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Dear Catherine, Michael and Erin, dear grandchildren Liam, Nora, Aiden and Maeve, dear family and friends,

We gather today at St. Mary’s, your spiritual home, to remember and commend to God the life of Edward James O’Leary—our Ed—born January 9, 1945, in Saint John, New Brunswick, and called home on July 30, 2025, at the age of 80.

For more than twenty years as your family pastor, I have walked alongside you in seasons of joy and hardship. I have shaken Ed’s hand at the church door more Sundays than I can count. I have watched him quietly set up chairs, check the boiler in winter, and slip out of the hall last—never first—after making sure the lights were off and the dishwasher was running. Today, I count it a solemn honour to speak of a husband, father, grandfather, friend, and servant whose life was steady and true.

Ed’s life began in a port city, and perhaps that was fitting. He learned early what tides teach: that strength and patience belong together, that storms can be met with preparation and courage, and that a good compass is worth more than fair weather. He carried those lessons into his first calling as a marine engineer with the Canadian Coast Guard. He served our coasts not with flourish but with competence that kept others safe. Engines that refused to listen to anyone else seemed to hum when Ed leaned in and put his hands upon them. He was the kind of man you wanted aboard when the fog moved in or the temperature dropped—unflustered, exacting, faithful to the task.

Later, when he came ashore to teach trades at a community college, Ed simply changed decks. He taught not only with diagrams and tools, but with his own way of being. His students remember that if you came unprepared, he would know it. If you came willing to learn, he would give you all the time you needed. He demanded precision because he knew carelessness costs people more than

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marks. But he also knew how to find the sentence that unlocked a concept, or the joke that drained the room of panic before an exam. There are, in this city and far beyond, men and women who make a living with their hands and wits because Ed took them seriously before they knew how to take themselves seriously.

In retirement, Ed never retired from purpose. He gave himself to St. Mary’s as if it were the next assignment on the roster. He mentored our youth with the same patient rigour he brought to an engine room—teaching how to fix a leaky tap, yes, but also how to keep one’s word, say “I don’t know” without excuse, and show up five minutes early. He had a particular ministry with those who thought they had little to offer. Ed had that quiet gift of making a person feel sturdy again, as though their keel had been repaired in the night.

He was a man of craft. In the garage that smelled of cedar and linseed oil, he shaped wood into useful kindness: cribs that cradled firstborns and fourth-borns, keepsake boxes that have already held tears and will go on holding love. When a family welcomed a child, Ed didn’t give advice. He delivered a crib that didn’t creak and a smile that said, “You’ll do fine.” His hands recorded care in dovetail joints and sanded rails, and many of you in this church have brushed those rails in the dark, rocking a baby while the house slept.

When the water called, he answered on Halifax Harbour, trimming a sail just so, reading the wind as if to an old friend. At home, the garden held its own dialogue with him—especially the tomatoes. More than once I saw him in the parish lot with soil under his nails and a paper bag of extras he’d press on anyone who would take them. He liked to say they tasted better when shared, and, as with most of Ed’s observations, he was right.

Music reached him where words grew quiet. Cape Breton fiddle tunes could pull a smile from him even at the end of a long day. If you ever caught him at the kitchen table with Catherine, the radio low, the two of them exchanging a few graceful steps between the kettle and the window, you saw the truth about Ed: his life was ordered around love.

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Fifty-five years of marriage to Catherine are themselves a testimony. It is no small thing, in our age or any age, to weave such longevity with such respect. Their life together was not a story of grand gestures so much as a daily practice of reliability—an honest accounting of the day, a cup of tea set down without being asked, a hundred apologies offered and accepted. Their love gave shape to their home, and from that home Michael and Erin learned what it meant to stand upright in the world. Liam, Nora, Aiden, and Maeve learned what it means to have a grandfather whose presence untangles worry. They will remember his quiet wit, the way a hint of mischief lived in his eyes while he was showing you how to plane a board or tying a bowline behind his back just to make you laugh.

Integrity and humility were Ed’s signature. He did the task in front of him with care and let someone else take the microphone. He was loyal—to family, to his crews, to his parish—steadfast in the old-fashioned way that requires choosing the same good thing again and again. He believed faith should live with its sleeves rolled up. He believed service came before self, that honesty needed no disclaimer, and that a word given was a bond. If you sought his counsel—and so many of us did—you left feeling as though the floor had been levelled beneath your feet. He never pretended that hard things were simple. He simply had a reassuring way of making them seem manageable.

