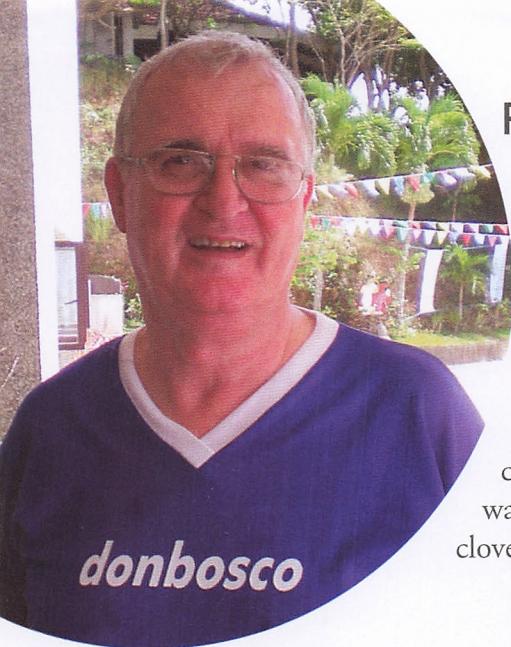


FR. CHRISTOPHER KENNEDY, SDB
6 September 1946 – 13 March 2014



FR. CHRISTOPHER KENNEDY:

Calm as a Clover, Sweet as a Shamrock

Shamrock, the young sprigs of clover, is a symbol of Ireland. The smell of the shamrock is sweet. The clover creates a feeling of calm. Such was Fr. Chris, the Irishman: calm as a clover, sweet as a shamrock.

HIS SALESIAN JOURNEY

Fr. Christopher Coleman Kennedy was born with twin brother Sean to John Kennedy and Helen O'Neil on 6 September 1946 in Coolderry. It's a roadside village in the town of Birr south of the county of Offaly located in the province of Leinster. His birthplace is situated close to the geographical center of Ireland, the Slieve Bloom Mountains, considered the oldest mountains in Europe.

Fr. Chris entered the Salesian Missionary College of Ballinakill as an aspirant on 12 September 1960. On 4 August 1965, he entered the Salesian Novitiate in Drumree and was clothed as a cleric on 31 October in the same year in Ballinakill.

He made his first religious profession on 15 August 1966 in Warrenstown College, which was then an agricultural and horticultural school run by the Salesians, in Drumree. He studied philosophy in Beckford from 1966 to 1967.

In November 1967, Fr. Chris arrived as a missionary in the Philippines. He renewed his religious profession on 15 August 1969 in Don Bosco Seminary in Canlubang, Laguna. In the same

place, he made his perpetual profession on 6 June 1972. By this time, he had already made the Salesian Province in the Philippines his new home.

In these times portrayed by historians as a “pivot of change” in the world, upheavals happened in politics and economics, as well as with family values and social norms, including the code and conduct of the Church.

In this context, the reasons for the resoluteness of Fr. Chris to be faithful to his religious vocation were clear: “I now know what my vocation to be a Salesian and religious in the world of today really means—a constant union with God and a readiness to be loyal to the Church, the Congregation, and this Province, in face of all the dissent of some professed religious.”

In October 1972, Fr. Chris returned to his native Ireland. He stayed in the salesian house in Maynooth for his theological studies. He was ordained a deacon on 2 April 1976 in Milltown, Dublin and a priest two months later on 26 June 1976 at St. Ita’s Church in his birthplace of Colderry. He then pursued his licentiate in theology.

Throughout his formation years, his formators observed that Fr. Chris displayed a sound and profound piety which, coupled with his generosity in service to the community and to young people, made his contribution to the salesian life considerable. He was diligent in his studies and responsible in his other duties.

After his theological studies, Fr. Chris returned to the Philippines and worked as Spiritual Moderator of the aspirants in Don Bosco Academy, Bacolor, Pampanga until 1985, and then as Spiritual Moderator of college students in Don Bosco Technical College, Mandaluyong City, Metro-Manila from 1985 to 1986.

