

Street renamed for 'light of Camden'

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(Photo: Jose F. Moreno/Staff Photographer)



CAMDEN - "He is the light of Camden."

Luis Maysonet, a South Camden resident and Sacred Heart parishioner for a decade, described Msgr. Michael Doyle as the historic church began to fill on a mild, sunny Monday morning.

"He influenced me so much," Maysonet added. "Everyone here knows him. He carries that spirit, that light, with him everywhere."

He joined fellow parishioners, city and county officials and Doyle's friends in the hardscrabble neighborhood marked on all sides by Doyle's 40-plus years of work: a writers' house in the works, to be named for his friend, the late poet Nick Virgilio; the once-derelict row homes that have found new life thanks to the nonprofit he founded, Heart of Camden; Poet's Walk, a quiet space for reflection; and Sacred Heart School, which has educated generations of city children.

Poet, pacifist, provocateur: Portrait of a priest

Now, along with all the intangible imprints of Doyle's impact on South Camden is an official one: Jasper Street, which runs along Sacred Heart's south side, was renamed Michael Doyle Lane from Broadway to 4th Street.

A priest in the Diocese of Camden since 1959, the 82-year-old peace activist, poet and advocate for the poor helped establish Camden Churches Organized for People, fought to preserve a city home where Martin Luther King Jr. once stayed and has long rallied the faithful in and outside the city in service and outreach.

Doyle, slowed by illness and age, didn't speak but greeted a steady stream of parishioners, politicians and well-wishers Monday inside the church.

"Every time I visit Sacred Heart, I'm reminded of so many fond memories," said Mayor Dana Redd, an alumna of the school. "There's such a sense of community and love and I've always felt that from Msgr. Doyle.

"He's an extraordinary man, from his work in civil rights and social justice to the way his vision has helped transform lives right here in Camden."

South Jersey Port Corp. CEO Kevin Castagnola called Doyle "the voice of the people," a man who "fought for the City of Camden."

Camden County Metro Police Chief Scott Thomson and Monsignor Michael Doyle pose for a photograph during a ceremony at Sacred Heart Church in honor of the renaming of a city street as Michael Doyle Lane. (Photo: Jose F. Moreno/Staff Photographer)



Bishop Dennis Sullivan of the Diocese of Camden said Doyle is "a representative of the best of what a priest is all about."

"Our Holy Father, (Pope) Francis, recently reminded priests that they are to have 'the smell of the sheep.' Well, from what I know, Michael Doyle has had the smell of the sheep from the day he was ordained. It is a great smell; it is a smell of many races and many languages, of many different people, all who are respected by him as children of God.

"To have this here forever, in this City Invincible, this naming of the street in your honor, to recognize here how you have pastored all sorts of sheep ... as a priest you have been a prophet in the best sense of what it means to be a prophet, in clearly reminding people that God is present."

"I don't consider myself a religious person," said Camden County Freeholder Jeffrey Nash. "However, I do believe in angels ... angels who have made a difference for those who live in the city.

"Michael Doyle is one of those angels," he continued. "He might be the head angel."

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Camden Mayor Dana L. Redd and Monsignor Michael Doyle smile during a ceremony to rename a street as Michael Doyle Lane.

(Photo: Jose F. Moreno/Staff Photographer)