
Blessing a Predecessor

It is the responsibility, and holy duty, of any priest to officiate at funerals for the deceased. I am glad that every priest here at the Cathedral takes that holy call seriously, and each of us will always do whatever we can to accept an invitation to officiate at a burial office. In my own priesthood, I find that funerals are some of the most important services I tend to.

Still, I must admit that the Cathedral has had more than our share of funerals in these first five weeks of 2017. Some true saints of this parish, and friends of saints (most of us are quite willing to officiate at funerals for non-members), have died; the Cathedral of St. Philip has tended to some holy funerals in the past two months. I like to call myself “The Blessing Dean,” and the blessings and commendations I say at funerals are among the most powerful that I can offer.

So, it was my honor to bless the life of one of my predecessors, the Very Reverend David B. Collins, who died in December, but whose service we held last week. He was dean of this cathedral parish from 1966 to 1984, and it was good to welcome back to the cathedral friends and representatives of his ministry here. In honor of him, and continuing to bless him, I offer some things I said in the sermon of that service.

We are here to remember how wonderfully and kindly David Collins played his part here, and with his family, and in the greater life of the Church. ...He brought kindness and charm to this cathedral parish. He had charisma. Of course, he had charisma in several ways, the right ways. His charisma brought Jesus to this place in new ways. ...My first memory of David Collins was when I was a teen-ager, taking full advantage of the charismatic renewal that was exploding in various sections of the Episcopal Church. ...And I attended, as often as I could, the Friday night Sonlight Club that was held in the lower room of this Cathedral. That room is now an indoor play area for our children! ...David was a man who fully welcomed, and embraced Holy Spirit renewal in the Church.

He presided in some quite complicated times. Of course, the Church is never simple. ...His greatest achievement might well have been in presiding over this great parish, the Cathedral Parish of St. Philip, which is full of theological and political and cultural diversity – and often conflict. In his time, David was preaching and pastoring a congregation that was being pulled in various ways. ... David had the gift of nurturing both camps and holding all of God’s people together.

Everyone here, probably, knows how he did it. It was through following one of his favorite principles. “Remember to keep the main thing the main thing.” He said it over and over again. “The main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing!”... And, of course, for David, the main thing was Jesus. In the beginning: Jesus. Is now: Jesus. And will be forever: Jesus. The way, the truth, and the life.

When I became dean of this holy cathedral, it was always my delight to welcome David Collins back. One of the first things David gave to me was his personal scorecard from the very first baseball game played by the Atlanta Braves in the old Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium. 1966. I remembered that game quite well myself. David, later to become chaplain of the Braves 400 Club, knew that I shared his love of baseball; and I am proud of this memento.

It has been my honor to follow in his footsteps of leadership in this huge and complicated cathedral parish. His footsteps are those of charisma and grace. The names of the people in his parish here, long ago, have changed. The names have changed. But the people remain the same. We are conservative and liberal, rich and poor, some eager and some lazy. Some a great joy, and some a great pain. But all of us faithful. David knew all that about this parish and was able to lead with grace and love.

Finally, of course, David Collins was a man of renewal. He certainly brought renewal to this jewel of a parish, the Cathedral

of St. Philip. He knew that we are always in need of renewal. And David welcomed that renewal. David Collins, bless his soul, is now in the place of ultimate renewal.

There is a place of ultimate resurrection and new life. That place is heaven itself, where David Collins resides now, the ultimate parish, and the ultimate community, full of all shapes and sizes and all sorts and conditions. And David spent a lifetime of ministry knowing, and serving, all those sorts and conditions. And now he is being made new with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.

Thank you David Collins. Well done, good and faithful servant.

[Read the full sermon here.](#)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip