

Fr Shaun Vincent Carls

16 May 1964 – 11 June 2018

Fr Shaun Vincent Carls was in his 55th year of life, 25th year in the Society of Jesus, 12th year of priesthood, and 2nd year of Final Vows.

<i>Ort.</i> 16 May 1964	<i>Diac.</i> 30 May 2015	<i>Die:</i> 29 June 2016
<i>Loc. Nat.</i> Ennerdale. Johannesburg, South Africa	<i>Loc. Diac.</i> Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Johannesburg by Archbishop Buti Joseph Tlhagale, Archbishop of Johannesburg	<i>Defunc:</i> 11 June 2018
<i>Ingr.</i> 1 July 1993	<i>Ord.</i> 8 September 2006	<i>Loc. Defunc:</i> Clarens, South Africa
<i>Loc. Ingr.</i> Lusaka, Zambia	<i>Loc. Ord.</i> Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Johannesburg by Archbishop Buti Joseph Tlhagale, Archbishop of Johannesburg	<i>Date of Funeral:</i> 23 June 2018
<i>Mag.</i> Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office in Cape Town, South Africa and OCIPE in Brussels, Belgium	<i>Grad.</i> P4	<i>Place of Funeral:</i> Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Johannesburg, South Africa
<i>Stud.</i> St Joseph’s Theological Institute at Cedara, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa; Heythrop College in London; Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California.	<i>Loc. Grad.</i> Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Johannesburg, South Africa	<i>Place of Burial:</i> West Park Cemetery, Johannesburg, South Africa
		<i>Province:</i> SAF

Shaun died of a heart attack in the early hours of the morning in Clarens, a small town in the Free State, on 11th June 2018. He was 54 years old.

Shaun's final moments encapsulate the essence of his Jesuit vocation, modelled after Fr. Nadal’s vision of the Jesuit “whose home is the road and the world.” As Vocations Director, Shaun had recently travelled to Lesotho to meet with potential candidates discerning a call to the Society of Jesus and had also offered spiritual direction to individuals along the way. Feeling unwell where he has stopped for the night at the local hotel, he sought help at the reception desk. Despite the immediate care of a local doctor and paramedics, Shaun passed away, leaving behind a legacy of quiet, faithful service.



Born and raised in Ennerdale, south of Johannesburg, Shaun’s journey to the priesthood was marked by dedication and resilience. After training as a teacher and spending several years in education, he discovered his true vocation and joined the Society of Jesus. His formation years reflected his deep desire for excellence in ministry, a desire he pursued with humility and an openness to the needs of the Society. Shaun’s pastoral experience included time at the Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office in Cape Town and OCIPE in Belgium. Following his ordination, he ministered in Orlando West, Soweto, and later at the Propaedeutic Year of the National Seminary alongside Fr. David Rowan, SJ.

Shaun was known for his quiet and unassuming presence, which belied the depth of his wisdom and pastoral care. His retreats and spiritual direction touched many lives, always delivered with minimal fuss but profound impact. As Vocations Director, Shaun encouraged numerous young men to discern their calling, accompanying them with compassion and insight.

At the time of his death, Shaun was serving as the superior of a complex and diverse Jesuit community in Johannesburg. In this role, he exemplified kindness, availability, and decisive leadership when needed. His ability to foster unity and understanding within the community earned him deep respect and admiration.

Shaun’s passing was a significant loss to the Society of Jesus in South Africa, his family, and all who knew him. While his growth as a Jesuit may have seemed understated to some, those who knew him recognized a man whose quiet perseverance bore rich spiritual fruit. His kindness, humility, and unwavering commitment to God’s work will remain an enduring inspiration.

Homily at Funeral
by Fr Rampeoane Hlobo

Monday week it will be twenty-five years since Shaun, Fr Chiti over there, and I, officially entered the Society of Jesus. Twenty-five long years that have been somehow extremely, or that have somehow gone, extremely fast. I can still remember that first day when we arrived in the Novitiate in Lusaka, and Fr Vincent – one of the old Jesuit fathers who was a member of the Novitiate staff there – he invited Shaun, or he mistook Shaun as a Jesuit, and he invited Shaun to the Father's recreation room for a cup of tea. And of course there was another Bishop, Bishop Paul Lungu – who had a wicked sense of humour just like Shaun – so Bishop Paul Lungu who knew who Shaun was, and was Novice Master two years before that, he looked at Shaun who was drinking that cup of tea, and he said, "He will learn", that's all he said, he said "He will learn." Shaun soon learnt that for the following two years he was not to have a cup of tea in that room. He and the rest of us novices were to keep that room clean for the Fathers and their guests. So such was his induction into the wonderful life of selfless service in the Society of Jesus. And as we grew up together as Jesuits, we learnt to be companions on a mission. And we quickly realised that companionship and the grace of God in this Jesuit life, were indispensable. So for the first six years of our formation and training as Jesuits, living in the same community in Lusaka, in Cape Town, and in Merrivale in Howick, we cemented this companionship and we matured in the Society of Jesus as brothers who cared for one another. Over the following years as we lived in different communities and different towns, we always made sure that when one was in town, he would make sure that he has time for the other so that we could go out for a meal or even for a drink, to talk about our desolations and our innumerable consolations in our Jesuit life. Such was our companionship.

