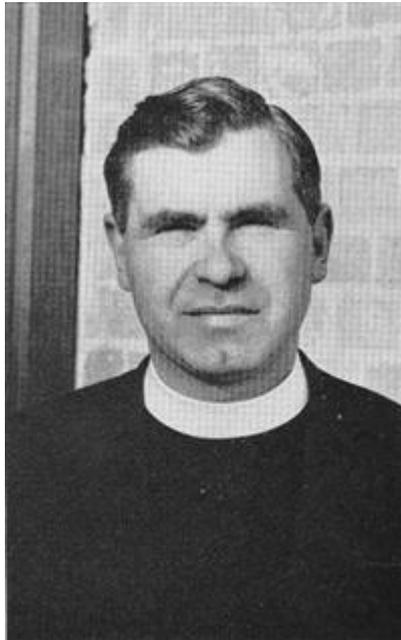


## Canon Gerald McCabe



Gerald McCabe was born and educated in Ireland. He was ordained in Kilkenny specifically for missionary work the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh in 1947.

His first Parish was the Immaculate Conception in Bathgate where he served as assistant Priest from 1947 until 1961. He was then posted to Kilsyth again as assistant Priest to Thomas Canon McGarvey and he worked here in St Patrick's from 1961 to 1968.



In 1968 he was transferred to Gorebridge where he served from 1968 to 1972.

His last Parish was Our Lady of Lourdes in Dunfermline where he was to die as Parish Priest on the 9th March 1993.

### **Very Rev. Gerald Canon McCabe – 9th March 1993**

*Canon Gerald McCabe, parish priest of Our Lady of Lourdes, Dunfermline, died on the 9th March 1993, in the 71st year of his life and in the 46th of his priesthood. At the funeral Mass the following homily was delivered by Father Thomas Rhatigan, parish priest of Holy Cross Edinburgh:*

On the first Tuesday of September 1941, twenty-three eighteen-year olds arrived at St Kieran's College Kilkenny to try their vocation to the priesthood. Eighteen of that number were eventually ordained for dioceses in Ireland, England, Scotland, the United States and Australia. Three of that eighteen came to Scotland, Father Gerry McCabe and myself to Edinburgh and Father Nicky Rowan to Glasgow – Father Rowan is with us at Mass today.

Looking back on that September evening nearly 52 years ago, in all charity, I have to confess that we must have seemed like a motley crew coming from all parts of Ireland with a multiplicity of accents, and I can tell you that there was no accent so “*quaint*”, shall I say, as that of a farmer's son from Co. Leitrim, one Gerry McCabe, but that in no way inhibited him from talking and talking and talking. His garrulousness often got him into trouble over the next six years, as even the *magnum silentium* held no terrors for him. (For the benefit of the junior clergy, may I translate “*magnum silentium*” – the great silence, or solemn silence as we used to

call it – which lasted from 7:45 at night time until 08:30 the next morning.)

During the six years at St Kieran's, student Gerry showed an incisive mind in the lecture hall, a high ability on the football field and a prayer life in the College Chapel that inspired us all. Well, were there any defects? There was one, as his many Parishes in Scotland could afterwards verify – he couldn't sing, not that this handicap deterred him in any way! Two classes a week were devoted to what we called in those days Gregorian chant, with a German Choirmaster, who ran the class with awesome Teutonic thoroughness. At this time of year, you would probably find us practicing the *Pueri Hebraeorum* or *O Crux Ave* at length. Occasionally, to show that he could be human, the choirmaster would say with barely a perceptible glint in his eye, "*Mr. McCabe, let's hear you sing Pueri Hebraeorum.*" An anticipatory shout of delightful expectancy would go up from the rest of us, and, to be fair, Gerry never disappointed. His performance was awful, shockingly hilarious, but of course, what we Philistines should have been doing was feeling sorry for the poor *Pueri Hebraeorum*.

After our ordination on the 8th June 1947, we came to Scotland together on the 5th September to serve in this Archdiocese. No Aer Lingus flights to Glasgow or Edinburgh in those days – we arrived by boat from Belfast at the Broomielaw, where Fr Gerry's first parish Priest Father Davitt as he was then, was waiting with his car to bring him to Bathgate. (Incidentally my Parish Priest was not at the Broomielaw.) Little did either of us realise that his ability to talk on any subject was soon to be put to the test. We had barely settled in to our respective parishes, when that most perceptive of Archbishops, Andrew Joseph McDonald, decided in his wisdom, that both of us were suffering from a defective education that only 3 years at University could remedy. Accordingly, he summoned both of us to 42 Greenhill Gardens to hear his plans. I was first into the august presence, and without any preliminaries, he told me that he had entered my name for Cambridge in the next academic year. To my astonishment when Father Gerry came out, his first words were, "*I talked him out of it.*" And as the portals of the Archiepiscopal residence closed behind us, he went on to say that, "*actually before I finished talking, the poor man was of the opinion that it was he who should be going to Cambridge.*" And so, for the next 20 years, Father Gerry was left in peace to carry out great apostolates in the two fine parishes of St Mary's Bathgate and St Patrick's, Kilsyth.

We often joked as to which of us would be first to get a parish. I beat him by a short head when Archbishop Gray asked me to go to St Margaret's Loanhead in January 1968. I cannot tell you how pleased I was when Father Gerry followed me very shortly afterwards to nearby St Margaret's Gorebridge. It was only then almost 21 years after our ordination that I realised what a tremendously hard-working priest he was. Like most priests of the Archdiocese, I already knew of his regular house to house visitation, but I had never realised how extraordinarily professional he was in the best sense of the word in that respect. I have since sometimes wondered if he did not occasionally feel a victim, as it were, of his own success. He once said to me, and this is the first time I have made this public, "*you know*", he remarked, "*how I love meeting people in their own homes, but it may have one disadvantage, you can get to know too much about people.*"

For the last 20 years it has been his privilege to administer to your needs here at Our Lady of Lourdes. I have one wonderful memory of those years – when he invited me to his 40th anniversary celebrations in 1987. I can still remember that glorious summer evening when you showed how much you loved and respected Father Gerry – your joy that evening was so natural and so spontaneous. And didn't he revel in it! That same pride and joy was reinforced less than

a year ago when Archbishop O'Brien made him a member of the Cathedral Chapter.

Canon Gerry was a man of deep but conventional spirituality, that had its foundation in an Irish home that gave three priests and one nun to God's service, and when his mother dies some years ago at the age of 90, she did so making the Stations of The Cross at her local Parish church as was her daily custom. No wonder he has asked to be buried beside her. Perhaps when we talk today about the shortage of vocations, maybe we should ask ourselves more seriously "*are our Catholic homes as Catholic as they once were?*"

Here at Our Lady of Lourdes, you will miss him desperately, as will to a lesser extent, the people of Bathgate, Kilsyth and Gorebridge. I share your desperation, but I shall not mourn him. Over the years we must have been together at scores of priest's funerals. Never once, even at the funeral of Canon Davitt, his first Parish Priest, whom he admired and respected so greatly, did he want to don the garb of mourning. I honestly believe that he did not regard mourning as a Christian virtue. Any heresy there, Your Grace?

But you will remember him in your prayers with gratitude and love. And because I knew him better, I believe, than anyone else here to-day, I have pitched my observations about him on a plane that no-one else might have done, even perhaps with a light-heartedness that others might question. And while you pray for him, there are a few of us, who because we knew him so really well, will have the presumption to pray: "*Canon Gerry, remember us, now that you have come into your kingdom.*"

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