

First of all, to the family of Father Dan, especially Marcia and Greg and Vincent, but also the many nieces and nephews and extended family members here — know that the prayers of Bishop-elect Bullock and all the priests of the diocese are with you in a very special way at this time.

I was invited to speak on behalf of the priests in the diocese, but I need to begin from a personal point of view for a few moments if I may. As most everyone knows I had a very special relationship with Father Dan. I have other close relationships with brother priests who serve as spiritual directors or confessors, but Father Dan and I were what I call playground buddies. We didn't talk theology a great deal though we did share a lot about our ministry experiences and our pastoral service to our local church but know what he and I were together were fun buddies. We were priestly bikers. We had some 35 years traveling and bunking in together, sharing tremendously fun activity which Bishop Gruss famously called, “the closest thing to flying without leaving the ground.”

Over our years together, and I think we estimated not two or three months ago when we were on a cruise together, that we probably did over 100,000 miles on our motorcycles together. We rode our bikes on every paved road in every state west of the Missouri River from New Mexico and Arizona to California, to the Canadian Rockies of Jasper. We laughed and we laughed, and we talked about the events of each day. Thrilling adventures both challenging and sometimes frightening on our bikes. But most of all we forgot about the stresses and the labor of priestly ministry back home for two weeks out of every year and let the thrill of the ride and the beauty of the mountains and the lakes refresh and renew us once again for the ministry that we would face soon enough again.

Well, not entirely did we remove ourselves from ministry. We found ways to evangelize and preach on the road sort of like Franciscan Friars on wheels. So, I'll give you a sense of what we did. Our pattern was pretty much the same every day. We had planned the trips for weeks in advance and we knew exactly where we were going to stay every night, we'd ride three to 400 miles a day and then we'd get off the road about 5:00, a quick clean up, chairs put out in front of our hotel rooms, cigars lit, blues music turned on, bourbon and scotch poured.

Now people traveling will avoid large groups of bikers traveling together but when there's one or two with music playing it draws them in. “Hey guys. Nice bikes. Where are you from? Where are you going? Where were you today?”

The conversation came easily and sometimes they would ask if they could grab a libation and sit down and join us for a while. Of course, we were dressed not in clerics but in leather, or biker T-shirts and boots, and Dan and I would always wait for the inevitable question, “So what do you guys do?”

Dan and I would look at each other and I'd say, “Dan you want to tell him this time, or should I?”

“No, you go ahead.”

“We are Catholic priests.”

“No. No way.”

I'd say, “Yep that's what we are. From the Diocese of Rapid City.”

When we'd say this, it would go immediately quiet for a long moment. We know what they were thinking, “Okay. What have I said during the last 20 minutes I now wish I had not said?”

However, after they recovered the conversation went on but it was different. “Can I ask you guys a question that I’ve always wanted to ask a priest?” Or “you know I haven't been to church in years and here's why and I’m not sure how to come back.” Or “this thing the church teaches about this has never made any sense to me and I can't get over it. Can you explain it to me?” And sometimes other things even more personal were shared.

I would often let Danny take the lead on these things. Partly because he was a little bit my senior but also because he was always so compassionate and understanding and encouraging in these situations. When people back home would talk to me about Father Dan these qualities were always mentioned and Dan was a true care bear.

In his obituary we find a beautiful summary of his 50 plus years of ministry in our midst. It starts by testifying to what Father Dan was first and foremost — a pastor. A very caring and dedicated pastor. Over 50 years, Dan was a pastor to countless families in small parishes and big parishes and rural parishes and city parishes and reservation parishes. His footprint was everywhere in the diocese, and he was well loved by everyone.

In addition to church work, Dan served in civic communities as well especially as a volunteer member of the local fire department. Whenever he had a new assignment, he would go to the fire department meeting, and he would join up. He was not only skilled with the hose and the truck, which he was, he was a trauma counselor to those who were hurt or worse to families who had lost loved ones in an accident or fire. Then when they had gone home, he ministered to the other members of the fire department who would often witness dramatic and terrible things.

How could you not love a gentleman like that? I always admired this about Father Dan. That was the type of ministry that I really struggled to do. I could say so many other things about this friend of mine who also ministered to me when certain assignments in my ministry were difficult to accept.

Dan also became a Canon lawyer, which placed him in administrative and leadership positions in the diocese. He exercised all of these with humility and a quiet but strong character. He never lorded it over the other priests or the laity, and he gave his opinions and direction without hubris. It's true to say he was respected by us all.

Now on behalf of the priests and the diocese I also want to thank Father Dan's family. Dan was a South Dakotan — a rancher, cowboy by formation. He was born into a devout catholic family near Ralph, South Dakota. His parents Norbert and Leone raised their children with the fundamentals of Catholicism and rural family values. This is who Father Dan was — a devout Catholic ranch boy who loved God and his family and was called by the grace of the Lord to be a priest and of the servant of Christ.

The ranch in him was always present, always there. Cowboy boots everywhere he went. I'm not talking about the ski slope experiences by the way. Those are TV mature. So, I'm not talking about ski slopes. Father Brian, Kerry Prendiville, we've got lots of other stories on the slopes, but Dan was always spotted up to 300 yards away because instead of a stocking cap he wore a great big black cowboy hat. Everybody could see him.

Father Dan's family, you never left him. You never left his heart. I know that he loved all of you very much. He talked of you often and we visited some of you on our motorcycle adventures. I know that Dan was present at so many of the school and sports events of his nieces and nephews, and he baptized and married many of you as your lives unfolded in the Church. And I know that you will miss him terribly, as we will.

I know when a young man is called to be a priest, it's such a blessing for his family. You will have a very special advocate in heaven as he was a special advocate for you here on earth. The entire diocese is grateful for this very special gift that your family has provided for some 50 years. May you always know Father Dan's constant prayer for you and may all of us one day come to share life with him in heaven.

And lastly just a short word of thanks to the priests of Casa Maria. You supported and encouraged Dan throughout his treatment regimen in these last many weeks and Father Gary O and Father Mike Mulloy, and also our bishop-elect, were with him in his final night with us. The priests are grateful to you for this fraternal gift given to Dan in his last hours.

May the Lord give to Dan peace and great joy in heaven. If anyone I know in the priesthood is deserving of these words it is him: "Well done my good and faithful servant. You're faithful in small things. I will now put you in charge of greater. Come now, share your master's joy."