



SIGNPOSTS FOR LIFE

# A Model for the Youth of Today

FATHER EDWARD JOSEPH FLANAGAN of  
Ballymoe, Co. Roscommon • Summerhill College, Sligo • Boys Town, U.S.A.

# A Son of Ballymoe

Poem by John Duggan

“There’s no such thing as a bad boy

No reason at all to despair

Men have been free and equal all over the world

But need loving kindness and care”.

That simple creed was first proclaimed many years ago

By Father Eddie Flanagan a son of Ballymoe

And at Omaha, Nebraska there’s the source of many joys

Where his beloved Boys Town is a home for wayward boys

From right across America from every creed and race

There every nationality can find their rightful place

Where boys prepare for manhood as on through life they go

The ideal of Father Flanagan the son of Ballymoe

He was a special Irishman, a legend in his time

A simple man of faith and love and character sublime

He saw the scars of broken homes reflecting all around

And so in nineteen seventeen a home for boys he found

The seed increased a hundredfold, the home became a town

And word went round the world of this Pastor of renown

The countless men who felt his love in Boys Town long ago

Still remember Father Flanagan the son of Ballymoe

And often in the evening time his thoughts would fondly go

Back to his happy childhood in Leabeg and round Leamore

To the modest little homestead where first he saw the light

And the school at Drimatemple where he learned to read and write

His thoughts would often wander to his days in Summerhill

With another famous Irishman whose voice is with us still

He remembered well that senior boy whose voice he did admire

The boy was John McCormac who was in the college choir

Young Flanagan was special and in college he remained

Until the year of nineteen twelve then Father Eddie was ordained

Then off to work in Mission fields he went to U.S.A.

And to the town of Omaha he quickly made his way

In two short years of Priestly work he acquired a place to stay

For men of dereliction who had sadly lost their way

But well he knew their brokenness was not caused by crime or bars

They were men who came from broken homes and carried boyhood scars

So inspired by faith and fatherland and love beyond compare

He knew that every living boy deserved much love and care

And so he spent his Priestly life to fill an awful void

And bring a sense of dignity where love had been denied

Young boys unwanted and unloved would find a special place

A place where they were cherished like the home he used to know

In his happy days of childhood out the road from Ballymoe

Then at the age of sixty two in nineteen forty eight

Monsignor Eddie Flanagan was called to Heavens gate

He will always be remembered for those words he did declare

“Men are born free and equal but we all need love and care”

A film about Boys Town made his name immortalized

And the actor Spencer Treacy won an oscar which he prized

His portrayal of Father Flanagan had let the whole world know

Of the wonderful achievements of the son of Ballymoe

When Pope John Paul II addressed the Irish Hierarchy in Cabra in 1979, he said:

*“Among those most needing Pastoral care from Bishops are prisoners. My dear brothers do not neglect to provide for their material conditions and their families. Have a special care for young offenders. So often their wayward lives are due to society’s neglect more than to their sinfulness. Detention should be especially for them a school of rehabilitation.”*

Any reflection on Pope John Paul’s words in Cabra inevitably brings to mind the philosophy and work of Fr. Flanagan. He was indeed a rare and unique human being. He was a visionary, a philosopher, a campaigner and a doer, all rolled into one. He is very much remembered for his practical response to the needs of ‘at risk’ young boys in America. His Girls and Boys Town homes are today a monument to his work, determination and commitment. Nowadays we hear a lot about holistic approaches and the impression is often given that this is a more modern and progressive approach. Well, this is just nonsense. Fr. Flanagan’s approach and philosophy was a totally holistic one. He knew that unless all the human and spiritual needs of the young boys were addressed, no real and lasting progress would be made. How right he was. And it is still a battle today to convince the powers that be that shallow, one-dimensional and cosmetic programmes are, at best, only stop gap measures and, at worst, useless.

