

Resolution of Council

26 June 2023

Item 3.1

Vale Fabian LoSchiavo

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

I wish to inform Council of the passing of Fabian LoSchiavo, social activist and devout Anglo-Catholic on 11 May 2023.

Fabian was born on 15 December 1949 and grew up in Eastwood. He attended Catholic schools in Eastwood and Bathurst where he discovered he had a vocation. After leaving school, he sought to fulfill it with the Vincentians in Campbelltown and Perth and later with the Premonstratensians at their seminary in St Norbert's Abbey, Green Bay Wisconsin, before returning to Australia in 1972.

Fabian was however faced with contradictions between his faith and his sexuality. His attempts to seek a "cure" failed, including through long-discredited aversion therapy.

After studying at the University of NSW, he joined the NSW State Archives, until his retirement in 2012.

In the early 1970s, he became involved in gay groups and joined the Anglican church, becoming a parishioner of the progressive and inclusive St Luke's Enmore.

For the following 50 years, Fabian actively integrated his religious life with his identity as a gay man and in doing so, carved a space in which LGBTIQ+ people of faith could be open and visible.

In 1977, St Luke's elected Fabian to the Sydney Diocesan Synod, which was a position he held into the 1980s. As a Synod member he attempted to persuade the Diocese to adopt an open, inclusive and accepting position on homosexuality against fierce opposition. In 1983, Synod blocked debate on Fabian's motion which stated, "Synod is of the opinion that homosexuality is not a bar to any ministry of this Church", instead referring it to a Synod committee.

On 24 June 1978, Fabian took part in a street march in support of gay and lesbian rights on the morning of the first Mardi Gras carrying a sign reading "Gay, Free and C of E." That night the first Mardi Gras ended with 53 people being arrested in Kings Cross. Soon after he joined a Gay Solidarity Group and along with other lesbian and gay Anglicans formed AngGays in 1979.

Fabian had a love of music and singing, which featured in both his religious observance and activism. He was a mainstay of the St Luke's parish choir, founding member of the Sydney Gay Liberation Choir, and a vocalist with the camp country gospel band, Eve and the Forbidden Fruits. He was also an accomplished piano accordionist, a talent he used in his best-known alternate persona, Mother Inferior, later Mother Abyss of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

The Order of Perpetual Indulgence was established in the United States in 1979 in response to the AIDS crisis. In 1981, Fabian and others established a Sydney Chapter of the Order, which soon became a feature of rallies, protests and community events.

In 1983, soon after the AIDS crisis became a major challenge facing the gay male community, Fabian led the Order in providing pastoral care within and beyond the lesbian and gay communities.

The Order's effective use of satire led to Fabian developing other characters to expose the hypocrisy, sexism and racism within organised religion. He performed them not just within the LGBTIQA+ community but at events and fundraisers. In July 1988, he brought several of his characters together in a one man show at the Performance Space in Redfern. It skewered the worst aspects of organised religion in the same way Max Gillies exposed politics and the late Barry Humphries laid bare Australian social mores.

One of Fabian's lesser-known talents was sewing, a skill he used in both his activism and religious faith. He sewed flags and banners for protests and conferences and shortened the robes of Father Jeff Parker, after he became rector of St Luke's in 2019.

He continued to be a St Luke's parishioner long after he moved to Malabar riding his bicycle to attend communion, teach Sunday school, help in its opportunity shop and perform at church functions. Father Parker appointed him as his rector's warden, the highest lay position in a parish.

After retiring in 2012, he became increasingly involved in the local Malabar community, always willing to mind and walk dogs of his friends and neighbours.

He was a regular Mardi Gras participant in his various guises and was featured in the 2022 ABC telecast as Father Brown riding his bicycle.

He also achieved his vocation, through the liberal Catholic Holy Celtic Church International, being ordained Rev Dom Fabian.

Fabian will be remembered by both the LGBTIQA+ and St Luke's parish communities for his bravery, creativity, warm-heartedness and sense of humour. His contributions to queer culture, social justice and inclusiveness within organised religion will long be celebrated.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE AO

Lord Mayor

Moved by the Chair (the Lord Mayor), seconded by Councillor Worling –

It is resolved that:

- (A) all persons attending this meeting of Council observe one minute's silence to commemorate the life of Fabian LoSchiavo and his significant contribution to social justice including LGBTIQA+ community activism and his Anglican parish community;
- (B) Council express its condolences to his family; and
- (C) the Lord Mayor be requested to convey Council's condolences to Fabian LoSchiavo's family.

Carried unanimously.

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Note – All Councillors, staff and members of the public present stood in silence for one minute as a mark of respect to Fabian LoSchiavo.