During the February 1986 bloodless and faith filled People Power Revolution against the Marcos regime, Fr. Chris, along with confreres and lay mission partners from Mandaluyong City, stood

guard for days to pacify military tanks and troops along nearby Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, commonly known as EDSA, the main thoroughfare of Metro-Manila.



From 1986 to 1991 he was assigned as Spiritual Moderator of the students of theology in the Seminaryo ng Don Bosco in Parañaque City, Metro-Manila. From 1991 to 1993, he worked in what was then the Salesiana Publishing House as Vice-Rector.

He served as Rector of Mary, Help of Christians House of Spirituality in Batulao from 1993 to 1999, then returned as rector of the same house from 2005 to 2011. In between those terms, Fr. Chris returned to the Seminaryo ng Don Bosco as formator of the students of theology and went to Guelph City in southwest Ontario, Canada for ongoing studies on spiritual direction.

For a year, from 2011 to 2012, he was assigned as Vice-Rector of the Post-Novitiate House in Canlubang, Laguna. He was then transferred in 2012 as Rector of St. John Bosco Parish, Makati City, Metro-Manila.

There is an Irish benediction that goes: "May your thoughts be as glad as the shamrocks. May your heart be as light as a song. May each day bring you bright, happy hours that stay with you all the yearlong." This is the blessing that Fr. Chris Kennedy left with his life, love and laughter to his adopted country, the Philippines.

CALM AS A CLOVER

Fr. Chris Kennedy was a companion one could easily spend time to chill out. He was always relaxed even in stressful times, with

that sense of humor and spiritual depth that can make light of heavy situations. As rector or member of any salesian community, Fr. Chris made each one a friend and a family. He gave those living and working with him a generous allowance for their gifts to shine and a kindly tolerance for their shortcomings as well.

He was genuinely interested with people and their personal stories, without being nosey. While being at times irreverent with some news about certain authority figures in the salesian and church circles, or celebrities from politics, sports or entertainment—the kind that he would call a ‘crack’, or is it spelled ‘craic’?—he always charmed those listening to him and was never disrespectful to the subjects of his small talks.

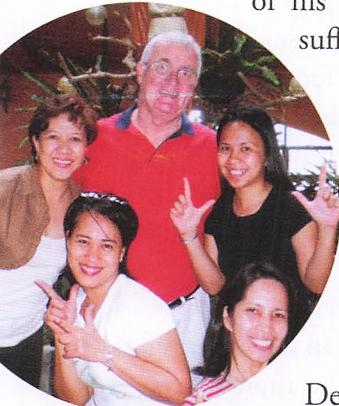
He had the gift of gab, one may say. He was polite in his swearing, and never a ‘holy Joe’ while pointing out what he thought was wrong about peoples and situations. With Fr. Chris, people knew they were in good company, because he was a man of balance as he was of calmness and composure.

Fr. Chris had a down-to-earth spirituality, as can be seen in the books he read and the lessons he shared, with the awareness that God penetrated all circumstances of life, the good as well as the bad things, and in the flow of happenings, the ordinary as well as the extraordinary events.

Listening to him sharing with such enthusiasm a godly insight from a movie or a magazine, one could sense that Fr. Chris was intoxicated with God even in things that seemed to be profane. Lay mission partners to whom Fr. Chris entrusted the translation of his homilies from English to Pilipino would treasure



the soothing impact of such homilies to their own daily grind. Fr. Chris loved to be surprised, be it a birthday party or a moment of insight, because he delighted in the God of surprises. God did surprise him when unexpectedly he was diagnosed with a cancer that was rapidly spreading. Fr. Chris suffered terrible pains because of his illness. But his wit and warmth shone even in suffering because of his union with the cross of Christ.



This benediction fits and bids him well:

Deep peace of the Running Wave to you.

Deep peace of the Flowing Air to you.

Deep peace of the Quiet Earth to you.

Deep peace of the Shining Stars to you.

Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you.

