

Bro Sebastian “Charles” McCarthy

Eulogy by [Bro Benedict Foy](#)

2nd August 2007.

Bro Sebastian was born, Charles McCarthy, 84 years ago, on 7th Dec 1922, the son of Norah Cottar and Andy McCarthy (Farmer) in Tullig – 3 miles from Coachford -17 miles from Cork.

He was the oldest of 8 children, followed by Fr Jerry (a Sacred Heart priest in Texas); Andy in Africa; Monica (who has predeceased him); Eileen; Olan (Eugene) in San Diego; Josie, (a nursing sister – Sr Illtyd – in South Africa) and Stephen. To all of them, and to Sebastian’s wider family and friends, we and especially Bro Sean - Bro Visitor, Sebastian’s Lasallian family, offer our sincere condolences on this occasion of Sebastian’s death and funeral.

Charles attended the De La Salle School in Macroom during which time he lived with his aunt. From there in 1938 he joined the De La Salle Brothers Juniorate in Castletown. A year later he moved to the Novitiate and was given the name Bro Sebastian Fidelis. Seb was always very pleased by his own baptismal name “Charles” and indeed was known to many people by this. So it is something of a mystery that he did not revert back to that when it became a possibility after Vatican II.

His first assignment was as cook in Faithlegg Scholasticate – for seven years – but he argued long and strongly – “created a bit of a fuss” in his own words – that he should be allowed to teach – which he was eventually assigned to do – teaching for 11 years in the Prep School in Cardiff (during this period he regularly turned out for the Old Illtydian’s Second XV – about which stories could be told!). Seb then went to Goldsmith’s College in London to study education.

Following graduation Seb spent 15 years teaching in various approved schools, in Bishopbriggs, in Hartlebury, in Wakefield – (where I personally first encountered his cheerfulness and encouragement.) During all that period he responded to a number of difficult circumstances taking on the roles of Deputy Head and Acting Head. Dai Burns speaks of the devoted, loyal, hardworking and conscientious efforts which Seb (his older Deputy

Head) made – and of important initiatives which Seb undertook – for example, to bring female student teachers from Worcester College of Education into Hartlebury – to “soften” the mostly male environment of the Approved Schools of those days. He was invited to participate in the special Home Office advanced course at Newcastle University in Childcare. During this time he lived with Bro Kevin McCarthy – who though no relation – was and remained a lifelong friend.

Eventually, Seb became Director and Headmaster in his own right at Nantwich, where he oversaw the handing over of the school to the local authority.

Seb moved to Highgate where for 11 years he conscientiously taught Sociology and Religion and acted as Head of Year. He was a much appreciated member of the community whose company was enjoyed both in the house and on breaks in Rhiw.

On retirement Seb undertook to work for Bp Guazzelli as Appeals Convenor for appeals for admissions and exclusions from all the Schools in the Eastern area of the Archdiocese of Westminster. This was a new work, requiring skills of networking and of tact, a role which he created from scratch and carried out with great fidelity, problem-free, with the assistance of a good body of clerks which he recruited, including Gerald Fogarty. His work in this area was highly regarded during his eight year tenure. For a short time too he served as Governor at St Joseph’s College, Beulah Hill.

When his health deteriorated too far he moved in 1995 to Half Moon Lane where I vividly remember him caring for Bro Lawrence Rice – who was going through a particularly difficult period at that time. Brothers John Southworth and Martin Morris speak of their enjoyment of Seb’s company during this time when he followed his own routines of Mass, walk and snack during the day and where he was always ready to greet and entertain visitors. His propensity for talking, often launching off with something like “John – you will be interested in this” and then carrying on regardless, would



mean that Brothers could slip off to bed, one by one, leaving Seb still happily talking.

Following further deterioration in his health Seb moved 5 years ago to Clayton Court where he was very happy. When we think that Seb suffered his first heart attack at Nantwich – so seriously that his specialist, Mr McSweeney, a manager of the school in Nantwich, wouldn't allow any visitors - the fact that he lived a further 32 years says much for how he took care of himself – and was taken care of by the staff here in Clayton Court. Although he declined physically and in his ability to communicate in recent years he was always very grateful for the care which he received and for the attention which his family and friends gave him in their frequent visits to see him. His end came quickly. After having been at supper on Wednesday evening, he collapsed in his room, and died suddenly at about 11.30pm.

Although Seb often appeared self assured, several Brothers who lived with him have said that that was often a cover for a sense of inferiority – something which he determinedly – and with success – fought against throughout his life – in Faithlegg – to argue for a change from being a cook to a teacher; in his determination – in Cardiff – to become a well qualified teacher choosing to go to Goldsmiths's College (during which time he lived at Blackheath) for that purpose “the best decision I ever made” he said later; and above all in his determination and hard work over many years in Highgate – with the encouragement of Davies Jones and with the assistance of Bro Edwin Bannon to complete his significant study - *“The Work of the De La Salle Schools for the Education of Delinquent Boys in the English Province, 1855 – 1975”* which he submitted successfully for M.Ed. Manchester University in September 1982.

Seb has been described as a typical Corkman – charming and engaging, enjoying life and work, but canny, maybe slightly eccentric and even, on occasion, a little Machiavellian. His capacity for talking clearly indicated that he had kissed the Blarney Stone – several times probably! It was known for him to miss turnings off the motorway because he was talking to someone else in the car! And – dare I say it? – he has also been described in recent days as having something of the Englishman in him – always elegant and spruce, “though never in blacks!- as one former Bro Visitor observed! (but as Bro Cuthbert Nolan also commented “It's a poor District that can't afford at least one gentleman!”). There was also

that certain jut of his chin; his pronunciation of his name “Charles” and the fact that he always appreciated a certain grandeur and style in life which give support for the thesis of Seb's English tendencies. But he was in indeed a natural gentleman – in the true sense of the words – natural and gentleman – even when he was arguing with Kerrymen – (never with rancour or harshness and always with a twinkle – or was it a gleam – in his eye) something which gave many a community a real enjoyment of his presence on more than one occasion.

Seb always had a special warm spot for his family. He was always very interested in their welfare and loved to see them when on holiday in Ireland. He would get anxious and even a little tearful if he heard if any were having a difficult time. This was typical of his great sensitivity to and enjoyment of people – as was recognised whilst a student at Newcastle University in 1968-9 where he became the much appreciated and popular spokesman for the students; by his election as the chairman of the Staff Association in St Aloysius College in Highgate; and also as President of the Metropolitan Catholic Teachers Association. He was known for putting little notes of encouragement in the pigeon holes of staff having a hard time.

As Chairman of the Appeals Panels for Bp Guazelli's area's schools he was able to make the process as humane as possible both for Head teachers and for families involved – without loss of thoroughness and efficiency. His natural charm meant, as I have been told, that many women were particularly fond of Sebastian. He always welcomed former brothers and their families and was a welcomed guest at many of their homes.

So we say farewell to Seb, a cherished Brother to both his families, his natural and his religious ones – we remember him before God with gratitude for the warmth, friendship, gifts and blessings we have received through his life. He really was used by God in these ways to do what today's Gospel reminds us of – “reveal the Good News” to children – and to all of us. St John Baptist De La Salle in his Meditations said to the Brothers that “the greatest miracle that you can perform is to touch hearts.” Sebastian did this throughout his life as a Brother – as we all here can testify. So it is in grateful and confident faith therefore that we commit him to the loving and eternal mercy of our God.

Eternal rest grant unto him O Lord, and let perpetual life shine upon him, may he rest in peace. Amen