

**Remarks by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez**  
on the occasion of Father William Kelly's Retirement  
as Pastor of St. Paul Parish, Jacksonville Beach, Fla.  
June 26, 2015

Last Sunday was Father's Day; a day we set aside each year to joyfully thank Dad. Dads can so easily be taken for granted. The significance of this day is fitting as we give thanks to our Lord for the life and ministry of Bill Kelly while he is alive, strong, and healthy!

To serve 55 years as a priest is an awesome record – especially when you consider what just a single day in the life of a priest. Father Kelly's day includes forgiving penitents, counseling and strengthening marriages (imagine the marriages that could face separation if his guidance was not there); reaching out to the poor, and responding to the 4 a.m. calls to go to a hospital. A priest's day encounters such mystery and grace! Now image 56 years? On behalf of five bishops who have preceded me, thank you!

We are here today to celebrate Father Kelly. Here is what I learned about him from others:

- His rectory was a home to his brother priests; he was welcoming and hospitable to all cultures, languages, classes, theologies, and personalities.
- No one enjoys and cares for the sick and elderly in the Diocese of St. Augustine better than Father Kelly. Health care professionals often share they saw Father Kelly during their night shift!
- School principals have shared how Father Kelly visited the school every day and was very supportive and affirming of them.

A priest forever! I want to quote a poem Father Joe Meehan wrote, June 2, 2014 – the day he was ordained to the priesthood. We published his poem in our magazine in July 2014:

*“A priest forever sounding deep resonances in a pure heart ...fired with dreams of the morrow in another land:”*

Father Kelly came to Florida from the emerald island of Ireland with dreams and lots of energy. What a difference he has made!

How will we remember this great priest, this outstanding pastor?

As one who is truly father!