Caring for and positively changing a troubled boy or girl’s quality of life is a long and often painful journey, and Fr. Flanagan highlighted this in many of his observations and pronouncements. For me, Fr. Flanagan’s approach was fundamentally based on ‘true love’. He demonstrated time and time again that his love of the troubled child was real and totally unconditional. He believed that every boy had potential and that it was up to us adults to discover this potential and to nurture it. Fr. Flanagan died almost sixty years ago and the World has experienced phenomenal change during the intervening period. However, and unfortunately, little has changed for troubled boys and girls. I fully accept that nowadays fewer children are dumped into State institutions and this is a plus, but many troubled and vulnerable children continue to be seriously neglected. Indeed, I am certain that if Fr. Flanagan came back to Ireland today he would be absolutely disgusted with how little progress we have made in ensuring that all our children are given equal opportunity to achieve their full potential. As a Nation we have too often failed and neglected our troubled children. Today, more than ever before, we need people with the vision, commitment and generosity of Fr. Flanagan. He found the proper balance between **talking the talk and walking the walk**. His legacy is that he continues to inspire all those associated with Girls and Boys Town homes in America, helping them to make a real and positive difference to the lives of thousands of vulnerable children they care for. Fr. Flanagan did his family, county and country proud. He has fully earned the right to be regarded as a true Irish legend.

**John Lonergan**

*Governor, Mountjoy Prison, Dublin*

SECTION	TITLE	PAGE
1	Acknowledgements	5
2	Objectives for this Publication	6
3	Introduction	7
4	An Overview of Father Flanagan’s Life and his Philosophies on the Care, Development and Education of Young People, i.e. The Boys Town Model	9
5	Father Flanagan’s Well Known Sayings	16
6	What Today’s Youth Carers, Educators and Parents, might Learn from Father Flanagan and The Boys Town Model	21
7	Promoting the Canonization of Father Flanagan	22
Appendix A	Father Flanagan’s Timeline	25
Appendix B	Brief Explanation of Current Girls and Boys Town Programmes of Assistance	26
Appendix C	Father Flanagan’s Sayings	28
	Bibliography	30

“When parents fail to do their job, when they allow their children to run the streets . . . then the parents and not the children are the delinquents.”

“Youth needs the force of good and attractive examples . . . they are apt imitators. They may be easily led to follow where they cannot be driven.”

## SECTION 1

### Acknowledgements

The Father Flanagan Committee, St. Mary's, Sligo, acknowledge with grateful thanks the vital assistance they received from representatives of Boys Town, Nebraska, U.S.A., in preparing this publication. Much of the information used in its preparation came from sources under the control of Boys Town, including various web sites. Also personnel from Boys Town viewed an early draft of the publication.

The Committee acknowledge with grateful thanks the various sources of information listed hereafter in the Bibliography.

The Committee are also most grateful to the Ballymoe Father Flanagan Group, Roscommon / Galway for their support in preparing this publication.

The Committee greatly appreciate the fact that Mr John Lonergan, Governor of Mountjoy Prison, Dublin, was able to accept the invitation to write the Foreword. Mr Lonergan is of course very well known for his caring attitude to the deprived of society.

We are of course most grateful to Mr John Duggan for his beautiful poem on Father Flanagan, "A Son of Ballymoe".

Last but by no means least, the Committee are greatly indebted to those who contributed funds to help defray the printing and other costs involved in the compilation and distribution of this booklet. In this regard, special thanks are extended to the many people who contributed at Church gate collections, and also to the Knights of St. Columbanus, Sligo, for their financial and other support.

*"A life without discipline is like a ship without a rudder . . ."*

*"Gratitude is the flower in the wilderness . . ."*

*"Nothing costs so little as a few words of recognition."*

## SECTION 2

### Objectives for this Publication

The objectives for this publication are:

- (1) To promote a public awareness of the life (1886 - 1948) of Father Edward Joseph Flanagan and of his achievements, and in particular of his advanced and enlightened approach to the care, development and education of young people. Furthermore, to recognise the progressive application of Father Flanagan's ideals since his death in 1948, in the operation of the Boys Town Model in the United States and elsewhere.
- (2) To encourage all of us, particularly parents, youth carers and educators, and all organisations with responsibility for young people, to re-evaluate their attitudes to, and methods of dealing with, these young people in the light of Father Flanagan's approaches and those of the Boys Town Model.
- (3) To promote a movement for the canonization of Father Flanagan.

