



# A Conversation with Fr. Charlie Dunn, SJ

by Grace Cotter Regan

When you mention the name of Fr. Charlie Dunn, SJ, the reaction is a genuine smile and an added comment, “What a wonderful Jesuit priest!” Fr. Dunn exudes joy, and his pastoral approach to every situation makes you feel like all is good in the world.

Charlie Dunn was called to the Jesuits while he was a student at BC High. He was inspired by the Jesuits and his call to priesthood made sense. Fr. Dunn identified two questions to answer in his heart before committing to his vocation: “Are you willing to teach?” and “Are you willing to serve on the missions?” An unequivocal yes was his call to a vocation with the Jesuits, and he entered the Society of Jesus in 1942. He still believes that “being a Jesuit is not a career, it is a way of life and that

priesthood is at the heart of a Jesuit’s life.”

His formation was traditional: novitiate and juniorate at Shadowbrook and philosophy and theology studies at Weston College. His teaching began at Baghdad College in Iraq for three years. After his ordination in 1955, he was assigned to Cheverus High School, Portland, Maine, as dean of discipline before a transfer to College of the Holy Cross as dean of men.

At Holy Cross, he was the man in the cassock. It is no surprise that his commanding voice combined with the power of the cassock made a point in his role as dean of men. Fr. Michael McFarland, SJ, president of College of the Holy Cross, describes those days: “To the 1960s generation, Fr. Dunn represented discipline and order; you



Fr. Dunn at College of the Holy Cross during the 1960's.

*Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God.*

*~ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ*

did not want to get a note summoning you to his office in Kimball Hall. And those young men who feared him during their days as students? They come back to Holy Cross eager to speak to him, to share their stories, and to spend time in his company. Today he serves in the Office of Gift Planning, always willing to lend a sympathetic ear to alumni and their families, and to his colleagues in the office. Fr. Dunn has an open door and a ready phone line, and people seek his guidance and counsel regularly, confident that they will be met with kindness, wisdom, and gentle compassion.”

A fierce athlete and competitor, Fr. Dunn was inducted unanimously by his teammates into the BC High Hall of Fame in 1991 for his esteemed football and baseball career. Chairman of the Hall of Fame Committee, Jim Cotter, remarked, “It is not often that an athlete comes unanimously recommended by his team almost 50 years after graduation. Fr. Dunn was a standout athlete, a quiet leader, and a gentleman . . . and his classmates recommended him for those qualities.”

Paul Sheff, former vice president for advancement at Holy Cross, spoke about Fr. Dunn’s profound influence: “Every time we had a change of leadership in the office, Fr. Dunn would routinely offer to resign, and I would routinely decline his offer because, no matter what direction we might take, Fr. Dunn was integral to the program’s success. He perfectly represents what the office needs, the presence of a wise and warm Jesuit who, in the spirit of Ignatius himself, is focused on the care of souls.”

I have had the privilege of knowing Fr. Dunn for many years as a Jesuit priest, colleague, mentor and friend. Fr. Dunn has served as a priest, teacher, missionary, administrator, dean, rector, chaplain, advisor, uncle, brother, and son, and the greatest gift he has provided in all of those roles is captured by Fr. McFarland’s description of Fr. Dunn’s unusual gifts of kindness, wisdom and gentle compassion.



Fr. Dunn celebrates his 65 years in the Society of Jesus at the 2007 Jubilee with brother Jesuits: top, l-r: Joseph Bennett, Charles Dunn, Joseph Duffy, John Mandile, William McInnes. Vincent Burns is seated in the front.



Family and friends celebrate with Fr. Dunn at his Jubilee.