**Eulogy for The Rev. Charles A. Gallagher, SJ**

**July 25, 2013**

Delivered by his niece, Meghan Sweeney

This past June marked the 55th anniversary of my uncle’s ordination to the priesthood. Thinking about this brought me back to the 25th anniversary of his ordination 30 years ago. Many of you were there that day (and if you need a memory jog, much of the music we’re singing today is what we sang in 1983). In a hot and muggy cavernous St. Ignatius of Loyola church in New York City on a sweltering Saturday in June, the filled-to-capacity congregation celebrated Fr. Chuck, and his vocation and ministry. As a 12-year old, I was mortified when he had me stand up and he introduced me to this enormously huge congregation. That day was the first time I had some understanding that my uncle was a kind of rock star in his own way, complete with routines and lots and lots of fans. To be honest, I thought the whole thing was a bit odd. “What’s the big deal?” I probably thought to myself. “He’s just my uncle.”

Most of you knew him as Chuck or Fr. Chuck. To his sister, my mother (Therese to the family, Terry to everyone else!), his aunt, his parents, and family friends, he was Charles. And to me he was Uncle Charles. An uncle who gave the most random of Christmas presents: a coffee maker, a blender, animals from the Heifer Project, a boomerang from his trips to Australia, and Waterford crystal; and an uncle to whom I gave the most ordinary of Christmas presents: usually socks, shirts, sweaters, New York Times crossword puzzle books (edited only by Eugene Maleska would do), and a pack of lighters (although no lighters for the past 4 years). He was an uncle who I vividly remember bounding down a hill towards me in Central Park after I wiped out on my toy motorcycle and hit my head when I was a toddler; and an uncle who let me drive (illegally!) for the first time in my life – I was 14! - his brand new red Toyota Celica GTS complete with sunroof and state of the art stereo system (a car, by the way, that I got to have when I was 19!). He was an uncle who took me to a Giants football game and a Mets baseball game, and he was the uncle who took me to see “The Mystery of Edwin Drood” and Lily Tomlin’s “The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe,” both on Broadway. He was the uncle who took me to Rye Playland and realized shortly into the ride that the Steeplechase was no ordinary carousel and that maybe he should have actually followed the safety instructions. He was the uncle who came to New York City, and Worcester, MA, and Cambridge, MA, and Providence, RI, and Atlanta, GA, for high school, and college, and master’s, and chaplaincy internship, and doctoral graduations.\* He is the uncle who made cornball jokes and embarrassing comments that made me groan. And he was the stubborn and unyielding uncle with whom his stubborn and unyielding niece would argue – not discuss, argue - about religion, politics, and culture, among other things; arguments with long-lasting, albeit slow yet important, impact.

At a modest celebration of his 50th anniversary, my mother told a story of their early childhood. Only 11 months older than my mother, my uncle’s place as the baby was usurped by this interloper of a younger sister. For the first few years of their lives, they shared the same bedroom, living in their own world and having their own language. When they were 5 and 6, it was time for them to be separated into their own bedrooms. Apparently they did not like this at all. One night my great aunt Genevieve went to check on them, and the first bedroom she checked on was empty. In the other bedroom she found them both asleep, each in their own twin bed, holding hands across the way. As my mother put it, he has been holding her hand ever since, being there for her and for me in difficult and painful times. For the past 41 years, my mother and uncle talked on the phone everyday with few exceptions. Even when he travelled great distances to exotic locales, he would call her. They were very good friends to each other.

Especially when I was younger, I loved having Uncle Charles come to visit. And especially when I was younger, he had a busy travel schedule and wasn’t around all that often – we’d see him for Thanksgiving, Christmas, birthdays, and Easter, and that was it. On the major holidays he usually would leave the festivities as soon as dessert was finished to go and visit with other families. These were early departures that just didn’t make any sense to me *at all*, especially when I was young.

What I came to have a glimpse of insight into about my uncle is that his vocation to the priesthood and to the Jesuits, and to his ministry in Marriage Encounter, and Parish Renewal, and everything else he was involved with, were at the core of who he was as who God called him to be. I glimpsed some of this at his 25th anniversary celebration, and I glimpse some of that today. My mother and I want to thank all of you who knew Chuck through the Jesuits and through these ministries and the relationships you formed with him. Just as teachers need students in order to be teachers, Chuck needed you in order for him to live into the vocation and ministry that God gave him. His vocation and ministry depended on you. As he impacted your lives, you impacted his: from the moment he was born he would have always been Charles, but he could not have been and become Father Chuck without you. As his family, we thank you for the love and care you showed him so that his life and ministry could be of fecundity, not sterility; of joy, not desolation; of stimulation, not boredom; of fullness, not emptiness; of relationship and deep friendship, not isolation.

One of my favorite hymns is “Come, labor on.” The last two verses are as follows:

Come, labor on.

No time for rest, till glows the western sky,

till the long shadows o'er our pathway lie,

and a glad sound comes with the setting sun.

"Servant, well done."

Come, labor on.

The toil is pleasant, the reward is sure,

blessed are those who to the end endure;

how full their joy, how deep their rest shall be,

O Lord, with thee.

My uncle’s mother and my grandmother died at the age of about 98. At the end of the funeral, before the final commendation, my uncle asked the congregants to applaud a life well lived. Today, I ask the same of you. Whether you knew him as Fr. Chuck, Chuck, or Charles, he toiled faithfully and tirelessly in the vineyard. Today he meets with the fullness of the love of God.

Uncle Charles, may your rest and joy be deep with the Lord. Well done, faithful servant, well done. You were a very good priest.