



Salesians of St. John Bosco



Salesian House,
Surrey Lane,
Battersea,
London SW11 3PB

June 1986

Dear Confrères

About 7 a.m. on the morning of Friday 16th May 1986

FATHER WILLIAM CHRISTOPHER O'NEILL S.D.B.

died peacefully at the Alexian Brothers Nursing Home, Twyford Abbey, London.

Father Christopher was born on the 5th December 1911 in Portlaw, County Waterford and he was baptised in St. Patrick's church, Portlaw on the 9th December. He attended the local National school until 1927 and, on leaving school, he started an apprenticeship course in Electrical Engineering. Having successfully completed the three year course, he decided to have a talk with the local priest, Father Power, about his future plans, and he told him that, although he enjoyed doing electrical work, his heart was not really in it and his whole desire was to become a priest. Father Power later wrote to the Salesians and recommended Christopher as a very promising aspirant for the religious life and priesthood.

He was accepted as an aspirant at the Salesian College, Pallaskenry, Limerick in September 1930 and, after spending two successful years there, he entered the novitiate at Oxford and made his first profession of vows in 1933. He stayed at Oxford for another year in order to study Philosophy. He was then asked to go to Italy to specialise in Philosophical studies for a further two years. Due to the effects of indifferent health he stayed at Bagnolo in Italy for two more years after making his perpetual profession there in 1936. After returning to England he continued his theological studies at Blaisdon, Gloucestershire and he was eventually ordained there in 1944.

After ordination he remained at Blaisdon and became the headmaster of the school there for the next seven years. He then moved to the Salesian College, Battersea, London, where he taught mainly Classics until 1966. He organised the local Boys' club and various camps and educational visits at home and abroad. During these years he also spent much time visiting parents of the London boys who were training for the priesthood at Shrigley. It was to Shrigley that he moved in 1967 and he remained on the teaching staff of the Salesian College there until 1975 when he suffered a slight stroke. He made a fairly quick recovery but it was thought wise to give him a lighter workload and he was asked to join the small community which was just about to be established at Ushaw College, Durham. He quickly adjusted to the new situation and his cheerful and helpful approach to both the Salesian and the Diocesan students made quite an impact on the general life of the College. Unfortunately he had another and more serious stroke whilst he was in London during the Christmas holidays. He was in hospital for about six months and he lost the use of his left arm and legs.

For the next ten years he remained with the Salesian community at Battersea. He was confined to a wheelchair but he still remained cheerful and full of interest in life. He was able to write and, having a great gift of friendship, he enjoyed keeping in contact with his many friends. He was a very spiritual man with a great love for the Salesian congregation and the many confrères he had known over the years.

His last illness started in January with a bout of pneumonia and his condition gradually deteriorated. During the last three weeks of his life he was cared for in the Alexian Brothers Nursing Home, Twyford Abbey. The remains of Father Christopher were received into the Community chapel on the evening of May 22nd, when Holy Mass was celebrated and the Office of the Dead was recited. On Friday 23rd May, the body was transferred to the Sacred Heart church where concelebrated Requiem Mass was offered by Father Provincial in the presence of Bishop Tripp and many Salesian confrères, and Father's two sisters, relatives and friends. The interment took place at the Salesian plot at Morden cemetery.

May God, our Father, through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians and St. John Bosco quickly grant him the reward of those who die in the Lord.

Please pray for Father Christopher and for the confrères in this community.

Yours sincerely in Don Bosco,
Bernard Higgins, S.D.B.

Data for the Necrology: Fr. Christopher O'Neill born in Portlaw, Ireland on the 5th December 1911 died in London on the 16th May 1986 at the age of 74 years after 52 years of Religious profession and in the 41st year of Priesthood.

R.I.P.