Perhaps for those of us, both young and old, who may feel powerless to deal with the many problems besetting society today, we might do well to ponder on the following brief extract from the Inaugural Presidential Address of Nelson Mandela in 1994:

*"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure."*

*"Our young people are our greatest wealth."*

*"The way to win respect is to show respect."*

*"Criticism, neglect, and indifference have a withering effect on the growing boy or girl."*

**The story of Father Flanagan is the story of an Irish man born in the latter part of the harsh 1800s in the West of Ireland, who was expected to die after birth, who endured poor health during his life due to respiratory problems, who committed himself to the priesthood at all costs, but above all dedicated himself to the betterment of neglected children in the U.S.A. and elsewhere, despite frequent and sometimes intense criticism from his peers and others who thought they knew better.**

The fuel that ignited and drove this man of humanity was surely the love of Jesus Christ abundant in his heart for the less well off in society. One might anticipate that such a person, so imbued with Christ's love for others, might not be very realistic or practical in his methods of operation. Quite the contrary was the case, however. Father Flanagan's in-depth approach based on sound philosophies and solid structures and procedures, showed him as a man who had an extraordinary understanding of human nature, and indeed of business organisation as well. How he grasped such a deep and advanced understanding is somewhat hard to figure out, for he seemed to be light years ahead of his contemporaries in the early 1900s. On reading in 2005 Father Flanagan's writings of the 1917 – 1948 era, the Sligo Father Flanagan Committee could not but feel that they were reading material that had just been prepared to deal with the problems of today. The sad fact, or at least it appears so to the Sligo Father Flanagan Committee, is that many of Father Flanagan's philosophies and approaches have not been sufficiently taken on board, or perhaps ignored altogether, by many parents, youth carers and educators in Ireland, and possibly elsewhere. Father Flanagan's vision and wisdom were incredibly advanced, in terms of today's youth issues.

Father Flanagan opened his first Boys Town home in 1917 in Omaha, Nebraska, with a loan of \$90, to house five troubled boys. It was a humble beginning. Despite a lot of opposition, even from his own pastors and peers, his organisation grew steadily, not only in capacity terms but also in stature and general acceptance by the public and the authorities. Indeed the growth of the Boys Town organisation has been phenomenal. For instance in 2004, nearly 44,000 children received help, healing and hope from Girls and Boys Town direct care programmes at some nineteen sites throughout the U.S.A. Also in 2004 some half a million children and families were helped through their National Hotline and about one million more were served through outreach and professional training programmes. Also it is possible that countless other children from many countries outside the United States will have benefited from the Boys Town Model, not least because Father Flanagan undertook during his life many trips abroad promoting his work.

Father Flanagan died suddenly from a massive heart attack in Berlin, Germany, in 1948 while on a mission on behalf of the U.S. Authorities. Father Flanagan, however, was confident that his work would continue, whether or not he was there to lead it, because he knew it was "God's work".

Incidentally, the name of Boys Town was changed to Girls and Boys Town in 2000, although girls were admitted to the Boys Town homes in 1979.

**The Sligo Father Flanagan Committee wish to dedicate this booklet to the memory of Father Edward Joseph Flanagan, and particularly in recognition of the enlightenment and inspiration he fostered in people caring for children, especially troubled children. Let all of us play our part in ensuring that the youth of today are not denied the benefit of Father Flanagan's extraordinarily advanced caring methods and positive thinking.**



“When you help a child today, you write the history of tomorrow.”

