



Obituary for
Canon Alan John Patrick McLean RIP
23rd May 1952 - 12th June 2026



Alan McLean was born on 23rd May 1952 in Balham, SW London. He was the oldest of four children. He attended the Sacred Heart Primary school in Battersea and then the Sacred Heart Secondary school in Camberwell. During this time, he was a member of the Cathedral parish and sang in the Cathedral choir. It was this liturgical involvement that led Alan to consider his vocation and respond to the desire to serve the Lord as a priest and so Alan made application in 1972 to then Archbishop of Southwark, Archbishop Cyril Cowderoy. Having been accepted for formation, Alan commenced his studies for the priesthood at St. John's Seminary, Womersley. His natural talent as a musician was soon

appreciated by staff and students alike and during his time at Womersley he played the organ in the Seminary chapel for the various liturgical services and Masses.

Following his Diaconate ordination on 3rd September 1977, Alan was sent to the parish of Orpington for his pastoral diaconate placement. In the report to the seminary written ahead of his priestly ordination, the parish priest, Fr Michael Phelan, writes that "any duties given to Alan have been carried out well... in his visits to the hospital, he has made a very pleasant impression on patients and staff, when visiting the sick and the housebound he has won the hearts of many, he has been involved with the primary school visiting the children and during Lent preparing them for Holy Week and Easter. He has been involved with the youth group in the parish and gets on well with the young people. One young person commenting on Alan's preaching says he is very sincere... Alan gets on well with his fellow clergy and is a good communicator and above all he gets on well with the people in the parish and has made a very good impression on them". In response to this report and subsequent reports from the Seminary Rector and those responsible for his formation, Archbishop Michael Bowen wrote to Alan on 17th April 1978 to give him the "call to the priesthood". In the letter Archbishop Michael wrote: "I was delighted to hear that you had settled down so well as a deacon at Orpington. Fr Phelan and the priests there gave excellent reports and everyone seemed pleased and grateful for your good work in the infants and junior schools particularly with the preparation of the children for Holy Week and Easter. I know too, that a number of parishioners have expressed their pleasure at having you in the parish. I am now looking forward to your ordination and especially to be able to welcome you into the diocese as one of my priests"

He was ordained as a priest by Archbishop Michael Bowen at St. George's Cathedral, Southwark on 18th June 1978.

His first appointment was as an assistant priest in the parish of Worcester Park, where he was to serve for just over 5 years as an assistant to Canon Cornelius Beausang. This first appointment had many joys but also challenges for Fr Alan, which were picked up in the visitation report of 1980, when Bishop Tripp wrote that "both priests bring very different talents to the care of the people in the parish. Both are very tolerant of each other, although they do not share a common

view of how things should be done.” During his time in Worcester Park Fr Alan used his talents and skills to reach out to the young people of the parish, in his visits to the local Catholic primary schools and the local Secondary school, and in promoting and encouraging the liturgical life of the parish, especially in building up a very talented and enthusiastic group of musicians and singers to animate the liturgy, a tradition that carries on to this day . In the Worcester Park parish history, it mentions Fr Alan’s time in the parish in the following words: “Fr Alan McLean was endowed with considerable musical talent. An accomplished organist himself, he left the parish in 1983 with two excellent choirs. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Folk Choir must have been one the best, if not the best in the Diocese”.

In August 1983 Archbishop Michael wrote him to appoint him to the parish of Purley as assistant priest. In his letter the Archbishop wrote, “Thank you very warmly for all the good pastoral work you have done over the past five years I know that this has been deeply appreciated... I realise how much you will be missed from the local scene”.

Fr Alan moved to Purley in the summer of 1983 and served as an assistant priest working with the parish priest, Fr Ronald Salmon. Again, this was to prove a challenging time for him and although he was faithful to his duties as an assistant priest and popular among the people he found the appointment a difficult one and wrote to Archbishop Michael asking if he could be reassigned.

