

SPEAKING NOTES

**The Honourable Noël A. Kinsella
Speaker of the Senate**

**On the Occasion of the Reception
For the 20th Anniversary of Fr. Sean O'Sullivan Room**

**Ottawa
November 24, 2010**

Speaker Milliken,

Your Excellencies,

Monsignor Bergin,

Honourable Senators and Members of the House of Commons

Jacques O'Sullivan and members of the O'Sullivan family,

Distinguished Guests,

Thank you all for joining us here in the East Block, the location of the Father Sean O'Sullivan Meditation Room. It was 20 years ago that this wonderful room was first dedicated to the memory of a remarkable man, Fr. Sean O'Sullivan.

I would especially like to thank Jacques and the members of the O'Sullivan family for making the trip to Ottawa today to celebrate your brother's legacy. While his time with us both in politics and the priesthood was short, he made an impression on us all.

I would also like to thank Msgr. Liam Bergin, who travelled all the way from Rome to be with us today. The Irish Pontifical College was instrumental in Fr. Sean's transition from politics to the priesthood. Msgr. Bergin actually began his own studies at the college as Fr. Sean was leaving. It is the Monsignor we have to thank for the photos from his days at the College that have been reproduced for this reception.

Underlying all of Fr. Sean's actions was the desire to serve. He served his constituency as a politician, then as a priest. In the latter capacity, he found himself as a bit of an oddity, which he described as being a "celebrity priest". This did not suit him at the time and he sought greater anonymity by transferring from the Diocese of Hamilton to the larger Archdiocese of Toronto.

His talents were readily apparent in his new location as well, and his desire for anonymous service fell by the wayside when he was made Director of Vocations, essentially the individual charged by the Archdiocese with recruiting people for the priesthood, and orchestrated Toronto's controversial 1983 billboard campaign featuring the crucifixion with the tagline "Dare to be a Priest Like Me".

Like most flames that burn rapidly and brightly, Fr. Sean's was not to burn for long. In April the same year, he was diagnosed with leukemia. It was while undergoing chemotherapy that he left us with another lasting contribution, his book *Both My Houses: From Politics to Priesthood*. At the time of publication, he was just 34 years old. He wrote, "In his mercy, the Lord has allowed me some time of service in both the secular and spiritual care of His people – in both His houses."

He returned to God on March 9, 1989 at the age of 37. In memory of his accomplishments and his service to both His houses, the Fr. Sean O’Sullivan Meditation Room was dedicated on November 8, 1990 by unanimous resolution of the House of Commons and was officially opened March 18, 1991.

As Speaker Milliken mentioned, the room has many features, but the one of which I hope you will take note is the altar with the distinctive high relief carving of a beaver on the front of the altar is in celebration of a distinctive addition to our Canadian identity. To commemorate this anniversary year of the Fr. Sean O’Sullivan Room, a number of renovations were made to restore the room to its original luster, including a new colour scheme, and new carpets.

In the twenty years since its dedication, the Father Sean O’Sullivan Meditation Room has been open to people of all faiths. If you have not done so already, please take a moment following the reception to visit the room. You may wish to take with you his final words from his book, “However dark the coming days, He will triumph and be with us always, even until the end of time.”