Fr. Michael Troy at 90

Lasha Morningstar

Follow this and additional works at: https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-tc

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Spiritan Collection at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritan Magazine by an authorized editor of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.
Father Michael Troy’s accomplishments run to pages — opening schools, founding editor of Spiritan Missionary News, consummate athlete/coach, excelling in track and field and rugby, seminary director, doctorate in philosophy.

Casting an eye back over his 90 years of living, the still-active priest honours some of the many folk who played key roles in his life.

Michael Joseph Troy was born in Dublin’s Rotunda Hospital, October 1, 1917 — the first of six children. His father, Bob, worked on people’s farms while his mother, Tess, minded the children and home in Artane. As a child, his father had won scholarships when he reached Grade 6, but his mother said, “What was good enough for his father is good enough for him and he will be milking cows in the morning.”

“But my father believed in education,” remembers Troy. He put young Michael in the local two-room school when the lad was a mere four and a half. After trekking the two and a half miles to school the first day, Michel stopped at Granny’s house the second day, crying and telling her he didn’t want to go. His father kicked up a fuss, but Granny stood firm, “He’ll be long enough at school.”

“And so I played hooky for a year,” says Troy.

**Grandpa and Granny**

Granny believed in home schooling — learning how to garden and farm. Her griddlecakes won prizes. This teaching of the practicalities of life at Granny’s knee is repeated today in Troy’s opinion of education. “I believe education is not just about school. You have to learn the skills to be able to earn a living. I’ve always believed in practical education. That’s one of the troubles in our education — we train everyone to be executives and nobody to do the work.”

One day when he was 10, Michael was on his way to his aunt’s who was taking him to the pantomime when he stopped by his grandparents. He was shocked to find them both sick in bed. Granny asked him to let the chickens out and he fed the hens with grain scooped up in the helmet Uncle Willy wore in the First World War. Granny shooed him on to the pantomime.

“But when I got back that evening, my daddy was there absolutely shattered. I did not know that men could cry.”
Granny died the next day and when they returned from her funeral, Grandpa was dead. The cause? Pneumonia — a killer before antibiotics. His aunt chastised young Michael, “Why didn’t you shed a tear?” His faith already solid, the young lad replied, “Why would I? They’ve gone to heaven where everything is good.”

**Grade School**

By the time he reached Grade 4 their teacher, Mr. McCabe, demanded the best from the boys. “He used the strap on fellows like me,” says Troy with a still rueful chuckle. “We were smart boys, but careless, not paying attention.”

McCabe harnessed their energy and formed a choir. “And he put us in for examinations — all sorts of examinations.” Says Troy: “He was the right teacher at the right time.” That’s how young Michael at age 12 finished Grade 6 and won a scholarship for secondary education.

The local priest, Fr. James Carroll, sat down and fired off letters to three secondary schools. One queried back, “Does he have any feeling for vocation at all?” “Not a one,” replied Carroll.

But Rockwell College in Tipperary sent a syllabus. Carroll helped Michael pack his things in the same trunk Carroll took to the United States when he was collecting money to build schools and churches back home. “He even put my name on it,” says Troy. “He was a key man in my life.”

**Boarding school was hard**

“Imagine a small boy like that being shipped into this big school with all these rich kids.”

But harking back to the discipline instilled by McCabe, Michael took to all sorts of sports — mountain climbing, track and field, long distance running.

“Did you win?”

“Of course I did,” says Troy with a howl of laughter. “But I lost some too. You never come out of a game that you didn’t do your best.”

Boarding school rules were rigid in those days, says Troy. Students spent two hours before dinner studying, followed by another hour and a half before bed.

Any twinges of vocation?

“Well I would say my prayers and I had all that time on my own,” remembers Troy. “Then the Holy Ghost guys came.”

**Favourite rugby position?**

“Wing forward.

I could move around all the time.”

Photo courtesy of Edmonton Journal
Former NHL star Brad Park will always be grateful to a Spiritan priest from Edmonton for guiding and inspiring him at a crucial stage in his life. Park was 16 when he first met Father Troy as principal at Neil McNeil.

“Even though I was not Catholic, he went out of his way to make me feel comfortable,” said Park.

“Not only did he discipline me when needed, but he showed me a softer, firmer way of dealing with people and my problems.”

Thanks to Father Troy, Park said he became a better person and gained a broader understanding of the world around him. “He also kicked my butt when I tried to play soccer with him and the other Holy Ghost Fathers,” Park quipped.

Bishop Joseph Shanahan visited Rockwell and talked to the students about missions and the work the Holy Ghost Fathers were doing in Africa. “So I decided I would give it a go,” says Troy. “But then I had to go home and tell my mother and father.”

It was the Easter break of his second or third year and after coming through the door at 1 a.m. following a three-mile walk from the bus, Michael told his father, “I’m thinking of joining the Holy Ghost Fathers.”

Bob gave a weary retort, “I have to get up and milk cows in the morning and you don’t know what the hell you are doing.”

Tess worried, “If you want to become a priest, then join the diocese and we will always have you around.”

But by the week’s end both signed the permission papers, telling Michael, “We hope you know what you’re doing.”

**Higher studies and teaching**

All his discipline and study won Michael another scholarship — this one to university. After a novitiate year in Tipperary, he enrolled in University College Dublin where he specialized in philosophy and classical languages. BA and MA in hand, he spent two years teaching in St. Mary’s College, Rathmines, where he played rugby in the national league. Favourite position? “Wing forward. I could move around all the time.”

To teach philosophy Michael needed his doctorate. So he sat down and wrote his thesis entitled The Concept of God. His fingers drum the table as he tells of typing out his missive.

The examining professors from Oxford rebuffed his work, saying, “You can’t be knocking down all these German professors and Aristotle and other authorities.”

His memory slips back to that moment and Troy mutters, “If I had written down everything my professors said, I would have gotten it in the first round. But you could stuff that up your jersey as far as I am concerned.”

After one year of theology at Kimmage Manor and World War II still sputtering, Michael was sent to Fribourg, Switzerland, to study for his bachelor of theology.

Skiing, mountain climbing, learning French so he could deliver his homilies, witnessing the practicalities of the country’s technical schools — Michael took it all in. He was ordained a Spiritan missionary priest in Switzerland on July 20, 1947.

Time to put all that study and experience into practice and Troy joined the staff at Kimmage Manor teaching philosophy and theology and as Director of the House of Philosophy from 1948 to 1956.

But remember that refused doctoral thesis? Seven years wiser, “I was able to put it down much better and we used the printer and original Greek characters.”

**Toronto 1958-1965**

The telegram saying he had received his doctorate tracked him down to his new posting to Canada where he had been assigned in 1958 to establish Neil McNeil High School in Toronto. It was at a time when the diocese had to fund the building and a lot of sacrifices were made by a lot of people. “The parents did a lot of work.”

Troy’s father Bob journeyed out to visit his son and as he walked through the building he pointed out what still needed doing and bits of falling plaster.

The sports factor came into play and Troy helped the school acquire a hockey franchise. Twenty-four of those Neil McNeil boys made the NHL.

What does sports teach students?

“It gives them the spirit of competition,” says the former athlete and coach. “They learn respect for other people, to admit you make mistakes.”

**Edmonton 1965-2008**

By 1965 Troy moved west to help Archbishop MacDonald High School in Edmonton. After six years, he went to St. Joseph. He is still there as chaplain.

“It’s a changing world,” say Troy. “I found that after Vatican II, people didn’t want priests giving orders on anything, especially being teachers. So a lot of priests and nuns — they quit. They were used to being the big authority, the big shot guy. But I could take orders just as well as anyone else. I’ve been taking them all my life.”

As well as his work at St Joseph and serving as resident priest at Holy Spirit parish, “I do lots of Masses, I pull my weight.”

This man’s tapestry of contribution to this city includes a multitude of threads from bouncing soccer balls into almost every venue possible, authoring books including Riches to Rags: Claude Francis Poullart Des Places (the Spiritan founder) and From Tiny Acorn to Mighty Oak: the Spiritans 1703-2006, chaplain to a variety of organizations and a mighty activist where children, aboriginal people and missions are involved.

An immensely charming chap whose Irish blue eyes never leave yours, Troy is asked about mistakes people make. The answer flies out of his soul.

“Some people think religion is contrary to reason and belief in God is stupidity. If you use your brains, you can’t get away with saying this whole bloody thing happened by chance. There may have been evolution, but who the hell started it? It is not a question of what it is, but that it is.”

Reprinted with permission from Western Catholic Reporter.