*The above photo of of a boy in a box was photographed by a famous photographer of the name Louis R. Bostwick, and was widely reproduced in the early days of Boys Town. (Courtesy of Girls and Boys Town Hall of History)*

**The teacher “is a dealer in horizons.”**

## SECTION 4

# An Overview of Father Flanagan's Life

And his Philosophies on the Care, Development and Education of Young People, i.e. The Boys Town Model

*(Note: Apart from specific source references identified in this section, generally speaking all the source material listed in the Bibliography was very helpful in compiling this section).*

### 4.1

A brief chronology or snapshot of Father Flanagan's life and achievements under the caption "Father Flanagan's Timeline", as downloaded from Girls and Boys Town web site ([www.girlsandboystown.org/aboutus/history/Flantimeline.asp](http://www.girlsandboystown.org/aboutus/history/Flantimeline.asp)) is reproduced in Appendix A herewith.

### 4.2

Despite his health problems, Father Flanagan persevered with his priesthood studies and was ordained in Innsbruck, Austria, in 1912. (Father spent some time in Austria as the climate there was helpful to his respiratory problems). He commenced his priesthood mission in Omaha, Nebraska, U.S.A., later that year. Boys Town home became a reality for Father Flanagan on the 12th December, 1917 when he opened a boys home with five boys – three wards of court and two truant newspaper boys. However, there was a preamble or forerunner in 1916 to this boys home in that Father Flanagan found himself working with homeless, jobless and alcoholic men, many of whom ended up in prison. Father Flanagan recognised that many of these men would have been neglected, abused and abandoned in their younger days. This led him to focus on the problem before it was too late to solve it, so he turned his attention to helping troubled children.

Father Flanagan was consumed with the belief that what he was doing was "God's work" and God would provide. He started with a loan of \$90 to pay for the rent of his first house. He soon had to move to a bigger house as the five boys grew to fifteen boys. However, numbers continued to grow further and many boys had to be turned away because of lack of space. Furthermore, complaints from neighbours mounted, because of Father Flanagan's policy of admitting boys regardless of race, colour or creed, as well as delinquents. Thus he moved house again in 1921, this time to a farm site called Overlook Farm which was some ten miles west of Omaha. In 1926, Overlook Farm was renamed Boys Town. The Village of Boys Town has remained the principal home ever since, and was subsequently renamed Girls and Boys Town in 2000. However, girls were admitted to the home in 1979.

"In the happiness brought to others,  
our own happiness is reflected."

"Youth who have not been loved and protected are not likely to love others and protect the rights of others."

### 4.3

Throughout his life, Father Flanagan continued to rescue troubled boys from the court system, and thereby saved them from adult prisons or reformatories. We will never know how many boys' lives were changed because of Father Flanagan. He never gave up despite major problems, such as lack of funds and critics who accused him of not knowing what he was doing. Father Flanagan believed that all boys needed was a loving and caring atmosphere and from that base they would mature to become productive citizens.

### 4.4

Boys Town has always been an open centre, with no security barriers. In the early days, the centre was administered by the boys themselves, serving as mayor, commissioners, judges, and so on. When rules were broken, the offender appeared before the elected representatives, who would decide the nature of the punishment. (Boys Town youth still elect a mayor every year). Of course Boys Town also employ professional and other staff. The vetting procedures for engaging staff were, and are today, generally very rigorous. Today the professional staff teach the boys and girls various skills and also use a motivational approach to teach correct behaviour. Each child starts his or her stay in Boys Town with a 'point card' on which he or she accumulates positive or negative points as rewards for appropriate behaviour, or punishments for inappropriate behaviour. Privileges such as watching television, using the phone, etc. are lost where the cumulative number of points fall below the norm.

"Character is formed by doing  
the thing we are supposed to do,  
when it should be done, whether  
we feel like doing it or not . . ."

