

Funeral Mass John Dallat 7th May 2020
Father John Cargan PP

John Dallat, like myself, was old enough to remember advertisements in shop windows and in local newspapers where the last line read ‘No Catholic need apply’.

I never fully understood the grammatical construction of that statement but the message was clear and, generally, we were accepting of it.

But John was fortunate enough to have benefited from the radical reform that provided free secondary education for all young people.

He himself became a schoolteacher and might well have settled for a comfortable and secure career in the teaching profession – but John had a passion for the rights and entitlements of the young, the old, and the middle-aged, a passion for fairness and equality and, while he retained an interest in education, it was this passion which propelled him into local politics, winning a seat on Coleraine Borough Council in 1977. It was on the Council that he honed his political skills.

John was determined but never aggressive, persuasive but never offensive. He won the respect of fellow councillors and became the first nationalist mayor of the Council in 2001.

Having established his credibility as a politician John was elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1998, where he again enjoyed the respect of colleagues, being appointed Deputy Speaker. In that role he was courteous, fair minded and managed the business of the House with an endearing sense of humour. John was respectful of those who held opposing views but on violence there could be no concession.

He was a pro-life activist from defence of the unborn to support of those who had suffered violence. His abhorrence of violence was not always reciprocated and for years he lived with real threats to his life.

John was a man of the light but he encountered those who preferred darkness to light because their deeds were evil. These threats put his family life under immense strain and it is to his credit that he never allowed this pressure to diminish the quality of life enjoyed by the family.

He had real concern for Anne and for each of his children. It was that fatherly instinct and care for the individual that caused his horror at the murder in 1988 of the young backpacker Inga Maria Hauser and the plight of the homeless Oksana Sukhanova in 2005.

Of course, I didn’t know John at that time. I had never met him before coming to the parish six years ago. I knew him as a campaigner for two interests we shared – the Derry to Belfast railway and the Magilligan/Greencastle ferry. Having been brought up in Castlerock the railway station was my playground and the Friday evening train was my escape from the weekly incarceration of St Columb’s College.

When Her Majesty the Queen, travelled by train to Bellarena in 2016 to open the station and the passing loop I sensed that her visit secured a future for the line.

For the past six years John has been a welcome visitor to the Parochial House,, sometimes arriving in the yellow Volkswagon beetle, sometimes in the restored Austin Morris and occasionally in what I referred to as ‘a real car’. He has encouraged me and advised me and in exchange for a cup of tea I enjoyed his wise counsel.

Since the diagnosis of cancer he kept me fully informed of his illness and of his treatment. There were days of great hope and days of deep despair. The news that his condition was terminal caused me real sorrow.

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Terminal death is a death that ends all life – it is a death without hope. Paschal death which we, as Christians, celebrate in this Easter season is a real death and something precious dies. But in Paschal death there is the hope of new life, there is new birth. The Paschal Mystery teaches us that we can trust God and embrace death with faith in his love.

It is in that faith that we entrust John to the Lord.

Anne, I offer you my sympathy and that of our parish community. Bishop Donal McKeown and other clergy of the diocese offer their condolences.

Ronan, Helena and Diarmuid I thank you for your willingness to accept the restrictions placed upon our celebration of your father's funeral.

Eamon, Colm and Michael, my sympathy on the loss of your brother

And finally my deepest sympathy to the grandchildren, because while your granda will not be here to play with you and to allow you the freedom to be a little bit bold he will be watching over you and guarding you with the help of all the angels in heaven.



Eternal rest grant to him, O Lord.