

Priest, professor, and spiritual director, Rev. Brian Inglis retires to Toronto

His homilies are still being discussed at the Hinton parish he left four years ago. His name and his favourite motto are ingrained at the St. Gregory Catholic School chapel. And even into his 80s, he was still driving down to the local hospital every day in case anyone wished to see a priest.

Now handing over his car keys and retiring at 86, Rev. Brian Inglis is leaving behind a legacy.

After 44 years as a priest, professor, and spiritual director, Father Brian is one of the longest serving priests from a religious order in the Edmonton Archdiocese. Inglis was ordained a priest with the Congregation of St. Basil in 1961.

“Whenever you mention Rev. Brian to people, you see their faces light up,” said Josée Marr, chancellor with the Archdiocese. “He was present in a lot of places and was always known to be a good presence.”

As he retires to his hometown of Toronto, Inglis says he will miss much about his life in western Canada, but his devout faith reminds him that his journey is far from over yet.

“Our lives are not about waiting around until we die and trying to amuse ourselves in between,” Rev. Inglis said. “Our faith gives an account of human life where we are loved in the beginning, loved in the end, and it’s a journey towards our ultimate fulfillment.”



Rev. Brian Inglis looks forward to a relaxed retirement back home in Toronto. Alan Schietzsch, Grandin Media

“You’re always limited on what material things you can take when you move, but I’ll be taking all the spiritual things. My memories, my many friendships – that will all stay with me.”

As a teen, Inglis attended St. Michael’s College in Toronto – a private all-boys school run by the Basilian Fathers that taught at both a high school and at a college level. The Basilian Fathers left such an impact on Inglis that he enrolled in the Congregation of St. Basil in 1951 to follow in their footsteps.

Inglis’ journey to Alberta began in 1975, when he took a job teaching Christian philosophy at St. Joseph’s College, the Catholic college at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.



Paul Flaman

Paul Flaman, a professor at St. Joseph's College, taught alongside Inglis for 15 years. He says Inglis was known for his wit and modest demeanor – so much so that many called him “a living saint.”

“He was always very prudent and steered clear of any of the internal politics of the college,” said Flaman. “You never heard him say a harsh or inappropriate word.”

As well, Inglis kept a piano in his office at St. Joseph's College, and his colleagues often heard him playing in the late afternoon, developing his skills in classical music.

Father Inglis taught at St. Joseph's for 23 years. When he turned 65 in 1998, Archbishop Joseph MacNeil asked him to take on a new role as the pastor of Our Lady of the Foothills Parish in Hinton, 300 kilometres west of Edmonton.

Inglis says it's a period of his life he particularly cherishes, and his impact is still felt there today.



Roni Iwanciwski

“Going from being a philosophy professor to taking over a parish, at 65 years old...it was a big step for him, but he did it wonderfully,” said Roni Iwanciwski, a parishioner Our Lady of the Foothills, who has known Inglis for over 20 years. “He became very dear to everybody's heart.”

Inglis remained their pastor for 17 years, leaving behind an esteemed reputation. Each day at 3 p.m. he went to the Hinton Healthcare Centre to comfort the sick. Every Lent, he would spend a week speaking on one section of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. By the end of his 17 years, Father Inglis and his congregation had gone through the entire catechism.

By 2015, during his final confirmation class at Our Lady of the Foothills Parish, Father Inglis had personally baptized nearly every child there.

“There are a lot of families here who thought of him as a grandfather figure and they still do,” said Iwanciwski. “He attended every function we had, and always made sure he took the chance to speak with everybody.”

“It set a great example for us. He wanted to help us grow in holiness, to weed out what wasn’t the truth and what was the truth.”



The Rev. Brian Inglis Chapel is shown inside St. Gregory Catholic School. Supplied

St. Gregory Catholic School in Hinton named its chapel in honour of Rev. Inglis, and his often-quoted saying – “To know, love and serve God in this world, in order to be happy with Him in the next life” – is displayed inside. It’s still mentioned by parishioners today four years after Inglis left, Iwanciwski said.

Inglis was also well-liked for his self-deprecating sense of humour, Flaman said. When asked how he was doing, Inglis often replied that he was “still trying to survive.”

When the Archdiocese assigned a single pastor to the parishes in Hinton and Jasper, Inglis decided his time should end. At 83, it was too difficult for him to drive the nearly 85-kilometre distance between the parishes, especially in winter.

However, this was not the end of his time in Alberta. Inglis was asked to join the formation team at St. Joseph Seminary, becoming a spiritual director to several seminarians each year.



Rev. Brian Inglis in 1986.

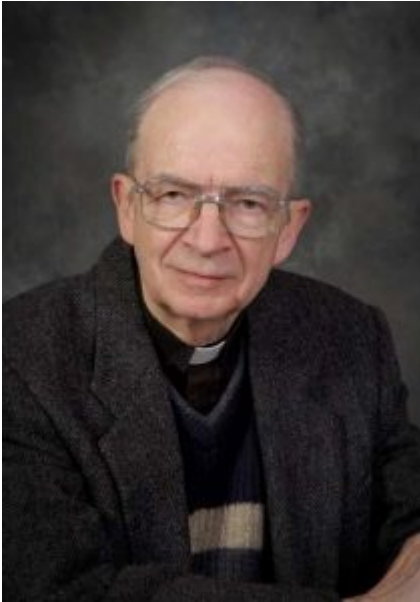
In 2018, Inglis was asked to return for a fifth year with the formation team, but at 86, he saw it as a tough commitment to make. Father Inglis decided it was his time to retire and return to Toronto while still healthy.

“I hate to leave. I love the West, and more than half my life has been out here,” he said. “But I think it’s the right decision. My feeling is, you’re better off to stop driving before you have the accident, don’t wait until after you do.”

“So now is a good time to retire. I still have my health and am able to do my own packing and preparations ... and voluntarily hand over my car keys.”

Inglis will retire to Presentation Manor, a retirement centre for clergy and religious women. Returning to his hometown, Inglis is looking forward to reuniting with many old friends and colleagues. He is also excited to have more time for personal reading and to develop his skills as a pianist.

Of the many changes Inglis has seen over his four decades, he sees a need for homegrown vocations as one of the biggest challenges.



Father Brian in 2005

“That’s been an enormous change within the diocese. There is a shortage of priests that have their local roots here,” he said. “The priests we bring from foreign countries can be wonderfully spiritual men, but if there’s trouble understanding them, that can create many frustrations.”

Inglis celebrated his final Mass on July 8, in the morning Mass at St. Francis de Sales chapel in the Archdiocese pastoral centre. The following day he left for his new residency in Toronto.

Known for his insightful homilies, he did not disappoint.

“In his last homily he spoke on the woman who was healed by touching Jesus’s garment,” said Marr.

“The garment was a visual thing that represented the full invisible reality of Jesus’s healing. It’s something that stayed with us through the day, just to be conscious of our environment and how it can hold the hidden presence of God. For us, Father Brian was like that garment, he was a source of healing.”