#### 4.4 CONTINUED

The boys and girls are taught many skills by the staff, including:

- Social Skills
  - how to have relationships, etc.
- Vocational skills
  - a large range are taught, including how to get a job

Dozens of other skills are taught, the most important of which are listed below:

- Following instructions
- Accepting criticism
- Accepting 'no' for an answer
- Greeting someone
- Getting the teacher's attention
- Making a request
- Disagreeing appropriately

Respect for others, especially the opposite sex, is taken very seriously.

“More important than wealth and position in the determination of individual happiness are good manners . . . They give a person poise and dignity. They are evidence of real worth.”

“The boy goes where his father goes”

#### 4.4 CONTINUED

Boys Town keep its students very busy, as Father Flanagan believed that idleness was the principal cause of delinquency. Also Boys Town educators consider reading an essential building block of education. Often in other schools children are shown films from which to get information, because they cannot read. Religion in Boys Town is also very important. Various religions are catered for.

Recognising the importance of the family, Boys Town introduced the 'family model' in the early 1970s, whereby the children live in highly structured and closely monitored family units of eight children, together with a married couple called 'Family Teachers'. The logic for this approach is to prepare the children for establishing their own family bases in later years. Generally the children spend some eighteen to twenty two months at Boys Town, after which they either return to their families, or graduate and go out into the work place, or to college.

“Without God at the beginning, there can only be confusion at the end.”

#### 4.5

Generally, graduates from Boys Town perform very well in later life and frequently outscore their counterparts in society. Graduates have found their way into all the standard trades and professions and many have also served with distinction in the military. Obviously not every student's stay at Boys Town goes smoothly, and some of these might suggest (at least on the surface) that the 'system' failed them. However, some good may well have been achieved, as the following story as related by one of the Boys Town teachers (as per [www.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/](http://www.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/)) suggest:

*There was a child who was so violent that he had to be taken away in handcuffs after threatening to kill his family teacher. Years later that same boy returned to his ex teacher, bringing two people with him and a very poignant message - "I know we didn't leave good, but I wanted my wife and son to meet the only person that ever made any difference to me".*

In fact over the years, there have been very many expressions of gratitude made by ex students to their alma mater.

Throughout its history and right up to the present time, there has been great interest shown by all sorts of people and organisations in Boys Town. These would include several American Presidents, politicians from many backgrounds, dignitaries of many kinds, film stars, social workers, the media and others. Perhaps the greatest social worker to have visited Boys Town was Mother Teresa of Calcutta, now Blessed Teresa. Needless to say, Boys Town is well known throughout the world. It was really put on the world stage with the showing of the film "Boys Town" in 1938 in which Spencer Tracy and Mickey Rooney co-starred, with Spencer Tracy acting the part of Father Flanagan. This film was one of the great classics, for which Spencer Tracy won an Oscar, which he later donated to Father Flanagan.

In recognition of Father Flanagan's Irish roots, the Boys Town National Alumni Association donated in 2001 a life size bronze statue of Father Flanagan to the Irish people. The statue was placed on a landscaped hill behind the Father Flanagan Memorial Centre on the edge of Ballymoe. The statue looks out over the fields and river into County Roscommon to the ruins of Father Flanagan's childhood home near Leabeg. Many dignitaries attended the unveiling of the statue, including the then Director of Boys Town, Father Val Peter, Ireland's Papal Nuncio, The U.S. Ambassador to Ireland, The Bishop of Elphin, Dr. Christopher Jones, Irish Government Minister, Mr Noel Treacy, and many local and other dignitaries. Among those attending was Father Peter McVerry, S.J., who of course is well known for his concern and care of the under-privileged. Father McVerry delivered a homily in Ballymoe on the day after the unveiling of the statue. Quoting from one of the publications promoting Father Flanagan, "A Saint of Our Own", Teaching Unit, by Maureen Brady and Sharon Nelsen, Father Mc Verry spoke as follows:

*Father Flanagan's greatness consisted, not in the wonderful organisation which he founded, nor in the numbers of children whose lives he transformed, but in each and every act of compassion, in which he reached out and gave all that he had and all that he was, to each and every child.*