SWEET AS A SHAMROCK

Thoughtfulness to friends and staff was a virtue of Fr. Chris. He would give a call or pay a visit to friends on their birthdays or bring back for them some “pasalubong” or souvenir items after his vacation in Ireland, be it a rosary bracelet or a green wallet etched with a clover design or a picture of him in red t-shirt with a cowboy hat.

During break times, he would waste time talking with the lay staff in their places of work, not with introspective or inquisitive banters but with stories of fun and good times. He knew how to downplay their rainy days and cheer them up in his roundabout ways.

Among young Salesians in their initial formation years, Fr. Chris was always up to say “I’m game.” It meant he was happily up for the challenge, especially during unstructured moments of camaraderie, be it a crazy parlor game or a spontaneous item in a program. With them he would share his love for soccer and the theater, as well as

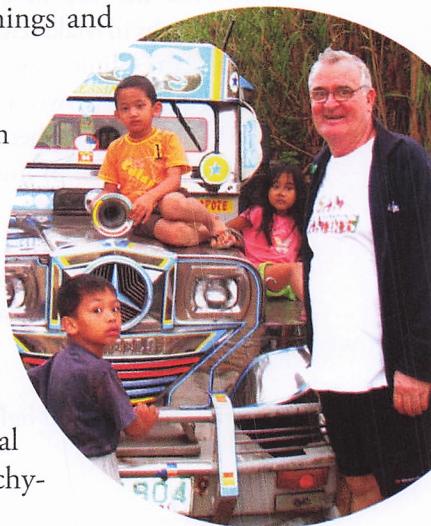
for Church liturgy and English literature.

On St. Patrick's Day, he would gleefully prepare Irish coffee for confreres and visitors, and wear the customary Irish green and grin the whole day. He would talk about Ireland on this feast day and speak some Gaelic language and customs. Listening to him lovingly reminisce about his homeland, some felt they became Irish by osmosis while most felt he did sacrifice a lot of his being Irish to embrace his being Filipino, for life. A true Salesian missionary without question!

The Filipino trait of "pakikisama", that is, getting along well or having smooth interpersonal relationship with others, was one that appeared to be a natural disposition of Fr. Chris. He was a likeable person. He was the kind of person with whom one had the joy of return, "binabalikan", as in the case of students to whom he preached retreats or professionals to whom he gave spiritual direction. They would visit him for an idle talk or a needed confession, or phone him for an invitation to homecomings and weddings.

Fr. Chris was a tactile person. His affection or compassion seemed to be designed more to be perceived by touch rather than by verbal or visual signals. Touch, be it a slight kiss on the cheek or a gentlemanly hug, was his unselfconscious expression of affection. At times he could be misunderstood. But for those who knew him, his warm gentility and relational sensitivity were transparent. His being touchy-feely was his way of being nice to friends.

Fr. Chris was a considerate pastor who grounded his teachings as best he could in the particular language and lifestyle of his hearers, giving different strokes for different folks, rich or poor, young or adult, a newbie or a vet in the faith.



But he had a bigger heart for the less fortunate and more marginalized people of more far-flung places. He was generous to the young people from the barrios around the retreat house who received scholarships for schooling from his Salesian community. His joy was to see them finish school, get a good job and have a better lease in life.

THE JOURNEY'S END

At the harvest season for sugarcane, the field is set on fire so that the useless leaves are burned and what remains are the stout sweet stalks ready for the harvest and the mill.

So it was with Fr. Chris. He underwent the fire of suffering for many months in Makati Medical Center and in Zatti Clinic, until it was time for the reaping of his sweetness during summer of 2014. Fr. Christopher Coleman Kennedy died on 13 March 2014 of multi-organ failure from metastatic cancer of the esophagus.

And so, as an Irish benediction goes, Fr. Chris we pray: "May every good seed you have planted bear fruit, and summer time find you standing in fields of plenty."

May the smile of God light you to glory, Fr. Chris!



SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO
Philippines—North Province

June 2014