

## "THE DRY" STARRING FR EUGENE MCKINNON

One afternoon Fr Eugene McKinnon, Parish Priest in the East Wimmera Parish, received a call from someone who wanted to look at St Joseph's Church at Banyena, 40km's west of St Arnaud. He suspected someone wanted to be married there instead was surprised to hear that a production company was looking for a church for a film they were going to make. The film was to be based on Australian author, Jane Harper's novel, "The Dry".

The synopsis of the story is of a small country Victorian town in the grips of a devastating drought. The central character, Aaron Falk, (Eric Bana) is coming "home" to attend the funeral of his best friend Luke who, along with his wife and child, have tragically died under suspicious circumstances. Luke's parents want the truth and no-one in the town is beyond suspicion.

The director, Robert Connolly, rang Fr Eugene and asked if he could play the role of the pastor in the film and if he knew of any parishioners who would be willing to play extras. Mr Connolly also needed an organist for the funeral scene, so Anne Walsh from Donald was invited to be part of the production as well.



On the two days of filming in Banyena, a large production crew built up the site to look like the scene described in Jane Harper's book. Fr Eugene's cue, as written in the novel, was one line: "The fat old padre made his way to the lectern and began the funeral."

The Director asked Fr Eugene to conduct the funeral scene as a priest would and begin in his normal style. Hours later, after many takes and after the other extras had departed, he was still repeating the same introduction as camera angles were assessed and re-adjusted. It was suggested to Fr Eugene that if he wanted to give up the priesthood he could easily get a job as an actor!

Several months later, there came a call to join Actor's Equity and be a member of the cast. This meant re-recording his words in a studio in Port Melbourne to remove extraneous noise from the background (passing traffic) and to add sound effects to the dialogue such as music. The movie's release in Australia, previously scheduled for August 27, is now likely to be in early 2021.

*Noeline Hogan – East Wimmera Parish*

*Photos are from the parish archives, not from film production; images from the actual film have been embargoed until the release of the film early next year. Top: Fr Eugene saying Mass in the Birchip side chapel Bottom: St Joseph's Banyena church frontage*