

Memories of Father Joe Christensen

It is with a heavy heart that I write about the untimely and sudden passing of Father Joe Christensen as he attended the 2012 CWL National Convention in Edmonton.

Father Joe Christensen was Pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Halifax and was the reason I joined CWL. When a Pastor asks you to join, you don't say, 'No'. That was the beginning of my CWL journey.

Father Joe was the eldest of a family of ten children brought up on a farm in Montrose, Cumberland County. He was always a country boy who loved his dog, going fishing, growing orchids and nature. He was an excellent cook as well. He was a big man in stature with a heart to match.

When he became pastor of my parish, my first memory of him was how he opened the rectory to parishioners, and he made you welcome. He said this house belongs to the parish and it is your home too. It was like being home because he would usually be sitting at the kitchen table and immediately you would be greeted with a warm smile and offered refreshment and a time to sit and talk.

I can recall numerous occasions when we differed on certain issues and the conversation ended without a winner. If you met him a half hour later, it was as if the earlier disagreement never happened. I was always amazed at how forgiving and understanding he was. This was truly a gift that he exemplified. He also had a great sense of humour. He could make you laugh when you felt like crying.

Father Joe was a priest's priest. He truly loved God and this showed in his service to Him. He was also a fundraiser for Christ as well. When he had windows designed for St. Joseph's Church, he raised money to pay for the windows and was able to exceed the cost and the money was given to the needy in the area. He was always mindful of the less fortunate.

Father lived the teachings of the church. He loved children and worked vigorously for the unborn. He was on a mission to bring attention to the church's stance on abortion and for the protection of life. Election time was a time he took a stand on the issue and was not afraid to challenge candidates on where they stood on these matters. His slogan was 'All Unborn Babies are Special People, Let Them Live' and he was responsible for the 'pink and blue' project. This slogan was prominently displayed in homes and on billboards. He spoke passionately about the need to end abortion and the protection of life at all stages.

The children always looked forward to Christmas Mass as well as the adults. Sometimes Santa would appear with treats for all the little ones, followed with an explanation of why we celebrate this special day. Other times a real baby would be brought up and placed in the manger on the altar. It was made so special that even as the children got older they were filled with expectation of what this year's Christmas theme would be.

When I learned of Father Joe's appointment as Spiritual Advisor for the newly formed CWL Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth, it was with great joy and expectation as I knew this was an opportunity for other CWL members to experience this wonderful man. He was an ardent supporter of the CWL. He faithfully

attended meetings where there was lots of lively discussion with strong opinions on both sides but we left a bit more tolerant and caring because of his kind and gentle way of reaching a solution. He never criticized and was so accepting of people's views and would win you over with his kind nature and sensitivity. Regretfully, God had other plans for him.

There were so many great virtues Father Joe possessed but the most important was his genuine love for God and for us as he carried out his mission on earth as an exemplary priest.

I will always cherish the many wonderful memories I had of Father Joe and be thankful for the time he spent with us. Our world has been a better place because of this great man with the huge heart.

Mary MacDonald
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