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## Msgr. Barrett Armstrong: Promoter and Preserver of Sacred Music

by Bill Steinburg

If there is any truth in the saying, "you reap what you sow," Msgr. Barrett Armstrong serves as an example.

For nearly 50 years, Msgr. Armstrong, 77, gave the students of St. Michael's Choir School friendship, care, support and an ample supply of corny jokes. He is receiving all of those gifts in return these days, particularly the corny jokes.

"I had a bad reputation for telling corny jokes to the kids," says Msgr. Armstrong with a grin. "Now, I go down to the Cathedral on Sunday for the Mass and afterward parents and graduates come to see me and shake hands and remind me of some of those jokes."

A visit to Anglin House, a retirement residence for priests in the heart of the University of Toronto campus, makes it clear that Msgr. Armstrong hasn't given up on joke telling. In a single trip down the hallway, he traded three humorous exchanges with nurses and other staff.

Msgr. Armstrong may have developed his disarming wit as a survival tactic, growing up in a household as the youngest of six brothers. He was born in 1929 in Peterborough, ON, to a family that involved music in daily life. His mother played piano, as did he and one brother, while another brother played the trumpet.

In 1941, 12-year-old Barrett moved from Peterborough to Toronto with his family. He attended Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School for his Grade 8 year. The following year, he managed to secure a place as a student at St. Michael's Choir School, playing the boogie-woogie as his audition piece. Little did he know at the time that the choir school was going to become the focus of his life's work. He studied there until 1947, when he graduated and entered St. Augustine's Seminary.

Msgr. Armstrong was ordained as a diocesan priest by Cardinal James McGuigan on June 4, 1955 and within the month found himself back at the choir school as the assistant director. It was an assignment he was happy to undertake but not one that he expected.

"I went into the priesthood with the willingness to go wherever I was needed," he says.

At the choir school, Msgr. Ronan, the director at the time, had a plan for the new priest on his doorstep: he turned him around and sent him to Rome to study at the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music.

Msgr. Armstrong remembers being driven to New York City by his brother and crossing the Atlantic on the Andrea Doria – the same famous ocean liner that sunk less than a year later after colliding with another vessel off the coast of Nantucket, Massachusetts. In Rome, he studied sacred music through the school year and travelled in the summers, soaking in the rich history and tradition that informs so much of the Church's musical tradition. "It was lovely," says Msgr. Armstrong, "but I was glad to get back."

He returned to the choir school for the 1958/59 academic year, serving as the director of music there until 1979. In 1980, he became the director of music for the St. Michael Choir Secondary School, serving as the school's visiting chaplain at the same time.

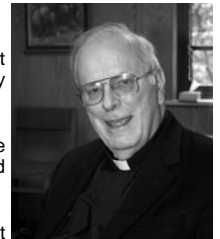
In his career at the choir schools, Msgr. Armstrong conducted both the junior and the senior choirs, working with hundreds of boys as they performed sacred music at St. Michael's Cathedral and around the world. His choirs sang for Pope Paul VI during a general audience in St. Peter's Cathedral. They sang for Pope John Paul II in 1984 during his papal visit and again in 2002 during World Youth Day at Downsview.

While preparing young men to sing for Popes certainly ranks as a highlight, likely the biggest challenge Msgr. Armstrong faced in his lifetime of musical ministry was dealing with the ground-shaking shifts in sacred music that occurred following Vatican II. The Mass, and all of its choral music had been in Latin for centuries. He found himself preparing settings of sacred pieces and preparing young singers for additional performances each Mass – "You have more chance to sing now than before Vatican II," he says.

Throughout his time at St. Michael's, Msgr. Armstrong felt his role as a promoter and preserver of sacred music was important to the Archdiocese of Toronto and to the Church as a whole. "I certainly felt that it was a responsibility for some people in the Church to preserve the tradition of good music in the Church," he says. "I hope I was a good example to the children."

In 1992, Msgr. Armstrong's work was formally recognized, when he received a Papal Honour.

Since leaving his residence at the choir school in 2004, Msgr. Armstrong has settled into a place where he has companionship with other priests and access to any additional care he may require. He has an opportunity to attend Mass daily in the building and makes a point to get out with his friend and former choir school colleague Kathleen Mann.



The support he receives through his accommodation at Anglin House is another example of how Msgr. Armstrong is reaping what he has sown. For years, he cared for and supported young people as they learned and grew in life and faith. Now, through The Shepherds' Trust, Catholics in the Archdiocese are demonstrating support and care for him.

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## Message from the Cardinal



My dear friends,

For 10 years, the annual Shepherds' Trust appeal has supported the retired and disabled priests of the Archdiocese of Toronto, providing them with comfort and dignity after their having dedicated their life's work to our parishes in God's name.

The Shepherds' Trust fund was established to ensure all the priests of our Archdiocese are sufficiently cared for in their retirement years. The Fund has benefited from your generosity in the past, but it continues to require the support of those who have received the pastoral care of our clergy.

