

Winning by finishing third

One of my great joys working around the Church has been the professional relationships and friendships I've been able to forge with clergy, religious, and lay men and women wherever I've been privileged to serve.

Many of these people have left a lasting impact on me: whether it was a moment of encouragement or spiritual advice, a shared project or ministry event, or simply a moment to laugh and share the craziness of life ... I can truly say that I'm a man who has been blessed by so many others.

One such person is Catherine Doherty, whom I've adopted as a bit of a "partner" in my ministry – and I'll be the first to admit that it's an odd partnership.

I'm a 30-something Catholic husband and father with a habit of investing myself far too much in the fortunes of the Edmonton Oilers, a deep love for Star Trek *and* Star Wars, and I spend most of my days serving a few thousand students across Evergreen Catholic Schools just west of Edmonton.



Catherine Doherty

She was an 89-year-old Russian expatriate who died when I was five years old, a woman who – having been born of minor Russian nobility – fled to North America at the outset of the First World War.

Here, she eventually founded the apostolate through which most people know her today: Madonna House in Combermere, Ont., about 300 kilometres northeast of Toronto.

Madonna House has 22 related houses scattered across the world. I came to know of Catherine Doherty thanks to members of her community who live here in Edmonton in one of these houses, the Marian Centre.

Catherine also wrote extensively – hundreds of articles and dozens of books – many of which have edified, encouraged, and influenced me personally and professionally. Although we never met – she died in 1985 – her influence is a significant one on my life and ministry.

Catherine Doherty had a way of speaking about prayer, the Church, and the need to serve others in ways that were concrete and easy to understand.

I aspire to do the same. I've adopted a line of hers from her book *Sobornost*, as a challenge for both myself and those whom I serve:

“Everybody in this pragmatic, cerebral society always wants to put himself first, and this cannot be done. God doesn't want me to do it. God wants me to be third, never first. God comes first, my neighbour second, and I am third.”

What does it mean to be third?

It summarizes the Ten Commandments well. The first three deal with God and the last seven with others. When Jesus was asked to describe the “greatest commandment,” he replied in *Mark 12:30-31* that we ought to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

What makes these words so striking to me is just how difficult it can be to put oneself third.

It's something I struggle with every day, but it's something that has become the single daily mission of my life. It's also a summary of every article, lesson, retreat, or mission I will ever give.

Whatever it is that I'm trying to say, it somehow fits in to those three little words: I am third.

When Grandin Media approached me and asked if I was willing to start writing these columns for them, there was really only ever one option for a column name: it had to relate to being third and, as a result to the work and writing of Catherine Doherty.

I'm not sure if she ever watched hockey and I doubt that Doherty would have cared about Star Wars. I do know that her love for Christ was sincere, profound, and contagious.

As we begin this journey together, I hope that whatever you read in this space will demonstrate a love that is also sincere, profound, and contagious. May my attempts and reflections on a “life in third place” inspire your own journey to do the same.

– *Mike Landry is the chaplain for Evergreen Catholic Schools. He is based in*

Spruce Grove, Alberta.