was known to us, was an Associate Pastor at Saint Raymond's in the 1970s. He became a lifelong friend to me and my family and to many of us. I can remember the times, though I was a child when Fr. Dewes arrived at Saint Raymond. He was a visible part of daily life at Saint Raymond's School and on Sunday at Church. I was an altar server and attended the school during this period of time and watched very closely, Father Jack, saying mass from the altar and it was an amazing time. "While at the time, we were all beneficiaries of Fr. Jack's vision of Church, perhaps what we will remember most is his uncanny ability to connect with every person he encountered with a smile, a hug, and, so often, a story. His stories helped people relate their current places in life—their personal challenges, families, work, friends, and neighbors—to the Gospel."<sup>1</sup> Father Jack had the unique ability to retell the stories of Jesus' life from memory. He had memorized the gospel of John. I had never met anyone who could bring the story to life, then or now. "Jack's style is like a lot of Chicago priests, liturgically speaking, tending toward the familiar and loose around the edges. But it is always prayerful and inviting, and his personable and generous way came naturally to him."<sup>2</sup>



He will be remembered for many things by many people but at his center, Jack Dewes was a Vatican II priest and the first that I had ever met. He also had a real penchant for celebration. In his own way, his ministry opened the window for me to understand the post-Vatican II changes at Saint Raymond school, on the altar, and in Catholic life that we all witnessed and have over the last 50 years now, grown used to. But in the early 1970s, there were big changes. Mount Prospect in the 1970s: Saint Raymond was changing, the Branches program had taken root with the High School students and we felt safe during a turbulent time with the priests who were assigned to us. Father Dewes was fond of theater and music, and these passions came through in his public style. I was told recently that he very much enjoyed his time at Saint Raymond. Please take the time to read Jean Powley Murphy's Book about our history.<sup>3</sup> If you don't have one, please ask to borrow a copy. In honor of the 25 Year Anniversary 1949 - 1974, which was named the Saint Raymond's Jubilee, and along with many other events and activities around the Saint Raymond's complex, Father Dewes and some parishioners formed The Jubilee Players, to add a little adult entertainment to the celebration. Jubilee as it was called, was a 2-weekend Vaudeville-like celebration held in the school and gym during the spring break. Music, Gambling, and fun. The following year the newly created ensemble, "The Jubilee Players" under the direction of parishioners Rich Nolan,





Cye Race, and Father Dewes produced their first original show. The Day After Tomorrow was a parish-wide dinner theater production. The cast, chorus, set construction, food table service, bar service, and the massive nightly clean-up was handled by parishioners and eventually the Branches students were included. It seemed like the entire parish had a job and was involved. The play's original theme content featuring believable real characters singing heartfelt solos, well-rehearsed musical numbers, and sequenced dancers made it wonderfully entertaining and an instant hit. Each night sold out and was met with roaring, standing ovations. While other parishes were performing The King & I or The Music Man, "The Day After Tomorrow" was an original story about a multigenerational family living in a Chicago Bungalow as the neighborhood around them transitions in the 1970s. The story focuses on the life of the family's uncle as he and the family navigate the changes in our city and their lives. Changes in the neighborhood, changes in the church, life after World War II, newfound freedoms in a post-Vatican 2 world. Everything from work changes to a reconfiguration of the Catholic Church mass and especially the more visible changes to the family's local church and altar including the shocking no more Latin mass. The entire story hit close to home. These changes had begun at Saint Raymond. The gates to the altar had been removed allowing people full access to the altar and sacristy. In

order to receive the holy communion, we would stand in lines as in a procession. The Saint Raymond Covenant at 301 I-Oka street which was home to our beloved sisters of the Sisters of Mercy order, no longer wore the traditional habit but wore smart pantsuits if they chose. Jean Murphy's book talks about this history in the parish but the musical forced the public debate again. Parishioners had a lot to say, both good and bad but definitely, it was controversial. Father Jack Dewes was a Vatican II priest and he made sure that all of us knew about those changes and why the new church was going to be better for all of us. "The Day After Tomorrow" was a semi-autobiographical story of Fr. Jack's family, his real uncle, and his life before entering High School at Quigley North. The message and recurring theme are found in the songs, "We are Changing" and, "Pictures in a Scrapbook". Only the photos had stayed the same but everything else had changed. We constantly compare the past to the present. Even today this is a constant theme and conversation topic here at Saint Raymond. We fight against the tide and search for a buoy to help us and guide us. I'm told that Barbara Streisand had purchased the rights to the song "Pictures in a Scrapbook" but I was not able to confirm it. Over the next few years, more original plays were produced. For Love or Money, was an original story about a man whose wife had passed away and he is thrust quickly into grief, change, and eventually hope and new love. The Man who loved Fairy Tales is a spoof of the Chicago political climate in the 1970s. The story is told and narrated by a six-foot frog who resembles Richard J. Daily. Pure humor. - The Jubilee Players continued to perform and produce quality entertainment at Saint Raymond de Peñafort and we are grateful to Father John W. Dewes for rallying the troops then and perhaps now and helping us to see a special part of the outcome of Vatican II by making religion and community more accessible to the message of Christ, and by introducing theater into our lives. It's more important now than ever that our motto and our heartfelt conviction that "All Are Welcome in this place" rings true for all of us in this place. Hopefully, the ability to laugh out loud at ourselves and the ongoing changes is Father Jack would have wanted for us.

Thank you for reading. -Chris Gordon

<https://www.davenportfamily.com/obituary/FatherJohn-JackDewes>

1 Rory Cooney <http://rorycooney.blogspot.com/2015/04/a-doozy-with-heart-of-shepherd-fr-jack.html>

2 Rory Cooney <http://rorycooney.blogspot.com/2015/04/a-doozy-with-heart-of-shepherd-fr-jack.html>

3 History of St. Raymond on the [st-raymond.org](http://st-raymond.org) home page under welcome.

