

Summer 2011

## Remembering Fr Ted Colleton CSSP

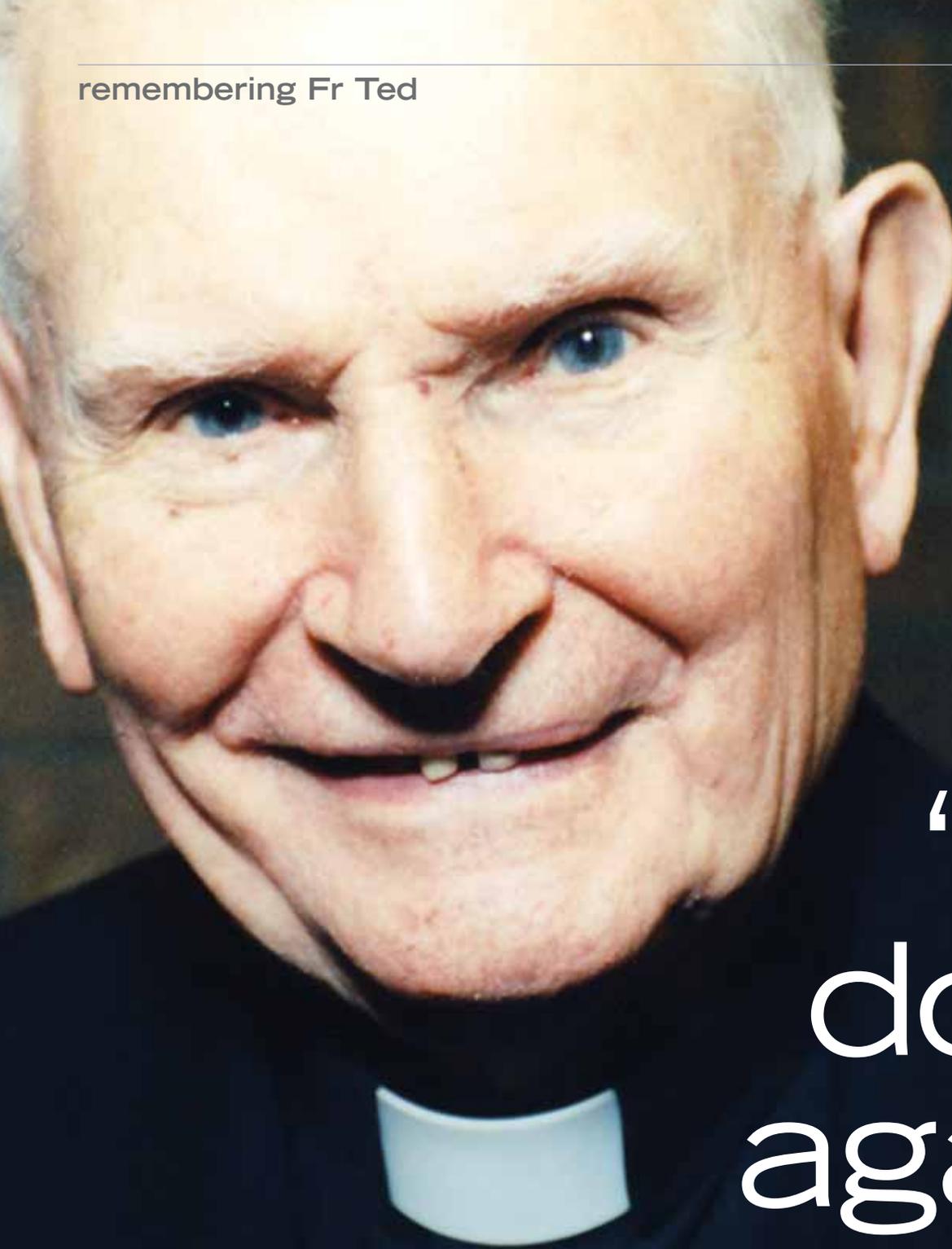
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“I’d  
do it  
again”

**A**s she passed his open casket a young girl gently placed her memorial card on his forehead — in blessing, in thanksgiving, in love ... her instinctive goodbye. Adults paused in remembrance and prayer. The Knights of Columbus honour guard stood at attention.

The pro-life movement had lost one of its giants. The Spiritans had lost one of their best-known members. Ireland, Kenya and Canada had lost a man who gave his heart to all three countries.

On April 26, 2011 Father Ted Colleton died, three months short of his 98th birthday. When we remember him we recall his deep faith, his infectious joy, his unflinching commitment to the Gospel. We remember a pro-life missionary.

#### **Missionary in Kenya**

Ordained in 1940, he was sent to Kenya as a Spiritan missionary. He worked there for thirty years until President Jomo Kenyatta declared him “an undesirable alien” and deported

him for defending the role Christian missionaries played in developing the East African country.

His parting words threw down a challenge: “After 30 years in Kenya I am leaving. I am taking with me my pajamas, a shaving set and a Bible. I hope everyone who comes to your country puts in as much and takes out as little. Good night.”

## New vocation in Canada

Kenya’s loss was Canada’s gain ... Did Canadian Immigration know who it was letting into the country?

Here he found a new vocation: a three-decade dedication as a pro-life missionary. He was on the board of Birthright, belonged to the Toronto Right to Life speakers bureau, was a founding board member of Priests for Life Canada and of Business for Life, a columnist with the Interim for more than 25 years, and, along with Jim Hughes, the public face of Campaign Life Coalition. He gave speeches and interviews, provided spiritual guidance for countless pro-lifers and at pro-life events. He encouraged pro-life activity and chided those who stood by and did nothing. He estimated he met more than 100,000 Canadians on his pro-life journeys, talking to groups large and small, preaching the Gospel and teaching about the unborn.

## Many words — written and spoken

He raised more than \$1-million through his three best-selling books: *Yes, I’m a Radical, I’m Still a Radical* and his autobiography, *Yes, I’d Do It Again*.

He was a man of many words. Spoken words — sermons, retreats, talks, stories, jokes, convictions. Written words — columns in the Interim, three books, countless letters. But not just words — a man whose words became flesh. He lived what he proclaimed, even to the point of getting arrested.

“Having preached and talked and written about the evil of abortion, I felt I had to take direct action.” So he put a padlock on the rear gate through which the women and girls entered the Morgentaler clinic in Toronto. This led to the first of at least a dozen arrests, four trials, and six weeks in the Mimico Correctional Centre. Correctional Centre? — Ted was incorrigible. His writings about life in prison were graphic, unsettling, stomach-turning. He was no longer “Father.” He was “Colleton”: “Colleton. Visit!” — “They used exactly the same tone they would use in ordering a dog to lie down,” he later wrote.

## Prayer and Priesthood

When he retired from pro-life activism in his mid-90s, his public appearances became rare, but he was driven around to several Life Chain events. There he lit up with excitement and so did those he came to motivate and encourage. He lamented he couldn’t do much for the pro-life cause, but was reminded that he always taught others that the most important thing they could do as a movement was to pray. That he could still do.

## Shine on, Fr Ted

For thirty long years, the so-called  
“Heart of Darkness” — Kenya precisely —  
Joyfully welcomed your light  
As a treasured gift enlightening hearts.  
Yet, in the Jerusalem of Canada,  
While you held aloft your anti-abortion torch  
They forced you to pay a price.

Thanks, Fr Colleton.  
Yet 'tis no farewell we bid you —  
For lo! a new star twinkles in the firmament:  
Twinkle on, Spiritans' spirit!  
As the spirits of aborted ones cavort about you.  
Twinkle on, as you hear our heartbeats unite  
To take up the rhythm of your swansong.

— L.D. Anthony (*abridged*)

Then there was his cherished priesthood. “I cannot think of any aspect of my life which I would substantially change — and certainly not my Priesthood. I have daily stood at the altar of God and offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, raised my hand in absolution over more repentant sinners than I could ever count, poured the waters of Baptism over the heads of babies without number, preached the Gospel in Ireland, England, Africa, the United States and Canada and anointed the foreheads of those who were within minutes of meeting God face to face ... And although I was only the instrument of the church, it is consoling to realize in the evening of life that I was chosen to be such an instrument. In this period of church history, when the glory of the priesthood has been somewhat overshadowed by the clouds of scandal and doubt, I want to affirm this fact: if I had another life to live — I’D DO IT AGAIN.”