This year's collection date for Shepherds' Trust has been scheduled for the weekend of November 18-19. By renewing your support again in 2006, the goal of ensuring assistance for our retired and retiring priests will be closer to fulfillment.

Photo Courtesy of Peter Caton,  
Toronto, 2001

We are called upon to extend a hand to those who need our support. The Third Letter of John, says, "You do a faithful work in whatever you accomplish for those who are brothers and strangers." Our clergy have faithfully served their brothers and strangers through their daily ministry. I invite you to recognize that good work and take part in this year's Shepherds' Trust collection.

Sincerely in Christ,

Aloysius Cardinal Ambrozic  
Archbishop of Toronto

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## Fr. Leslie Tamas is a Priest on the Move

by Bill Steinburg



Fr. Leslie Tamas may have retired just over a year ago but he shows few signs of slowing down.

Since his retirement in August 2005, Fr. Tamas has been stepping in to celebrate Mass in parishes almost every weekend. He also keeps connected with the many people he has met in his 46-year journey as a priest in the Archdiocese of Toronto, getting out with friends three or four times a week. The receptionist in his retirement residence confirms the fact, saying unexpected visitors are lucky to find him at home on any given day.

Fr. Tamas is the epitome of a man on the move, and it has been that way since he was young.

Born in Hungary in 1935, Leslie Tamas heard the call to priesthood at an early age. He remembers being moved by the high Mass and red vestments at Pentecost when he was five and recalls pretending to celebrate Mass as a child of seven. By 13, he had entered the minor seminary in Budapest. He studied there until 1954, the year the Communists took power and locked the doors to religious institutions, halting the young Leslie in the midst of his

formation.

For two years, he worked as a labourer in the loading docks of a transportation company but knew that wasn't the life he wanted to live. When the Hungarian Uprising broke out in October 1956, Leslie took advantage of the opportunity to escape.

"I realized if I wanted to be a priest, that was my chance to leave."

He spent three months in a refugee camp in Vienna, hoping to immigrate to North America. Canada called first. For four months, he had no way of connecting with his parents, his younger brother or his two younger sisters. They had no idea where he was and he had no idea how they were faring in the severe Communist clampdown that followed the uprising.

Leslie crossed the Atlantic in March 1957 and made his way to Toronto. Eight months later, he resumed his religious formation at St. Augustine's Seminary, without the slightest knowledge of English. He completed his studies and was ordained May 28, 1960.

His career has taken him throughout the Archdiocese of Toronto, starting as an associate pastor at St. Margaret's in Midland, then moving to St. Cecilia's Parish in Toronto in 1962, to Toronto's St. Joseph's Parish in 1967, to Blessed Sacrament in 1971, and to St. Theresa's a year later.

In 1974, Fr. Tamas was appointed pastor at St. Anthony's Parish in Toronto, then briefly at St. Patrick's Parish in Brampton in 1977. A year later, the priest on the move had the opportunity to establish some deep roots. Fr. Tamas was assigned to Holy Family Parish in Bolton and tasked with building that parish's first church. It was a challenge he embraced.

"It gives you a very unique appreciation, it's almost like harvest time," says Fr. Tamas of the opportunity to help build a community. "You see the fruits of your labour, which doesn't happen too often in your life except on certain occasions like these ones. When the church is built and people come to Mass and the parish is increasing in number . . . that's a very rewarding job."

He guided that community for 12 years, through July 1990, helping nurture the parish from 160 people to thousands.

"The benefits of a stay like that [at Holy Family] is that you get to know the people and they get to know you," says Fr. Tamas, reflecting on his career from his modest apartment overlooking a tranquil greenscape in Thornhill. "When you leave, it feels pretty painful."

As a priest and spiritual leader, no matter where he was, Fr. Tamas relished the opportunity to help guide people back to God through the sacraments. During a long assignment like that at Holy Family, he witnessed the long-term impact of those blessed moments, helping people through different stages of life, watching them grow in life and faith.

Soon after leaving Holy Family, Fr. Tamas received another long assignment at St. Mark's Parish in Stouffville. Again, he had an opportunity to invest himself in a parish community for more than a decade, arriving in October 1991 and remaining there until his retirement in September 2005. His impact on that community was so strong that the local newspaper recognized his departure with a front-page feature on his work in Stouffville.

The first year of retirement has been difficult for the priest on the move. Though he has kept busy, Fr. Tamas misses the daily interaction with his flock. "As a priest, you don't have your own family but you have thousands of families," he says.

While slowing down may be a challenge, Fr. Tamas is settling into his new home at Glynwood Retirement Residence. He has decorated his room with some of the hundreds of pictures, paintings and figures he has accumulated of clowns (a collection he was inspired to begin after years as a Red Skelton fan). It is a place he is glad to be, a place he can stay only with the help of The Shepherds' Trust.

"Without the Shepherds' Trust I would not be able to exist [in retirement]," he says. "I will thank Cardinal Ambrozic forever for this. He established The Shepherds' Trust 10 years ago. Now, at least you have a decent place to live, a roof over your head for every priest."

