

The Very Reverend Leo Canon Glancy

Canon Leo Glancy was a cheerful and faithful priest whose ministry took him from the parishes of the Archdiocese to missionary service in Nigeria, and whose particular care for deaf Catholics made a lasting contribution to the life of the Church in Scotland.

Born in Musselburgh on 7 January 1939 and brought up in Stirling in a committed Catholic family, Leo felt drawn to the priesthood from an early age.

He attended St Mary's Primary School in Stirling and St Modan's High School before beginning his formation for the priesthood at Blairs College, Aberdeen, in 1951. After a further period at St Modan's, he continued his studies at St Andrew's College, Drygrange, near Melrose.

He was ordained to the priesthood by Cardinal Gordon Gray at St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh, on 30 March 1963.

His first appointment was as an assistant priest at St Francis Xavier's in Falkirk, where he served for five years. In 1968, he volunteered for missionary service in northern Nigeria, beginning an important chapter in his priesthood which would remain close to his heart for the rest of his life.

The Archdiocese of St Andrews & Edinburgh had taken responsibility for missionary work in the Bauchi area and Canon Leo was among the priests who responded generously to the call to serve there.

He ministered at Gambar, Bauchi, Gombe and Billiri between 1968 and 1975, serving during a particularly difficult period in Nigeria's history.

His contribution is still warmly remembered in Bauchi more than 50 years later.

In a message of condolence following his death, Bishop Hilary Nanman Dachelem CMF said Canon Leo had made an important contribution to "the growth and development of the Church" and had been "instrumental in the building and development of the Church in Billiri and St James' Church in Gombe".

Bishop Dachelem added that Canon Leo's "dedication, generosity and commitment to the work of evangelisation" had left a lasting legacy in the Diocese.

Ill health eventually forced him to return to Scotland in 1975, but his affection for Nigeria and his commitment to the missionary Church never left him. He remained in contact with the country and returned to the area on later visits.

He subsequently served for many years in promoting awareness of the Church's missionary work, including as Vicar Episcopal for Mission Awareness and in roles connected with the Pontifical Mission Societies. Missio Scotland remembered him following his death as "a true missionary" who "never lost his love for the missions".

After recovering his health, Canon Leo was appointed to St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh in 1976. It was during this period that another of the defining ministries of his priesthood began.

He became aware of the pastoral needs of Catholics who were deaf or hearing impaired and made contact with those already ministering to the deaf community, including Vincentian priests in Glasgow.

He learned sign language and, crucially, learned how to communicate the liturgy and the faith in a way that was natural and accessible to deaf people.

Liz Ann O'Hare, a registered British Sign Language Interpreter, who signed at Canon Leo's funeral, said that his understanding went much deeper than simply learning signs.

"He came through to Glasgow to see if he could be of any help, and we taught him how to sign the Mass, and he never stopped. He just had a mind like a deaf man, he thought like a deaf man," she said.

Canon Leo went on to dedicate decades to this ministry.

He celebrated signed Masses and took part in liturgical celebrations for deaf Catholics in Edinburgh, Falkirk, Glasgow and elsewhere in central Scotland. He travelled to Glasgow for important celebrations such as Palm Sunday and Christmas and made himself available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, sometimes spending hours in the confessional with deaf Catholics who could communicate directly with him through sign language.

He understood the distinctive culture of the deaf community and was concerned that Catholics with hearing impairment should be able to participate fully in the sacramental life of the Church rather than find themselves isolated from it.

Canon Leo's ministry also became closely associated with HCPT, the charity which organises pilgrimages to Lourdes for disabled and disadvantaged people.

He served for several years as chaplain to Group 89, whose helpers came largely from Lanarkshire. Kathleen, one of those involved with the group, recalled that he was always willing to travel west for its meetings and social events.

"Canon Leo was a great chaplain," she said. "He had a good rapport with the children and helpers as well as attending to our spiritual needs. He is remembered for his smile, his sense of humour and his kind and gentle nature."