In January 1986 Archbishop Michael wrote to Fr Alan to appoint him to be assistant priest at Forest Hill. This new appointment was with the priest who had recommended Fr Alan for formation for the priesthood, Fr Patrick Aikens, and they were to prove a very successful parish team for the next seven years. They worked collaboratively and fostered a sense of responsibility among the people of the parish. Together they built up a community of faith, sustained by the weekly celebration of the Mass and the provision of meaningful liturgy. Fr Alan continued with his involvement with the local primary schools and was involved with leading Inset days for the primary school staff. He was much in demand for his expertise, his knowledge and his commitment to Catholic schools and education.

Fr Alan was a very popular priest at Forest Hill and was called a “great friend and a much-loved priest” by the people there.

In May 1993 Archbishop Michael appointed Fr Alan as parish priest of Dockhead, and this was where he was to serve for the rest of his life as parish priest. He was inducted by the area bishop, Bishop Howard Tripp. Fr Alan soon immersed himself into his new parish surroundings and quickly endeared himself to his new parishioners and the deanery clergy. He also built up good ecumenical links with the local clergy.

Following a Confirmation ceremony in 1996 Archbishop Michael wrote to Fr Alan to thank him saying: “I thought it was a marvellous celebration and the liturgy and singing were very good indeed. The people are clearly delighted with the work you are doing in the parish, especially with regard to the children”. A few years later following another visitation in 2001, Archbishop Michael wrote to Alan to say “I have just received Bishop Howard’s visitation report of the parish and I am delighted to read all that is being done and being planned there. It does make very encouraging reading. Thank you for all your work and I know that I am echoing the sentiments of your parishioners who are certainly pleased to have you there and I think they are indeed fortunate!”

Fr Alan had a great devotion to Our Lady and was a regular pilgrim to the shrine at Lourdes, accompanying pilgrims from his home parish.

He also was in demand to celebrate the marriages of couples he prepared for that sacrament, often going overseas to celebrate their marriages.

As parish priest for nearly 33 years he supported thousands of people in Bermondsey and neighbouring areas, whilst continuing to keep in touch with and care for those who moved away. A parishioner wrote of him: “He kept a really strong link with the church, the community and the people, whether they still lived there or not, He has been a priest and a Canon who has led not

just with faith, but with huge personality and huge character. To say he could be a little bit stubborn would be an understatement, but he was always stubborn for the right reasons. He would fight for his local community, religious and non-religious.”

Canon Alan was popular among the deanery clergy and this led to him been invited to serve as Dean of the Cathedral Deanery and also as an Ecumenical Borough Dean. He also had great respect for the many religious congregations across the Archdiocese and was invited for many years to animate the music at the annual Mass for Religious on the feast of the Presentation of the Lord. He was a gifted preacher and would often be asked to preach at various diocesan events and at the funerals of the priests with whom he had worked.

It is true to say that music was a great influence on the life and the ministry of Canon Alan Mclean. From his first parish appointments he was passionate about the way the people prayed and worshiped using music and encouraged many to develop and use their gifts as musicians and singers.

He was for many years the “musical voice and face” of the liturgical life of the Archdiocese of Southwark, as a member of the Diocesan Liturgy Commission, as chair and a member of the Music Sub-Committee and serving nationally on liturgical advisory groups for the Catholic Church in England and Wales. He led and directed the Southwark Diocesan Choir, providing the music for the big diocesan events each year: the Chrism Mass, the Rite of Election, several Episcopal Ordinations and the Installation of two Archbishops, Diocesan celebrations at Aylesford to mark the Jubilee Year 2000, the Year of the Eucharist and the Year of St. Paul, and also the events associated with the Silver Jubilee of Archbishop Bowen, the Ordination Jubilees of Archbishop Smith, Bishop Hine and Bishop Lynch, the celebrations to mark the anniversary in Canterbury to commemorate the arrival of St Augustine, and the Vespers to mark the 150th anniversary of the restoration of the Hierarchy in England and Wales and the founding of the diocese, in addition to many other events across the Archdiocese of Southwark. As director of the Diocesan Choir he also led many days of formation around the Archdiocese and introduced many to the music of some of the contemporary liturgical musicians, inviting them to come to the Archdiocese to lead music days. These music days were popular and helped form and develop those musical talents seen in so many of the parishes of the Archdiocese today and were a firm foundation for the continued musical traditions of the Archdiocese. Many Bishops from England and Wales would comment on the quality and the standard of the music whenever they came to an event in the Cathedral and particular on the quality and the richness of the choices of music which reflected the Diocesan family. It was always joyful, a real celebration, and uplifting.

