Three degrees of separation

‘Six degrees of separation’ is the notion that all people are a maximum of six social connections away from each other. In the Church, it is more like three.

It is a big world, but within the life of faith, unexpected connections are constantly being found.

One of the Church of England's many theological colleges is on the outskirts of Oxford. Oxford itself sports three Anglican theological colleges which itself is noteworthy – it once had even more! The one that is on the outskirts of Oxford is in a small leafy village called Cuddesdon. The college's name is Ripon College Cuddesdon. The Rev'd Max Lambourne from St Alban's Church in Wilston, Brisbane, trained there, as too did this cleric.

Theological colleges are formative places. The older I get the more I realise what a gift the lectures were, and what a privilege it was to study, worship and live as part of a college community. I was at Cuddesdon for three years and then propelled into a curacy. Many of my fellow ordinands stayed in the south of England. I headed back north to The Diocese of Blackburn in Lancashire, where I spent four years as a curate in a suburban parish in Lancaster. In my Ann St, Brisbane office I have a photo taken during my curacy of a church full of people, young and old. I cannot remember the particular occasion, but it is a powerful reminder of my roots, for curacies are also formative.

So it came as something of a surprise to find a close connection between Cuddesdon, The Diocese of Blackburn and Northern Region Bishop Jeremy Greaves.

Bishop Jeremy's grandfather, Walter Baddeley, was the Bishop of Blackburn from 1954 until his death in 1960. He trained at Cuddesdon, which is curious enough. He was also Bishop of Melanesia from 1932-1947. I was deaconed at Blackburn Cathedral (1993) – the same church that Baddeley had his seat. I was ordained by Alan Chesters, and it is quite possible that during my ordination he was using Baddeley's crozier, which is still in that Diocese.

But what really surprised me was to discover in an article of British journal New Directions how Bishop Walter had gently shaped the Diocese of Blackburn in his six-year episcopate. Lancashire had been the home of what was known as Lancashire Low (a low expression of Anglicanism), but under Baddeley and the appointment of clergy from Cuddesdon, the Diocese of Blackburn flourished in a broader direction. By the time I was there, in the mid-90s, Blackburn was a Diocese somewhat similar in outlook to the Anglican Church Southern Queensland's. My curacy was served in a cheerful Liberal-Catholic church, yet just 10 minutes' walk away was St Thomas', an equally cheerful church but evangelical in orientation. One could go from one to the other without anxiety as Bishop Walter Baddeley had set The Diocese of Blackburn on that course.
It is just a curiosity that I have a photo from my time in Blackburn in my office and in Bishop Jeremy’s office there is the document (a Royal Warrant) calling Baddeley to Blackburn.

Beyond my surprise and curiosity, I feel tremendously grateful for the efforts of those I never knew in laying foundations for people they never knew. And, beyond that I am grateful that in the unique way of faith communities, Church lives crisscross and connections can be found.

I just wonder what Bishop Walter Baddeley would have thought of this cleric, who was trained at Cuddesdon and in Blackburn, working with his grandson Bishop in Brisbane.

Sunday Devotions • Monday 24 August 2020 • By The Rev’d Canon Gary Harch

Sunday 30 August 2020 (Octave of Martyrs of New Guinea – 2 September)

To whom do we look for honour?

“Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.” (John 12.26)

Main Readings (Martyrs of New Guinea, Wednesday 2 September): Zephaniah 3.14-20; Psalm 130; Romans 8.33-39; John 12.20-32

Main Readings (Sunday 30 August): Exodus 3.1-15; Psalm 105.1-6, 23-26; Romans 12.9-21; Matthew 16.21-28; [Jeremiah 15.15-21; Psalm 26.1-8]

Supplementary Readings (Sunday 30 August): Psalm 75; Matthew 17.14-27; Exodus 11; Psalm 63; Romans 12.1-8

When I was the rector of St James’, Toowoomba, I became aware of a part of our Church’s history that I hadn’t properly known. It was the history of the 12 Anglican World War II New Guinea martyrs. Parish priest Fr John Barge went from St James’ to the island of New Britain in 1936, eventually being appointed to the small village of Lumielo on the south west coast in 1943, and was the last Anglican martyred by the Japanese forces. He was one of the 12, four of who came from our Diocese.

In John 12.23-26 Jesus responds to the enquiring Greeks by speaking of glory, eternal life and honour. Are these words that you associate with the Martyrs of New Guinea? Should they have stayed on regardless? Should they have left when they had the opportunity? They made their decisions in the heat of war, in the context of their time and in their understanding of mission and the needs of the people they served. We know that some were betrayed. We best honour these people by respecting their Christian stance, not by assessing them against modern standards.

Probably none of the martyrs thought that their lives would be held up as examples and their stories retold 80 years after their death. It has taken decades of research and reflection to find out the ever-increasing complexity of what happened. Their actions were not for personal honour. Thus, they are honoured first by God, the Anglican Communion and by the memorials around Australia.

Being a servant of Christ constantly challenges our perceived self-importance – we need to find value in service, not in what others might believe.