

With no doubt Fr. Ron Lewinski was one of the finest priests in the Archdiocese of Chicago. The list of his accomplishments is truly impressive. His contribution to the life of the church, and the lives of those who had a chance to get to know him, cannot be measured. He had so much to offer to each one of us.

As I reflect on my relationship with Father Ron - three words come to my mind: a father, a friend and a mentor.

Fr. Ron was a holy and humble man who truly enjoyed sharing his life with others. His loving and generous heart enabled him to make a lot of friends. I was very lucky to be one of them. I had the privilege to meet Fr. Ron in the spring of 2005 when St. Mary Annunciation Parish was selected for my diaconate pastoral experience. From the very moment I arrived at the doors of St. Mary's he welcomed me warmly and invite me to be part of his life. A few months later, right after my ordination, he traveled with me to Poland to join me and my family in celebrating my First Mass in my home parish. That journey was the beginning of what would become a wonderful working relationship and a valued friendship. During the following 12 years Fr. Ron accompanied me in every major step of my life. I can honestly say that he treated me like his son. He was a father to me.

Although he served as my mentor, we quickly became great friends. I was inspired by his generosity, by his humble and joyful acceptance of everyone into his life. He knew when to support me and when to challenge me. We learned so much from each other. We worked hard together; we shared the load of pastoral responsibilities. He shopped, I ironed. We cooked together, laughed together, and watched the news together at the end of the day. I taught him Polish vocabulary, he taught me English idioms. We walked the paths at Independence Grove, sharing the joys and burdens of serving a diverse and sometimes demanding community in a difficult and confusing world. We traveled together. He really enjoyed our last two trips to Poland during which we visited the birthplaces of his grandparents. He enjoyed meeting my family and I enjoyed meeting his. Many of you are here with us tonight - Ron's sister Diane and his brother-in-law Richard, his cousin Alice, his nephews Mark and Paul with his wife Dona; his nieces Cindy and Linda. We have many wonderful memories to cherish in our hearts from your numerous visits to our country-house here in Freemont Center. I will miss him a great deal, and I know that you will too.

Ron was an excellent mentor and teacher. In his ministry he was well known for his open-mindedness, creativity and thinking outside the box. He was not afraid to ask hard questions. He was a man with great vision of a strong and vibrant church. He always encouraged people to grow, to stretch their minds, to search for new ways, to find more effective ways of ministering to God's people. He was an inspiration to many priests and many seminarians. He was a mentor and a friend to many of us. His death is a big loss to the Archdiocese of Chicago and to all of us. We will miss him dearly. He introduced me to parish life and priesthood. I learned so much from him. We had many great conversations while sitting on our famous bench on the hill by the cemetery. I will miss those conversations. How good God has been to us!

My friends, as I look at all of you tonight, gathered here to remember and pray for one of the greatest men we have ever met in our lives, I am confident that Fr. Ron's life and his hard work will not be forgotten. His spirit will continue to dwell among us, especially here at St.

Mary of the Annunciation - the parish that he loved so much and cared for with great dedication and passion. He had a dream, a desire to build a place, a community which would become the realization of everything he believed in and stood for. And he accomplished that dream. We are the beneficiaries of his generous heart and great mind. We couldn't choose a better place than St. Mary's to celebrate his life.

Farewell, Fr. Ron! Thank you for all you have done for us. You have made your mark on us. You have helped us to become better people and more faithful disciples. And thanks, Ron, for being a good father, a faithful friend, and a wonderful mentor. Please pray for us as you enjoy your retirement in heaven.