



Obituary - Canon Philip Doherty

The fruitfulness of Philip Doherty's priesthood is witnessed in the deep affection with which parishioners held him.

This was nurtured by serving the Catholics of Cowdenbeath for more than 30 years. He did so with dedication, sensitivity and good humour.

Canon Doherty described the focus of his day as "Holy Mass, praying the Divine Office, administering the Sacraments and being with people".

It was that pastoral role that helped him in his priesthood: "The faith of the people strengthens the faith of the priest".

He made the above comment at the celebration of the 60th Anniversary of his ordination in 2015 at Our Lady & St Bride's.

He said: "Very often I'm amazed at the faith of people, especially when they are in difficult circumstances and there's still a joy about them, and their faith is not dented one little bit. That impresses me."

There was an outpouring of tributes on social media following the news of his death. People recalled his keen sense of humour, his wisdom and friendliness – he went out his way to make everyone feel welcome at his parish.

One wrote: "We were blessed to have Father Doherty as our parish priest for so many years. He has left imprints on many hearts."

Philip Doherty was born on 17 May 1931 in Cowie, Stirling, the youngest of ten children born to James and Catherine, who had come to Scotland from Donegal. Two of those children died in infancy before Philip was born.

Philip was baptised at Sacred Heart Church, attended primary school in the village, and was a short time at St Modan's High School, Stirling, before heading to Blairs College, the junior seminary in Aberdeenshire. His brother Frank, who was four years older, had gone to Blairs before him and then to senior seminary at Oscott, Birmingham. He too became a priest of the Archdiocese of St Andrews & Edinburgh.

Philip studied alongside two others who would become priests of the Archdiocese – and great friends of his – Canon John McAllister and the late Monsignor Tony McNally.

They attended St Sulpice seminary in Paris together, which inspired Canon Doherty's love of France (he spoke fluent French). They regularly returned to visit St Sulpice.

The three men were ordained by Archbishop Gordon Gray at St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh on 2 July 1955.

Canon Doherty's first parish was St Cuthbert's in Edinburgh, where he spent six years.

He then served in St Alexander's in Denny (1961-62), St Marie's in Kirkcaldy (1962-72) and St Margaret's in Gorebridge (1972-85) before moving to Cowdenbeath where he was parish priest for 30 years.

He served as Provost of the Metropolitan Cathedral Chapter 2014-2015. He was known for his good sense humour (described by one retired priest as "bonhomie") and being a

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gracious host who liked to put people at ease and who enjoyed the company of his brother priests.

He had a sharp intellect, was shrewd, and took seriously his duty of obedience to the Church, the Liturgy, Her dogma and traditions.

He was a skilled preacher who would not shy away from highlighting difficult truths, but in a way that remained charitable and inclusive.

He refused the opportunity to retire at the age of 75 so he could continue serving the people of the parish.

Into his 80s, he was fit enough to walk around Cowdenbeath every day and he continued to regularly concelebrate Mass with the priests of the Institute of the Incarnate Word (IVE) who came to Our Lady & St Bride's (now part of The Holy Family parish). It was only in recent years that his mobility declined. He would be helped onto the altar for Mass and soon experienced increasing deafness.

Fr Nicholas Grace IVE said: "Canon Doherty was loved by the people here. He was an absolute gentleman and a pleasure to be around.

"Even at the age of 88 he delivered fantastic sermons at the funerals of parishioners when called upon."

Canon Doherty had a very strong sense of family. He was devoted to his parents and to his siblings, as they were to him. He took a great interest in his nieces and nephews and their families.

Over the years he celebrated many family baptisms, weddings and funerals.

He loved company, and he enjoyed getting together with family to relax with them over a meal and a glass of wine.

A statement from family and friends said: "Fr Doherty was a very caring and holy man, a wonderful and dedicated priest to his parishioners.

"He always had a story for every occasion and was very witty. He will be sadly missed by all who knew and respected him.

"Fathers Franco Liporace and Nicholas Grace have been a great support to Fr Doherty and also to Mary, his dedicated and trusted housekeeper of 44 years."

Canon Philip Doherty died after a short illness at his home in King Street, Cowdenbeath, on Saturday 30 October. He was 90. May he rest in peace.