

# FR. ROBERT COLCLOUGH

## FORMER PRIEST OF SANDYFORD

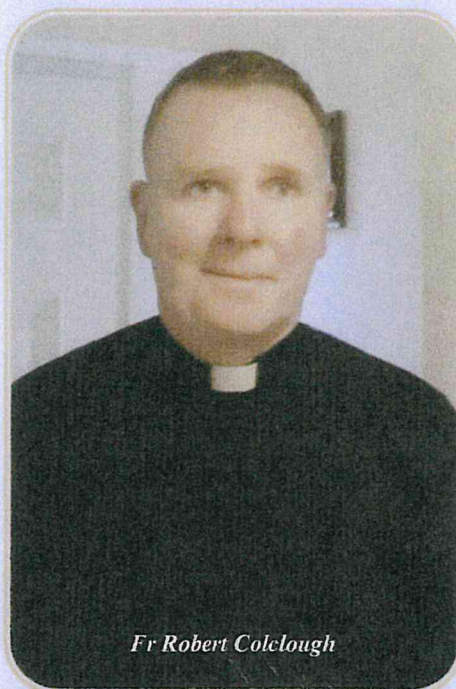
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### CELEBRATING FIFTEEN YEARS OF PRIESTHOOD

I find when you have taken the very long road to the place where you find yourself right now, it becomes very difficult to put pen to that story. So what I can offer is a skeletal of the past and the present, hoping something may resonate with you the reader. As I sit to write this I am celebrating fifteen years of priesthood this week.

I was born and bred in Dundrum, Dublin and educated by the Holy Ghost Fathers. I am the second eldest of four (two brothers and one sister). No longer fit, but sometimes found on the road back fighting gravity. I worked as an engineer in the Structural and Software disciplines for a combined sixteen years, mostly abroad. I am less crazy now than I was in my 20s, 30s and 40s (only because I'm not able any more). I've been lost and found, foolish and sensible, loved and in love, and often to blame. I was a person who often struggled with my faith, but always believed, a great gift given to me by my parents in my younger years. I have been blessed with family for their love and support over the years. I have enjoyed life, sometimes too much, occasionally being responsible and mature. Always searching and never fully content. I was not aware of the power of God's Love until I finally stopped and listened, entering the seminary in 2001.

Since ordination I have ministered in three parishes in the Dublin diocese. Sandyford, Holy Redeemer in Bray and currently in the inner city at the North Wall. Each parish being unique in its own way, but all share the same challenge of witnessing to Jesus in a way that is relevant and that engages the people while never compromising on the richness of the truth of the Gospel. In each of the parishes, I've been heartened and blessed by the faith and commitment of some of the people. The generosity of the volunteers, in giving to their parish freely and witnessing to God's love through the sacramental life of their church, has been my privilege to be part of. Their tireless



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efforts and love have been a huge support to my priesthood.

As with the joys of ministry, each parish has presented some very difficult challenges through bereavement, addiction, violence and, apathy and hostility to the faith. It is more often the case that in these moments I have encountered Jesus more intensely. It is here that the Lord's words to Paul penetrate deeply 'My grace is enough for you: my power is at its best in weakness.'

As a priest, I can't stress enough how encouraging and helpful it is to know that people are praying for me in my ministry. I have probably been guilty of taking for granted the work and commitment of Saint Joseph's Young Priests Society, but I'm very grateful and moved by the support and care shown. Thank you! This support is needed more than ever right now as the pressures in ministry increase. As our society continues to question the relevance of God and remove Him from the public sphere, I really

believe that being rooted to the person of Jesus Christ is essential to ministering effectively today in priesthood. This call to holiness in priesthood has for me, found its meaning and expression in placing the Eucharist in the first place in my life. The parish must be built around the Eucharist.

St Augustine wrote, "John was a voice for a time. Christ the eternal Word in the beginning. Take away the word and what is a voice? When it conveys no meaning it is just an empty sound. A wordless voice strikes the ear, but it does not make the heart grow." I continue to be grateful and privileged that God has chosen me to be a voice for his Word in this time. The challenge is enormous, but I believe that my priesthood will only be authentic if it is lived through the Cross of Christ and with Christ. Parish life teaches you, that you do not have all the answers to the various issues that present themselves. Simply being present is a nice place to start.

The most beautiful aspect of my ministry over the years has been the confessional, where I have witnessed immense healing. Pope Francis has said that, "Awareness of the need for salvation is the best way of encountering Jesus." Being part of someone's journey, helping them to encounter Jesus is both humbling and overwhelming. No-one is beyond the reach of God and it's truly wonderful to see the moment when someone realises that about themselves.

No doubt, I will continue to get lost on this journey serving the Lord, but hopefully my heart will continue to burn as I listen to the Word with those I encounter in this wonderful priestly life. God's love for us is greater than any trial or setback we will ever encounter in life. That's always worth telling someone.

*Fr Robert Colclough*

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