

St. Mary of the Annunciation Mourns Fr. Ron Lewinski

By John Gannon

Fr. Ron Lewinski, our beloved former pastor and a dear friend of many in the parish community, passed away unexpectedly on July 19th. In his nearly eighteen years as pastor of St. Mary, Fr. Ron, in essence, re-founded the parish, leading the construction of our beautiful church, founding Frassati Catholic Academy, and presiding over the growth of the parish from a rural community of fewer than 600 families to the thriving suburban parish of over 1600 families that St. Mary is today. His passing has left an enormous void in the lives of his many friends and relatives and in the life of the wider church in the Archdiocese of Chicago.

The breadth of Fr. Ron's influence and the depth of the love and admiration that so many have for him was reflected in his magnificent funeral liturgy, celebrated at St. Mary on July 26th and attended by over a thousand people. Cardinal Blasé Cupich presided at the emotional and triumphal liturgy that was concelebrated by eight bishops and 127 priests. In his homily, Fr. Andrew Liaugminas, one of the many young priests and seminarians whom Fr. Ron mentored, spoke of his friend's love for the sacrament of baptism, his world-renowned expertise on the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, and his reverence for the liturgy and especially for the Eucharist as the source and summit of Christian life.

At a prayer service, held the night before the funeral, Fr. Ron's close friends Deacon Howard Fischer and Fr. Robert Fedek, as well as his nephew Paul Ciesielski, recalled Fr. Ron as a loyal friend, a man of humility and a quick and dry sense of humor, a persistent and patient mentor and a devoted uncle known affectionately to his many nieces, nephews and great-nieces and nephews as simply UR. Hundreds of people attended the visitation in the hours leading up to the prayer service, exchanging condolences and telling stories about Fr. Ron.

Fr. Ron Lewinski was indeed many things. For 45 years he was a good and devoted priest and a visionary of towering intellect whose influence on the church in the Archdiocese of Chicago and beyond is immeasurable. More than that though, he was a beloved brother, uncle and cousin and a loyal and true friend who made a profound and lasting impact on countless lives. And for almost eighteen years, he was our good shepherd whose legacy lives on in the beautiful church he built, the prayerful and reverent liturgy he fostered, and the vibrant and welcoming community of faith he nurtured here in Fremont Center. Fr. Ron's love for this parish community is evident in the fact that it was his wish to be buried here in our parish cemetery.

In the coming months and years, the parish and Frassati Catholic Academy will find other ways to honor Fr. Ron, and the entire community of St. Mary can carry on his legacy by continually striving to be missionary disciples, by continuing to celebrate the Eucharist with prayerful reverence, and by encouraging vocations to the priesthood and religious life from among the youth of the community. May perpetual light shine upon Fr. Ronald J. Lewinski and may his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in Peace.