

OBITUARY (or RECOLLECTION) THE REVD. ROBERT LESLIE HUGHES

Canon Hugh Beavan writes:

Robert Hughes was a priest whose faith and ministry were honed, shaped, tested and strengthened by bouts of depression and chronic fatigue, but who managed to combine a great love of cars and motor racing with a deep passion for justice, especially for those who were victims of abuse.

He was born in 1952 at Bilston near Wolverhampton and his family were involved in the local Methodist church. After Brierley Hill Grammar School Kingswinford, Robert studied law at North Staffordshire Polytechnic and Birmingham Polytechnic. After qualifying as a solicitor and working in private practice, he joined the Crown Prosecution Service in 1986 and was based in Birmingham and Stoke – on –Trent. Robert derived great satisfaction from his work with the CPS and, in the words of one magistrate ‘always brought calm and order to the proceedings’. His speciality was child abuse cases and he was on the team of senior prosecutors who rewrote the National Procedures Manual in the mid 90s.

Cars were to be his passion throughout his life. He always seemed to know everything about every car and was an avid follower of F1. He loved going to Donnington, Silverstone, Shelsley Walsh, and numerous exhibitions and rallies.

He met his future wife Hazel in 1991 at the International Swimming School at Whimble in Devon. They were married at St. Mary’s Merevale in Atherstone, Warwickshire by a retired priest, Canon Peter Buckler, who was to have a profound influence on them both and prepared them for Confirmation. It was at Merevale that Robert and Hazel first experienced the beauty and richness of Anglican worship and the seeds of Robert’s vocation to the priesthood were sown.

After quite a long period of discernment, Robert was accepted for training for the ministry and they moved to Queen’s College Birmingham. After 2 years Robert was ordained deacon and served his title at Christ Church Quinton in Birmingham, where he and Hazel were warmly welcomed. After 6 months he was struck by post-viral fatigue and depression which meant he was unable to work for 9 months. Throughout this time he was tremendously supported by his training incumbent and colleague, John Barnett.

In 2005 Robert was made priest-in-charge (later team vicar) in the Appleby group of parishes in Leicestershire: 5 villages, 4 churches (all with open churchyards) and 2 schools, all legally one parish. Ill health led to early retirement and in 2009 Robert and Hazel moved to Myland in Colchester where they soon became involved in St. Michael’s church. He would often undertake prayer walks around a large new housing estate in the parish. As part of the Queen’s 90th birthday celebrations, he was involved with a small group from the parish in organizing a wonderful street party on the estate.

Outside the parish Robert served as a quietly efficient secretary of the Colchester and District Clerical Society; he served on a committee of Watch (Women and the Church) to advise General Synod members on issues relating to women bishops; he was also involved in IJM (International Justice Mission) Restored (speaking out about domestic abuse) and VAW (Violence against Women) Such was Robert’s heart for justice, mercy and peace.

At the end of 2016 Robert was diagnosed with a very rare and aggressive brain tumour and he died in June 2017, his faith undiminished. We thank God for his life and ministry and pray that he may rest in peace and rise in glory.