A favourite memory returns to me now with particular brightness. At our community suppers, it was often Ed who stood at the carving board. Steam rose, plates clinked, and there was Ed—apron on, knife steady, telling a seafaring story that grew more elaborate as the evening went on. He had a way of punctuating a sentence with a deft slice, then looking up to see if Catherine was rolling her eyes at him from across the room. Laughter would ripple down the line. Strangers relaxed. People who came alone left having met someone. The roast was carved, but so too was the ice around the heart. This was service. This was hospitality. This was his ministry as surely as any Sunday reading.

We will, during this service, pause for a moment of silence to acknowledge Ed’s years with the Canadian Coast Guard. Silence seems particularly fitting for a

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man who let his actions speak. In that quiet, we honour not only his duty at sea but the countless practical mercies he performed on land.

And at the family's request, we will also hear Psalm 23—"The Lord is my shepherd." Ed knew that psalm by heart, not as poetry for the mantel, but as a map for living. He recognized green pastures when they were simply ordinary days. He trusted still waters when the horizon blurred. Even in the valley of the shadow, he did not dramatize fear or deny it; he simply kept walking, confident that goodness and mercy have longer legs than we do and will indeed follow us all the days of our life.

To Catherine and the family: grief is real and not to be rushed. It is the price of loving well. Yet even within this sorrow, there is a sturdier note that Ed himself would insist we hear. He would want us to notice the gifts that do not end: the way Michael measures twice before he cuts; the way Erin steadies a friend with three plain sentences and a cup of tea; the way each grandchild holds a tool, or a story, or a tomato seedling as if it mattered. These are not accidents. They are inheritances.

To the young people Ed mentored: when you tighten a bolt and stop before you strip the thread; when you return a borrowed tool cleaner than when you received it; when you admit a mistake and fix it—know that Ed's hand is there, firm over yours, teaching without a word. Keep your word. Show up. Ask questions you think are too simple. And when you can, carve the roast and tell a story that makes strangers into neighbours.

To the parish: let us honour Ed not only with flowers but with imitations of his faith in action. If there's a chair to be stacked, stack it. If there's a young person who needs a Saturday morning in a garage learning to sand with the grain, offer it. If there's a new family that could use a meal, make it—and if you can, make it enough to have leftovers.

What will we miss most? We will miss his steady counsel—the way a five-minute check-in in the parking lot could set your day right. We will miss his firm

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handshake that said, “You’re not alone.” We will miss the reassuring way he made problems feel manageable, not because he minimized them, but because he believed we could meet them together.

And what shall we remember most? That a faithful life is most often an accumulation of small obediences. That humility and humour can share the same workbench. That love grows in the ordinary. That service before self is not a slogan but a way to spend a life.

Ed did not chase applause. He built a life that made others stronger. He was a husband devoted for fifty-five years to the same good woman. He was a father who taught by example, a grandfather who blessed by presence, a shipmate you wanted in a squall, a teacher who opened doors, a parishioner who turned up early, a friend who stayed late.

In the Christian hope, we entrust him to the mercy of the One who calms seas and leads us home. But even for those among us who measure hope differently, there is this truth to hold: a good man has passed through our lives, and we are better for it.

May the God Ed trusted be close to Catherine in the evenings when the house is too quiet, close to Michael and Erin when a decision feels weighty and they reach for the phone, close to Liam, Nora, Aiden, and Maeve when they need a story and a steady hand. May we, each in our turn, take up some small piece of the work he has set down.

And when we hear a fiddle tune late on a summer night, when a harbour breeze stirs the flag, when the tomatoes redden all at once and we must share them, when a newborn sleeps in a crib shaped by loving hands—let us give thanks for Ed.

For his integrity. For his humility. For his quiet wit. For his loyalty that held fast like a well-tied knot.

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Edward James O’Leary. Beloved by Catherine. Father to Michael and Erin. Grandfather to Liam, Nora, Aiden, and Maeve. Marine engineer, teacher, parish servant, woodworker, sailor, gardener, friend.

Well done, good and faithful servant. Rest now in the safe harbour. We will carry on, honouring the course you set, caring for the people you loved, and trusting, as you did, that goodness and mercy will lead us all the way home.

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