The young girl’s memorial card had Father Ted’s photo on the front. The reverse side read:

May the Lord support us all the day long,  
till the shades lengthen  
and the evening comes  
and the busy world is hushed  
and the fever of life is over  
and our work is done.  
Then in his mercy  
may he give us a safe lodging  
and a holy rest  
and peace at the last.

— *Blessed John Henry Newman*

# MEMMO

## Jim Hughes, Chair, Campaign Life

I've known him for forty years so it's hard to condense him into 10-12 minutes. His own words at the beginning of a talk come to mind: "Set your watches. I'll be here for about an hour."

Yes, he did feel useless in the last few years of his life: "All I can do now is pray." But I reminded him of what he had told me from Day 1 — the most important thing we can do as a movement is to pray. He looked at me. "Giving me a homily now, are you?"

Fr Ted was a giant of a man, a giant of a pro-lifer, one of the great heroes of the Canadian pro-life movement. He was a wonderful example, giving everything he had for the unborn and vulnerable.

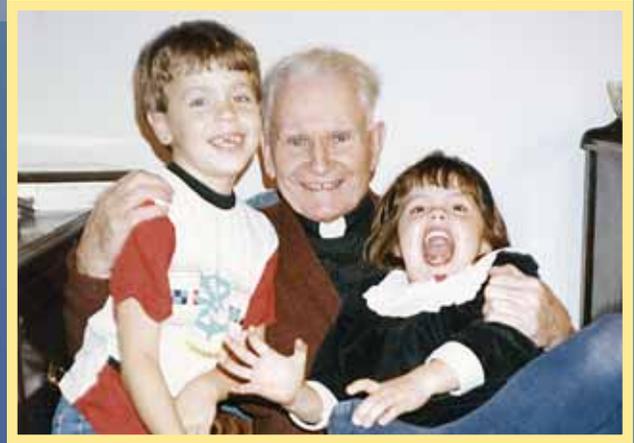
Whenever he was in town, he was in our house. We lived at opposite ends of Hambly Avenue in Toronto. When I came home from work I would find him sitting on the floor doing card tricks or coin tricks with my children. I recall a breakfast at our house — we were finishing ours when he dropped by. "What's that in the frying pan?" "Some bacon fat." "Just put in a few slices of bread and heat them up. They'll taste well." Then a cup of tea — with four spoons of sugar — followed by a piece of apple pie. And he lived to be 98!

Many other people fondly recall Fr Ted for his jokes and card tricks. But what they did not always realize was that his humour and stories were theatrical opening acts. After the light-hearted introduction, he had audiences eating out of his hands.

I remember walking into the Bo Peep restaurant and seeing a leader of one of the pro-abortion movements sitting at a table. I pointed her out to Ted. Over he went, hands out in greeting, his face lit up. "Hello! How are you?" I'm not sure he really knew who she was.

Then there was the black trench coat. He came to our front door on a cold evening. Taking off his coat he remarked, "See this coat? I couldn't find my own winter coat so I went up to the VICS store this morning and got this one. You know, it fits perfectly and even has a little rose on the lapel." My wife Jenny piped up, "That coat's been here for the last two years. I got so tired of seeing it that I brought it up to the VICS Store last week for resale."

Finally there was the day we were showing some priests around the Campaign Life offices. I opened a door and there was Ted fast asleep at his desk. I quickly closed the door. But not quickly enough. One of them saw him. "That's Ted Colleton! What's he doing?" I had to admit, "He's sleeping ... Let's close the door so he can rest in peace."



The image of God in swaddling clothes has gripped the attention of the world in every age and in every clime and will continue to do so as long as the world needs love. And if ever the day comes when the world does not need love — there won't be any more world!

— Ted Colleton, *Yes, I'm a Radical*

## Paul Tuns, Editor, *The Interim*

Fr Ted had the authority of a person who walks the walk. He lived what he proclaimed and paid a penalty for taking a principled stand.

