

# Father Carney came to serve, not to be served

Father Chris Carney died earlier this month. While Father Carney had been a Christian Brother prior to ordination, Chris and I were in the same ordination class of 1971. Time has taken its toll on our class. In addition to Father Carney, Fathers Don McMaster, Joe Kaiser, Blair Raum and John Delclos have all gone to God. Life is indeed humbling on this planet. Here we truly have 'no lasting city.' But we also are comforted by knowing that we do have an eternal lasting city in another place beyond time and space.

It's fair today that Father Chris was the best of what we would call the 'old-fashioned' priest. He, like Jesus, came to serve, not to be served. When Father Ray Brown - the great Scripture scholar - died, a fellow priest and scholar described him as: "Being without any ego. He put his life at the service of the Word!" The same could be said of Father Chris. He was without ego. He put his life at the service of the Lord.

Sister Susan Engel, the pastoral associate and mediator of all graces at Annunciation Parish, captured the heart of Father Carney. In her eulogy she said, "After Father Chris' heart attack, July 5, 2005, the doctors ordered scans and chest X-rays in preparation for possible heart bypass surgery. The doctor who came to see Father Chris with the results had a strange look on his face. He told Father Chris that the tests showed his heart was in the wrong place! It was too much in the center. But we know Father Chris' heart was always in the right place. His heart was large enough to hold countless friendships."

Father Chris served in various parishes: St. Thomas More, Our Lady of Victory, Annunciation, St. Michael's in Overlea, and St. Ignatius in Hickory. When he first went as pastor to St. Michael's Parish, he told me that he overheard a parishioner comment, "Oh, our new pastor is old!" He laughed as he told the story. He took the ministry seriously, but not himself. No doubt the person who made that comment would soon learn that Father Chris was also kind, generous and wise.

A great story of Father Carney's generosity was cited by Sister Sue about the time when Chris was audited by the IRS because he claimed to have given away more than he earned. The government found that hard to believe. "Father Chris could have reminded the government they have done the same."

I think of St. Paul when I think of Father Chris. St. Paul referred to the 'super apostles' who carried letters of recommendation. Paul said that he had no such letters. The only letter he had was the one written on people's hearts. His credentials were not the words of someone else. His only credential was his own ministry. He carried the people he loved in his heart, and the people who loved him carried him in their hearts. How true of Father Chris.

As Sister Sue would say, "And so when the doctors operated, they found in Father Chris a heart that pumped out forgiveness, healing and peace. A heart that looked to what was right in others, and not to what was wrong. A heart that always gave the benefit of the doubt. A generous heart!"