But of course, none of us, certainly not me, was prepared for this moment.

When one will be called to preach at another's funeral, certainly we knew that one day one of us would have to bury the other. But I was certainly not prepared, or did not think that this moment would come so soon. It is true that death is like a guest for whom you prepare something to eat, but never comes. The day when you have not prepared anything for it, it decides to come and claim its share. Although I knew since 1995, when I accompanied Shaun to a chemist in Mowbray to do his cholesterol test, I knew from then that he had a cholesterol problem. Shaun's sudden and untimely death came as a shocking surprise. Be that as it may, as believers, and as we heard in our first reading this morning, "the perishable body must put on the imperishable; and the mortal body must put on immortality". It does not end here. Shaun's life did not end with that dreaded heart-attack. What happened here, fellow mourners, is that transition that St Paul – the apostle – talks about in our first reading today. The perishable body has put on imperishable, and the immortal body has put on immortality. Needless to say, that this transition is almost always accompanied by pain for those of us who are still in this perishable and mortal body. The pain of separation from those we love, for those we care for, those we have been attached to, and quite often inordinately attached to – that pain is often unbearable and makes us blind and momentarily to forget what we profess in our creed when we say we believe in the forgiveness of sins, we believe in the resurrection and life everlasting.

The apostle Paul reminds us that it is not death that has won here. As he puts it, "death has been swallowed up in victory" and at this point one also remembers the words of the famous 17th century English poet and cleric, John Donne, who says "one short sleep past we wake eternally, and death shall be no more, death thou shalt die." We are therefore reminded in our first reading this morning that there is no victory in death. And Shaun will wake eternally and join the heavenly court and be our advocate.

I believe so, because our God is an abundantly and immensely generous God, as we have heard from our Gospel. He invites us to work in our vineyard and generously rewards us, not according to what we deserve, but according to what we need. Shaun was invited into this vineyard later than some of the many Jesuits that we know, and his time in this vineyard was certainly not as long as others have put in. As I said earlier on, he would have celebrated 25 years as a Jesuit had he lived but twenty more days. But amongst us here we have two other Jesuits who will be celebrating 50 years in the Society of Jesus. They have worked much longer than Shaun, and still continue to work in the vineyard for the Lord. Just three years ago some of you will remember that we buried Fr Fitzsimons who was almost 80 years in the Society of Jesus. So as you can see, Shaun he had a relatively short spell in this vineyard as a Jesuit, but also a relatively short spell in this world as well. He was, however, like the generous landlord, generous with his energy and generous with his limited time in the vineyard. The many people he met and interacted with in his work can attest to this fact, that he was generous – not least with his humour – that left many smiling or in stitches. Through his work in spiritual direction and accompaniment he also managed to help those who came to see him in desolation, to move into a state of consolation. Shaun was dedicated to his ministry. Shaun died at his post, with his boots on!

He died surrounded by neither family nor friends. He died in the company of total strangers, far away from his community, far away from his family, far away from his friends. And this is exactly what St Ignatius had in mind for a Jesuit. In his letter of December 1546, St Ignatius says, “the Society of Jesus and its members have joined together in one and the same Spirit, namely to travel to various places in the world among the faithful and the infidel as we are sent.” Shaun had travelled to a mission, a mission he was given by his superiors, and died on that mission, at his post, with his boots on.

As we lament this humanly undesirable of Shaun dying at such a young age, 41 years younger than when Fr Fitzsimons died three years ago at the age of 95, we remember that in the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius, St Ignatius invites us in the principle and foundation to be indifferent. He says: “consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honour to dishonour, a long life to a short life. Our desires should be what is more conducive to the end for which we were created.” And it is a difficult thing to embrace and let alone to achieve.

So, *broer*, as you join the heavenly court, may you be our advocate. You know our challenges, you know our struggles and you know our weaknesses. Be our advocate.

And to Philip, I know you were very close to Shaun. And to the rest of the family. May you find solace in the knowledge that your brother, your uncle, was valued so much by so many. The Jesuits in South Africa have received so many messages of condolences from all over the world, and particularly from those who lived and worked with Shaun at some point. They are all shocked by the passing away of Shaun, but equally grateful for having met him, for having interacted with him, and for some, for having journeyed with him in their lives as Jesuits. He clearly made an impact in people’s lives. He certainly did in mine. Please receive my deepest and sincere condolences. And may you find solace in the words of St Ignatius again, when he wrote to a sister to console her at her brother’s death, and St Ignatius said to her: “When all is said and done, we have so Good a God, and so loving a Father, that we should not doubt that his benign providence draws out his children from this life at the best instant there is for entering the next.” Let us be consoled knowing that with God, the timing is perfect for a labourer who has been called out of the vineyard to receive his or her reward

God bless you all, and may He give you the strength to continue and remain faithful on this pilgrimage towards Him.