His signing at Mass left a particularly strong impression.

She added: "We remember him especially for his signing during our own group Masses and also at the Scottish Mass and Trust Mass which all groups attended."

“Our lasting memories of Canon Leo were how he was so absorbed in his signing that we also were drawn into the beauty and wonder of signing. Even to this day I find my hands wanting to move when I hear certain hymns!”

Archbishop Leo Cushley also first encountered Canon Leo through HCPT more than 35 years ago.

Speaking at his Funeral Mass, the Archbishop recalled seeing him signing the liturgy and “dramatizing the Gospel” with what he described as “a smiling enthusiasm”.

“I don’t remember who the celebrant was or what he was saying,” he said, “but I remember Leo communicating the Gospel in this way... and it’s a moment I’ll never forget.”

After serving at the Cathedral from 1976 to 1980, Canon Leo became parish priest of Our Lady’s in Currie, where he served until 1986. He was subsequently appointed to St Mary’s in Haddington, where he served from 1986 to 1988.

In 1988 he was asked to become Spiritual Director at the Archdiocesan seminary at Gillis College, a role he held until 1993.

Mgr Philip Kerr recalled that Canon Leo had a keen interest in the spiritual developments taking place within the Church and brought that experience to the formation of men preparing for priesthood.

He was also asked by Archbishop Keith O’Brien to organise gatherings for retired clergy, a ministry of fraternity and support which he continued for many years.

Canon Leo subsequently served at St Catherine’s in Edinburgh before being appointed to Christ the King in Grangemouth in 1997. From 2000 his ministry also embraced Sacred Heart parish in Grangemouth.

He was to become a familiar and much-loved figure in the town, remaining there until his retirement from active parish ministry at the age of 80 in 2019.

Even while carrying the responsibilities of busy parishes, his ministry to deaf Catholics and his links with HCPT continued. When he travelled to Lourdes with his Grangemouth parishioners, he would still meet up with his old friends from Group 89 and sign at the Trust Mass, sometimes still wearing his Group 89 sweatshirt.

In 2013 Canon Leo celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his ordination, marking 50 years of priestly service.

Across more than six decades of ministry he is remembered for his good humour, gentleness, missionary zeal and simple enthusiasm for communicating the Gospel.

Mgr Philip Kerr described him as a “zealous and cheerful minister of the gospel”.

Archbishop Cushley similarly remembered a priest of courage and tenacity who loved parish ministry and found it difficult to leave it behind as advancing age and declining health eventually made retirement necessary.

In the final years of his life Canon Leo lived at Nazareth House in Glasgow, where he was cared for by the Sisters of Nazareth. He died at Gartnavel Hospital, Glasgow, on 23 July 2026. He was 87.

His Funeral Mass was celebrated at St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh on 11 August 2026.

In his homily, Archbishop Cushley reflected particularly on the ministry which had distinguished Canon Leo for so many years.

"For much of his priesthood, he patiently found time to share the good news with those whose hearing is impaired in some way, and he worked to communicate the Lord's call to love and life by learning to use sign language.

"In doing so, he therefore became in some way the voice of the Lord of life to others: Leo encouraged others with the Lord's own words, he reached out to them, and he comforted many hearts with the Word of God through his ministry of signing.

"And typically, he did so with his winning simplicity, his smile, and his tenacious enthusiasm."

The Diocese of Bauchi also paid tribute to the spirit which had marked his missionary service, saying that his ministry there had been "a testimony to his love for God, the Church and the people entrusted to his pastoral care".

Canon Leo Glancy served the Church as missionary, parish priest, seminary spiritual director, advocate for the missions and as a pastor to Scotland's deaf Catholic community.

His long priesthood was characterised by a willingness to go where he was needed and to find ways of bringing the Gospel to those entrusted to his care.

May he rest in peace.