Fr Alan was particularly proud of his own parish choir and music group and it was a great honour when they were chosen to be part of the musical ensemble and singers at the Opening Ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games held in London.

Fr Alan gave great service as a priest to the Archdiocese and in 2012, at the end of the event to mark three Episcopal Jubilees, Archbishop Peter took him by surprise when he announced that he was to be made an honorary Canon of the Archdiocese. In his letter that followed up the announcement Archbishop Peter wrote: “ I offer you my congratulations and I am sure that the clergy and the people of the Most Holy Trinity will be delighted by your appointment. I think it is very well deserved. The great work you have done in enhancing the liturgical music, particularly for Diocesan events, has been very much appreciated over many years and I think it is only right and fitting that all you have done should be recognised publicly.”

Four years later, when a vacancy occurred on the Cathedral Chapter, Archbishop Peter again wrote to Canon Alan to appoint him as a Chapter Canon, thanking him for his service to the clergy of the Archdiocese as a parish priest, Dean and as Chairman of the Council of Priests.

Sir Simon Hughes, former MP for Bermondsey and Old Southwark from 1983-2015, paying tribute to Canon Alan, whom he called “a priest for all people” said: “Canon Alan of Holy Trinity, Dockhead was one of the men most loved, admired and respected by thousands of people and

families throughout Bermondsey and all of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark. He was a dear and trusted friend to many, including me. Alan was not just a wonderful and popular caring priest and pastor, but a hugely talented priest who developed the music of his parish, diocese and cathedral, and was fully involved in the issues and decisions of his local community. He was also great fun and great company.”

Canon Alan had a particular respect and care for those who felt marginalised by society and by the Church. In the 1980s, he made it a special mission to support those suffering during the AIDS epidemic, taking care of the families of the bereaved and those having to live with the stigma of the terrible illness. He continued to minister to those effected by HIV and was to them the face of the Lord Jesus, the healing and compassionate presence of the Lord, very often reaching out to people whose families had turned their backs on them and rejected them. To him, they were children of God, his brothers and sisters in the Lord.

He spoke out, often placing himself in the firing line when he felt there was an injustice to be challenged. He had no time for unnecessary bureaucracy and unfair decisions especially when it damaged and caused unnecessary suffering. He was a champion of the poor and in that respect followed the example of the great Saint Oscar Romero, who was a great hero of his and whose ministry and life he greatly admired.

Alan served the parishioners of Dockhead until his health meant he was unable to minister to them. He continued to live in the presbytery, praying for his parishioners, appearing in the church for the final time just a few weeks before he died, to say thank you, to pray with them, and to say Good Bye.

He died in the early hours of the morning of Friday 12th June, in the presbytery at Dockhead, on the Feast of the Sacred Heart.

In his recent letter to priests given to the world by Pope Leo on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, the Pope reminded priests that they were to “renew each day your *“Here I am” before Christ’s pierced Heart. Give yourselves entirely to him, so that you may love his people with the same love with which he loves them. And joyfully remember how the saintly Curé of Ars loved to say that “the priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus” (cf. Benedict XVI, Letter Proclaiming a Year for Priests on the 150th Anniversary of the “Dies Natalis” of the Curé of Ars, 569). This love is a pledge and a guarantee that, if we surrender and offer ourselves completely, nothing of us will be lost. I entrust each and every one of you to the Virgin Mary, Mother of Priests. May she, who cherished the mystery of her Son in her heart, also teach us to keep alive and make the Heart of Christ, Saviour of the world, beat within us.”*

Canon Alan Mclean was a priest who loved his people, and lived out his priestly ministry in service, in joy, and with that beating heart for the love of Jesus within him.

Canon Alan McLean, priest of the Archdiocese of Southwark, who died in the 48th year of his priesthood aged 74.

May he rest in peace and rise in glory.