

# Fr. Joseph Desmond Scanlan, C.Ss.R. (1932-2015)

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*By Fr. Mark Miller, C.Ss.R.*

Fr. Des was born in Montreal on June 8, 1932, the first of five children, to Michael and Margaret (Scullion) Scanlan and baptized at St. Gabriel's Parish. There were four subsequent children: Ellen, Margaret (who became a Holy Cross Sister), Johanna, and Larry; Des remained close to his siblings and their families all his life.

His elementary schooling was with the Irish Presentation Brothers at Canon O'Mara grade school, but after meeting several Redemptorists at parish missions (notably Frs. Joe McGreel and Bill O'Flaherty) he completed his high school at St. Mary's College, Brockville. His novitiate was at L'Abord á Plouffe where he professed his vows on Sept. 15, 1953. He was ordained on June 22, 1958 at Holy Redeemer College in Windsor. He did most of his theology studies in Woodstock, but was with the first class to be ordained at Holy Redeemer.



**Fr. Joseph "Des" Scanlan, C.Ss.R.**

**Born: June 8, 1932**

**Professed: September 15, 1953**

**Ordained: June 22, 1958**

**Died: November 20, 2015**



*Fr. Des leading the band at St. Mary's (photo courtesy of the Archives)*

He began his priestly life as a teacher at St. Mary's College. In 1966 he was appointed the Prefect of Students and then rector at Holy Redeemer College just after the end of the Second Vatican Council and the turmoil at the seminary in 1965. Staff, brothers and students all found him a gentle, if at times firm, leader and guide during challenging times. From 1971 to 1983 he also took on the task of religion consultant for Windsor Catholic Schools, a job/ministry for which Catholic educators in the Windsor area continue today to praise and thank him.



*Fr. Des at Gerard House (photo courtesy of the Archives)*

In 1982 he moved to Toronto to take charge of Redemptorist students at Gerard House and for the next 11 years he guided what is now the backbone of the Edmonton-Toronto Province. In memoriam, Fr. Leo English noted that "...Scan in his own loving way fashioned and formed any number of us as Redemptorists over the years. He was interested in influencing us to be gentlemen – he often spoke of manners, good behaviour, speech and attitude." "He was a gracious, hospitable man with a warm laugh." (Email to Ellen, Johanna, Larry & Elizabeth). Ray Earle

had this to say: “During my time at Gerard House, I will always remember his prayerfulness, wonderful uplifting homilies, spirituality, balanced sense of life, and of course his contagious laugh. Scan, as we knew him, could brighten up a gathering just by his presence.”

In 1984 he was also elected provincial superior of the Toronto Province, an office he held for nine years, and which he undertook while still guiding the students at Gerard House. When he came off the provincial’s job in 1993, there was no Redemptorist community left in the Windsor area, where he had ministered for years. So he accepted the role as Director of Holy Family Retreat House in Oxley, where he was renowned for his retreats, his homilies, his welcoming friendliness, and his spiritual direction.

In 2008 he retired to St. John the Baptist Parish in Amherstburg. He continued his ministry both in the parish and beyond, especially in his support for Catholic education and his gentle guidance through spiritual direction. A special word of thanks is owed to Fr. Brian Jane, pastor of St. John the Baptist Parish, and the parish staff who supported and cared for Fr. Des, allowing him to live his retirement years in peace within a loving, faith-filled community. I add a huge word of thanks to Cathy Ventura, a close personal friend of Fr. Des, who accepted responsibility for his personal care during much of the past year. Through her assistance, he was able to remain at the rectory until a broken hip early in September brought him to the Windsor Regional Hospital and, eventually, Richmond Terrace long-term care facility in Amherstburg (though he was there only a little more than a week).



*Fr. Redemptorists singing the Redemptorist Rosary (from left side of casket) Fr. Ralph McQuaid, Fr. Carl Schmidt, Fr. Mick Fleming, Fr. Peter Chin, Fr. Francis Nguyen, Fr. Ray Douzdech, Fr. Mark Miller, Fr. Santo Arrigo, Fr. Joe Ruta, Fr. Bill Fitzgerald, Fr. Tom O'Rourke, Fr. Tomy Joseph, Fr. David Furlonger and Bro. Ray Pierce)*

During the funerals in Amherstburg and then at St. Patrick’s in Toronto, I was simply awe-struck by the number of people who took the time to tell me how much Fr. Des had meant to them in their lives. From spiritual guidance, to healing for married couples, to support for families in sorrow, to encouragement and support for young people—he was a priest of the people and for the people. He is, and will be, greatly missed.

Fr. Brian Jane told me one story about Fr. Des that, I think, showed his commitment to the Redemptorists. Fr. Brian said that Des had several times told him the story of his choosing the Redemptorists, then adding that he always wanted to preach missions. It was the one appointment that he never received. But if he was

disappointed, it never affected his dedication to every other ministry that he undertook.

Among those who attended the funeral at St. Patrick's were Judge Joe James, Jawad Kassab, Mike Dodds and his sister Colleen, Deacon Guy Alden, Lloyd and Sharon Lipinski, the novices and staff from the Provincial office.



We were grateful that the rain only sprinkled after we finished the prayers of commendation at the burial site for Fr. Des.