Fr. Tamas's busy schedule may not leave him much time to spend in his apartment some days but when the priest on the move does look for a break, he has a place to call home.

"In my life, I was always the servant," he says. "I invested my time and energy in people."

Through The Shepherds' Trust, those same people have had an opportunity to return the deed by investing some of their good fortune in him.

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## The Shepherds' Trust Golf Tournament 2006

As in years past, many golfers gathered to play at Kleinberg Golf Club for the 10th Annual Tournament. The weather, although a little cool, was bright and sunny and many happy faces returned from a day of golf to enjoy a wonderful BBQ dinner.

A success like this day is only possible with the generosity of the many people who support the Trust in various ways from corporate sponsorship to gifts for the table.

This year we would like to recognize, among the many corporate sponsors, Catholic Cemeteries of the Archdiocese of Toronto who provided the wind shirts, which coincidentally was the perfect item of clothing for the day. In addition, we would like to thank the following corporate sponsors: Miller Thompson who again provided the golf balls, CIBC, Dixon-Garland Funeral Home, Frank C. Buckley, Greer-Ouellette Graphics, J-G Cordone Investment Ltd., J.J. Barnicke International, Knights of Columbus – 9108, Knights of Columbus 4393, Mavrix Fund Management Inc., Peter G. Cathcart, Q.C., Toronto Tank Lines, Reflector Coatings and Turner & Porter Funeral Home.

Among the many happy faces were those individuals who walked home carrying a trophy for their hard day at play. Trophies for the Closest to the Hole were awarded to: Duke Delahey, Dave Scanlon and Fr. Bob Glynn. Longest Drive was awarded to Carlo Delgado, Cy Abbass, Kerri Calhoun, Barry Gilmour, Judy Cathcart and Kevin Collins. Of course trophies were provided to the winning foursome with a score of ten under par. The winning team consisted of Fr. Liborio Amaral, Michael Ottaway, Patrick Hoey and Kevin Collins. The song "We are the Champions" was heard long after the tournament was over. Congratulations to everyone and a big thank you on behalf of the Trust to those who work behind the scenes to make this day a possibility.



# Hanging Out With the Men in Black

by Jasmine Mascarenhas

As the Student Service Coordinator for the Office of Catholic Youth (OCY) for the Summer of 2006, I have been looking for innovative ways to have young people involved in service opportunities. This fits in with the OCY's mandate to Identify, Form, Link and Integrate youth to answer the call of loving and serving Jesus Christ. I first met with Marisa Rogucki, Coordinator of Retired Priests, in early 2006 and I was fascinated by her work.

As Coordinator for retired priests, she is essentially a mother to more than 80 men over the age of 75, men who have served our Diocese through priesthood.

When we met, we spoke of the different aspects of her ministry, and began to talk about the possibility of youth being linked up with retired priests in some sort of mentorship program. Retired priests, in many cases are isolated all across the Diocese. Often they don't get out for weeks, due to the complications that come with being older. Teens and young adults are often eager to share their time with others but because of the restrictions of schooling and mobility, they sometimes have difficulty locating suitable projects.



With all this in mind, the program "Hanging Out With the Men in Black" was formed. The premise of this program is to potentially match up retired priests and young people to spend four hours together each month. In spending time together, several things will be accomplished. First and foremost, the retired priests will be given a vehicle to mobilize themselves. The young people matched to the priests can motivate themselves and assist their counterparts in enjoying all that life has to offer. In turn, retired priests have a wealth of knowledge to share in terms of spiritual and vocational direction. Between the ages of 16-35, youth are faced with a wealth of moral dilemmas and vocational crises. Building a relationship with a retired priest can help create a trusting environment to properly work through these situations and make the best decision. Last but not least, this program would be a lot of fun for all involved.

A great example of this was on June 7th when more than 35 retired priests gathered at St. Augustine's Seminary to share in food and fellowship. They were also joined by clergy who have been in ministry 1-5 years. I, along with 6 others, was privileged to represent the Office of Catholic Youth at this event.



As the priests arrived, we directed them and their drivers to the parking lot where we personally greeted each of the clergy, and escorted them to the courtyard for lunch. During lunch we assisted in serving the food and helping some of the clergy to carry their plates from the buffet back to their table. Dessert brought lots of room for chatting, relaxation and conversation in which dialogue between the youth and the retired priests increased. We talked about their vocation story and what made them realize their call. We explored their lives as priests, highlights of their time in ministry, struggles that they faced and inspirations along their way. Most interestingly the priests also asked us, young people, where we come from, what our goals are, and what challenges we face.

This experience challenged me to open my heart a little more to be open to the challenge of discernment and I was absolutely thrilled to be given a chance to talk to such remarkable men with fascinating life stories.

It is our hope that in the coming years, the Office of Catholic Youth and the retired priests will have a firm partnership through programs like "Hanging Out With the Men in Black."

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Many thanks to the volunteers who attended the Leadership Mass and Reception at St. Augustine's Seminary!

