

World-renowned scholar and priest retires to Edmonton

Rev. Ian Boyd is a man of many titles – a pioneering scholar, a world traveller and a compassionate spiritual director.

It's a reputation that's sent the Basilian priest across Europe, the U.S., South Africa, and Japan. But in recent months, Boyd has become a familiar face in Edmonton – where he now plans to retire.

Wherever Boyd travels, the impression he makes on others remains the same.

"I've never experienced such a wealth of knowledge before," said Sandy Jewett, a parishioner at St. Andrew's Church in north Edmonton, where Boyd has celebrated Mass every Sunday for the past year. "He's a gift to our archdiocese. His whole intention is how we need to think deeper about our walk with Christ."

After a life-threatening surgery in 2018, Boyd took a period of rest from travelling and lecturing and moved in with his sister Betty in Edmonton. Since then, Boyd has celebrated Mass weekly at St. Andrew's and St. Joseph's Basilica.



Rev. Ian Boyd

Now at 84, Father plans to remain in Edmonton and leave behind his life as professor, lecturer and editor of *The Chesterton Review*, an academic journal he founded 40 years ago.

Looking back on more than 50 years of priesthood, Boyd says it's a life of great grace.

"The sacramental priesthood is a great treasure," he said. "You become an instrument through which Mass is said, sins are forgiven and Christ is brought to others. In our Catholic tradition we know in any life there's naturally ups and downs and proclivities, but there was never at any moment any regret."

Raised in Blaine Lake, Sask., 85 km north of Saskatoon, Boyd took an interest in the priesthood as a teenager. He was inspired by his brother Leo, an Oblate priest who ministered to Indigenous communities in the Northwest Territories. For his part, Boyd was drawn to the intellectual tradition of the Congregation of St. Basil. He was ordained in 1963.

As a professor of Christian literature, Boyd taught at St. Thomas More College in Saskatoon and Seton Hall University in New Jersey – one of the oldest Catholic universities in the U.S.

That expertise and love of literature is key to his pastoral life. In a recent sermon, Boyd used Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* to demonstrate how God's grace is at work even through our sins.

When parishioner Sandy Jewett was seeking spiritual direction, Boyd recommended the short story *The Happy Hypocrite* by Max Beerbohm to show how we become new persons in Christ.



Rev. Ian Boyd celebrates Mass at St. Andrew's Church in north Edmonton. Kyle Greenham, Grandin Media

It's literature, Boyd believes, that pierces the truths of life more than any argument or abstract philosophy can.

"Because human life has all the characteristics of a story. We are characters in a story told by God," said Boyd. "Like a novel it has an ordered plot, meaning everything in our lives is significant and providential.

"If you have a Hawthorne novel or a Chesterton story to illustrate a point about God's grace, then that Christian literature is a good source for throwing light on the Gospels."

Boyd's philosophy is rooted in G.K. Chesterton – the prolific Catholic writer, philosopher and social critic of the early 20th century. Along with a pioneering book on Chesterton's novels, Boyd founded *The Chesterton Review* that is still published today.

"I can't think of a time in my life I wasn't familiar with Chesterton," Boyd said, who spent his childhood skimming his father's copies of *G.K.'s Weekly* – Chesterton's newspaper.

"What should resonate with Catholics today is the confidence and joy Chesterton exuded in his writing. He always emphasized the Christian virtue of hope. He always saw the crucifixion in the light of the resurrection," Boyd said.

"Catholics during the liberal 19th and 20th centuries were frightened by this changing world. Then Chesterton came along with his gusto, his great gales of laughter and orthodox wisdom, and he flung the doors open and taught confidence. I think we could use that same lesson today."

That sense of wisdom and joy has made Boyd a treasured priest for many of his parishioners. The insight and depth of his homilies are a common compliment.



Louis Rouleau

“Many things he has said have stayed with me,” said St. Andrew’s parishioner Louis Rouleau. “He once did a homily about humility that was really quite moving. He talked about how humility is an essential virtue for encountering God, and if we are not humble we cannot even recognize God’s presence.

“It was said in a way that was different from any discussion I’d heard before; you could tell he really dug deep into our tradition and came out with this well spring of nourishment.”

As his vast library of books are shipped up from Seton Hall to his home in Edmonton, Boyd is slowly settling into retirement. He hopes to continue celebrating Mass and often hosts weekly Bible studies at his home.

Though he has left behind the world of classrooms, lecture halls and academic journals, it’s clear Boyd’s devotion to the Church and love of sharing wisdom is one thing he can never retire from.