

# Death of Fr. Phil Dunlea, Redemptorist.

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The death occurred suddenly on Tuesday last, July 23rd 2019, of Fr. Phil Dunlea, in our Clonard Community. May he rest in peace. His funeral took place in Clonard Church on Friday 26th, with burial afterwards in the Redemptorist plot in Milltown Cemetery.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis!

The following is a brief look at his life.



Fr. Phil Dunlea C.Ss.R., 17 years attached to Clonard Monastery, Belfast.

. **Philip (Phil) Dunlea, C.Ss.R.** was born in Cork city on 5th July 1935 and a few days later was baptised in the recently opened Church of Christ the King, Turners Cross, Cork. He used say that his mother told him he was one of the first to be baptised there, but on one occasion he looked up the baptismal register and found his name was on either page 3 or 4. Actually the church had been opened about three years before his birth.

He was one of a family of four boys, Philip, Brian†2015, Michael and John (Jack) former C.Ss.R. student and one girl, Louise.

As a young boy the family moved to Rathkeale, Co. Limerick and Phil lived there until he went to the Juvenate (now St. Clement's College) in Limerick in 1948.

In August 1953 he headed to Esker in Co. Galway and joined our novitiate and, a little more than a year later, on 24th September 1954 he pronounced his vows as a Redemptorist. He then travelled the short journey from Esker to our House of Studies, Cluain Mhuire, in Galway city to continue his training. On Sunday 21 January 1962 Phil, together with 16 companions, was ordained a priest in Cluain Mhuire.

In the autumn of 1962 Phil and four of his recently ordained companions, Frs. Noel Gartlan, Louis Eustace, Hugh O'Donoghue and Brendan O'Connor were appointed to our mission in the Philippines. Their departure was delayed, possibly due to difficulties in obtaining visas, and because of this delay they were among the first Irish Redemptorists to travel by air to the Philippines.

Shortly after arrival they had their 'Pastoral Year', a period to complete their training, during which they received initiation into the practical application of what they had learned in class.

At the end of the pastoral year they were assigned to different houses in the Vice-Province, but Phil remained in Cebu where he was appointed to teach in the new House of Studies (1961) in Cebu for the Filipino students, along with a number of their Irish counterparts: Tom Devitt, Jim Stanley, Gerry Pierse, Pat Reynolds and John Goode. He often jokingly spoke of his teaching canon law to the students and he who, just a short time beforehand, had been a student himself.

Previously, from the mid 1950s, the Filipino students had gone to Bangalore, India for their studies, but immigration problems had eventually made this impracticable. However, a few years after the opening the House of Studies in Cebu, there was a change of mind due to the smallness of numbers. So, from 1965, for the next five or six years the Filipino students were sent to Ireland for their studies. As a result of this move Phil, in 1965, was assigned to teach in the Juvenate (minor seminary) in Iloilo.

He returned to Ireland in 1969, in the company of Frs. Pat O'Sullivan and Noel Gartlan, to 'recharge his batteries'. On his return to the Philippines in 1970 he spent varying periods in the parish in Dumaguete and also in Scala Retreat House on the outskirts of Cebu City.

About 1978 he was back again in Ireland on furlough, returning to the Philippines via the U.S.A. where he did a month's supply for a priest in New York and arrived in Dumaguete in February 1979. Before this Fr. Luis Hechanova, the Vice-Provincial had written him a few letters asking about his feelings of returning to the Philippines and asking what work he would prefer. Towards the end of 1978 Fr. Luis wrote telling him that he had appointed him to Dumaguete, "your first choice."

In July 1980 there is mention of "compassionate leave" for Phil. At the end of January 1981 he returned to Ireland, as both his father and mother were ill. In the summer of 1981 Phil actually renewed his re-entry permit, but apparently following the death of his father he decided on remaining in Ireland.

His ministry in Ireland really began in 1981 with his assignment as bursar of the Limerick Retreat House. This was followed in 1984 with his appointment as school chaplain in St. Clement's Redemptorist College in Limerick.

His next move came in 1986 with his appointment as curate in Brookfield Parish, West Tallaght, Dublin. Seven years later, at the nominations in 1993, he became curate in our Parish of St. Gerard, Belfast. After nine years in St. Gerard's his next and final appointment was to Clonard Monastery in the autumn of 2002.

Here, until his death, he was very much part of the Clonard church ministry team and also of the chaplaincy team at the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH). As the chaplaincy team wrote in tribute following his death: "Phil was a much loved and respected part of our chaplaincy team in RVH for almost 17 years. He was a lovely, gentle, caring and supportive man of God." Over the past couple of years he has been an assistant priest in the nearby Parish of St. Paul.

In Clonard Phil became interested in Christian Meditation, especially the method promoted by the Benedictine, Fr. John Main. Not only was he a promoter of the Meditation but was personally very committed to it. Every Thursday evening a group of Christians gather in our community oratory for an hour's meditation where Phil was a leader and encourager.

Other interests of his were listening to classical music, reading the latest in theological developments and bird watching.

*Note:*

*Over a period of twenty weeks earlier this year a "School of Prayer" was held in Clonard when a series of speakers presented different systems of prayer. One Tuesday in April Phil, together with Mary McKinney, presented the John Main system of Christian Meditation. The various presentations were video recorded and put on the web, including that led by Phil and Mary McKinney and if you are interested you could cut and paste this link:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vt5yUaFM5cM>

*The recording begins with a 'shaky' camera and during the hour Phil has an input of about twenty minutes early on and towards the end of the recording. A big part of the programme seems to be given over to the participants.*

From The Irish News:

TRIBUTES have been paid to a west Belfast Redemptorist who died suddenly just minutes before he was due to say Mass at Clonard.

Fr Phil Dunlea was making coffee for the Redemptorist community at about 6.45am on Tuesday when he collapsed in a small dining room in the monastery.

The 84-year-old, who was originally from Rathkeale in Co Limerick and grew up in Cork, had been based at Clonard for the past 17 years.

He was ordained in 1962 and, before joining the Clonard community in 2002, he had been based for nine years at St Gerard's on Antrim Road where he was a curate.

Clonard Rector Fr Peter Burns said the Redemptorist community had been left "shaken by the suddenness" of Fr Dunlea's death.

"Our community woke up yesterday morning to the death of one of our confreres unexpectedly," he said.

"He was getting ready to say the 7am Mass. He was making coffee in the small dining room and just collapsed and died on the floor."

"He was a very quiet but a very easy presence in our community and we are very shaken by the suddenness of his death," he added...

Tributes were also paid to Fr Dunlea online, with one woman describing him as “very soothing and sincere” while another said he had been a “gentle and spiritual support”. Another person described him as “such a kind, clever, loving man – an example to the world”.