When he was arrested for his pro-life activities, some critics called him a radical. He embraced the description, using it in the title of his first book *Yes, I'm a Radical*, which went on to sell 20,000 copies. Another book, *Yes, I'd Do It Again*, went through four printings. A third book was *I'm Still a Radical*. Over twenty years his books raised more than \$1 million for the pro-life cause.

On her deathbed, Fr Ted's mother had whispered, "Edward, be a good priest." His 70 years of priestly service can be seen as an act of obedience both to Christ and to his mother's last wish.

# DORIES

## Trish Wojnar, niece

Our uncle and friend, Edward, was an exceptional human being. A man steeped in humanity, of profound faith, and with a wonderful sense of humour.

Wherever he went he made life-long friends: kids now adults, adults now grannies and granddads — many, many of them long since died. The people he met expressed a deep affection, but above all, a great respect for him. He treated all equally, from the shoe-less bush pupil he taught in the '40s to the government ministers he so often and even more recently opposed.

Edward did not cause controversy, but he certainly met it head-on. He left Africa in the middle of the night with only his breviary, his razor, and pyjama pants in a plastic Barman backpack. He brought love and education, respect for human dignity, along with the faith to Africa — and he left with nothing. He also left some of his heart and a lot of his health behind him. His utter conviction and his unbending faith brought him into conflict with the authorities who took the easy way out and deported him.

In the early '70s he moved to Canada at an age when many of us are retiring. Not Edward. He embraced a whole new career. He became involved in Campaign Life Coalition, working for the protection of the rights of the pre-born child. He embraced his new life with the same conviction and passion that he had brought to Africa as a twenty-five year old missionary priest. He gave it his all. His humanity and his conviction of the right to life shone through all his words and actions. He raised funds through charity shops and ostrich farming, he spoke in schools, lectured at seminars and actively campaigned on TV and radio for the cause. He did not see that in any way he should compromise his principles: this was partly what made him such an admirable person, but once more brought him into conflict with authority.

Canadians were drawn to this extraordinary man who could recite Shakespeare, laugh at himself and his own jokes, do card tricks and turn every action into an act of faith. You welcomed him into your homes, fed him cake and ice cream and did not make him eat his greens! He found his new home among you.

He lived ninety-eight years and he acquired no possessions, except his rosary and his breviary. Edward was a "pray-er". He always said, "I'll pray for you." And he did. Whenever he landed home, one of his first questions was, "Where can I say Mass" Each day his holy office was a ritual he never missed. He was a deeply religious man, his faith he always wore lightly, but with deep conviction. I think he will be remembered as a man and a priest who made a difference in this world.

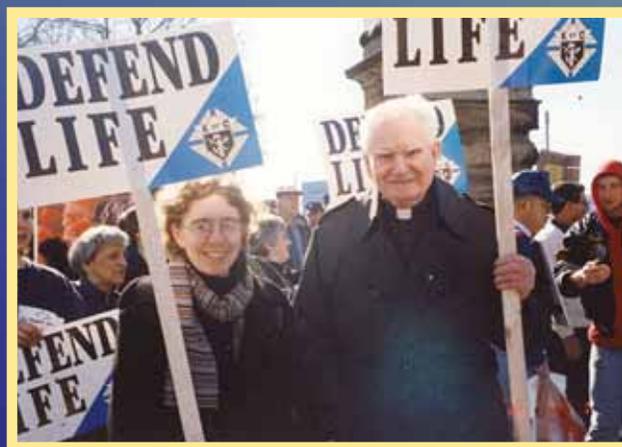
## Joe Scheidler, National Director, Pro-Life Action League USA

Fr Ted was a holy man with a huge heart that matched his height.

## Spiritual Fr Paul McAuley

He did a great deal of visiting the sick in hospitals just before they died. I've heard many anecdotal stories about people who'd been away from the Church or the faith for a number of years.

He was a great people person with a great sense of humour. He was actually able to bring a great number of people back to the Church or reconcile them to God before they died.



I have been blessed, or some would say cursed, with a conscience which will not allow me to keep a prudent silence when principles are at stake.

— Ted Colleton, *Yes, I'd Do It Again*