

He touched the lives of so many people'; Mourners pack Notre Dame Cathedral for funeral of Father Robert Bedard

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They packed Notre Dame Cathedral Wednesday to say goodbye to Father Bob.

And the priest known for his wit and self-deprecating humour might have appreciated the comments from passersby who were obviously startled by the sight of dozens of churchmen and Knights of Columbus members resplendent in full regalia.

"Hey, what they doin', electing the next Pope?" shouted one driver waiting for a green light.

"They filming a movie?" asked another.

No Pope, no movie. Just a final sendoff - a priest's funeral for Father Robert Bedard, who died last Thursday aged 82.

The assembled church and lay leaders were waiting for the arrival of Father Bob's casket, while inside 1,200 or more crammed into the lower and upper pews.

Father Bob arrived precisely on time and with the Knights bowing slightly and lowering their chapeaux, pallbearers carried him to the church.

"He was one of the funniest guys I have ever known and so passionate about his faith," said pallbearer Terry Lauzon, who was a student of Bedard's at St. Pius X High School in 1975.

Father Bob began teaching at St. Pius in 1958 when it was a preparatory seminary. He was principal for a time and taught until 1984 when he became pastor of St. Mary's Parish. Everyone at school and church loved him, added Lauzon, who was 14 when he first met Bedard and in later

years regularly had the priest at his home for dinner.

Risa Upton, at the funeral service with her two daughters, had a typical reason for being there.

"I had known Father Bob for years," she said. "He baptized me, married us and baptized our children. He touched the lives of so many people. I came to honour him and the memory of him."

Another woman, who asked not to be named, said simply: "I met him 30 years ago and he made a deep impression on me."

In his homily, Father Scott Mc-Caig honoured Bedard for founding **Companions of the Cross**, an association for priests with a mission to spread the Word and to attract young men to the priesthood.

Companions of the Cross now has active branches across North America.

Father Bob, a gifted and persuasive speaker, also became a leading member of the Charismatic Renewal Movement and is credited with bringing hundreds of young people into the Catholic Church and creating a vibrant parish at St. Mary's when earlier a closure had appeared more likely.

As the cry of a baby echoed around the cathedral, McCaig remembered Bedard as a priest who was always available with a listening ear and a compassionate heart and who began all his morning prayers with a whispered, "Not ready Lord, but willing."

Father Bob had suffered numerous maladies during his later years but, said McCaig, was never heard to complain.

Lauzon agreed.

"He was a solid guy right to the end."

Illustration: • Chris Mikula, The Ottawa Citizen / Funeral at Notre Dame Cathedral Basilica for well known and respected priest, Father Robert Bedard.

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