*We can best honour Father Flanagan's memory by imitating his greatness, by reaching out in compassion, with all that we have and all that we are, to all those in our community who are in need, who are lonely, who are depressed, who are in pain, and particularly to those children who are deprived and needy.*

*What Father Flanagan did was not an act of charity, it was an act of justice. When we give someone what is their right, what they are entitled to, we do not call it an act of charity. Each child has a right to be loved, to be cared for, to have security and to have a place they can call home. Father Flanagan gave them those rights. He would not have expected any gratitude, any reward or any honour for doing what he understood to be his duty, his responsibility.*

It is quite clear that Father Flanagan had a great understanding of human nature, and this goes for matters pertaining to education of young people, as well as in many other spheres. For what Father Flanagan had to say about education would seem to put him way ahead of his time, and indeed possibly ahead of many of today's educators. The following extracts from his article in Boys Town Times of September 27th, 1946 (Boys Town had their own newspaper) demonstrates:

*The most important factor in any school programme, of course, is the student. It is for him that the school is built and the teacher hired. His training in the classroom is designed to bring out the best that is in him so that when the time comes he will be able to fulfil the obligations and enjoy the privileges of citizenship. The boy who goes out from school should be able to stand on his own feet. ... He should have enthusiasm for life, enthusiasm reflected in the way he does his particular job. ... The boy who had the advantage of good classroom training, has greater self confidence. He knows how to analyse a problem. He is equipped to grasp the significance of things and events which crowd the world about him. He knows how to help himself. He may not retain all the learning he got from his books, but the habits of work, thought, appreciation and tolerance learned in the course of his training will stay with him and increase his chances for success and happiness.*

*No boy's education is complete until he has been taught to accept nothing from life except what he can win with his own hands. ... In addition to making a living, however, we also have to face the problem of making a life. This is the primary aim of all education worthy of the name. Education, properly speaking, is the organisation of knowledge into human excellence. It not only increases our skill and knowledge but teaches us to apply these in harmony with that end for which life is lived. It can be seen from this that the job of the teacher is a big job. ... He has to have a genuine knowledge of human nature. He has to understand young people. ... The teacher, among other things, must be a good salesman. He is a dealer in horizons. He should have zest for living. He should be able to inspire confidence and ambition. He should be able to create in the student an appreciation for all that is wholesome and good and helpful. And last of all, he should be interesting; there are no uninterested students in a class thought by an interesting teacher.*

What a wonderful and inspiring description of the role of the teacher is given above! Even the so called best teachers among us today could well pick up some useful ideas therefrom. Surely very many profound statements are contained therein – possibly one of the greatest is that the teacher "is a dealer in horizons".

Clearly the impact of the Boys Town Model in the care of young people in the U.S.A. has been huge. As was indicated in the Introduction, nearly 44,000 children received help, healing and hope in 2004 in the U.S.A. from Girls and Boys Town direct care programmes at nineteen sites throughout the country. Also in 2004 some half a million children and families were helped through their National Hotline, and about one million more were served through outreach and professional training programmes.

*Appendix B*, which was prepared by the Public Relations Department of Girls and Boys Town, contains some brief explanations of the foregoing programmes of assistance. The Appendix also contains some contact addresses and phone and fax numbers. It also contains a note concerning Girls and Boys Town copyright.

“No one is too good to perform whatever is required of him.”



*The above photograph shows Father Flanagan talking with a group of youngsters at the Austrian Youth Centre in Vienna, just ten days before he died in 1948. (US Army photograph). Courtesy "Boys Town, A Photographic History" published by The Donning Company.*

## Father Flanagan's Well Known Sayings

A publication referred to earlier, "A Saint of our Own", Teaching Unit, by Maureen Brady and Sharon Nelsen, contains five pages of Father Flanagan's Sayings. These Sayings give us an insight into the extraordinary depth and breadth of Father Flanagan's knowledge of humanity and on the very many factors that impact thereon, particularly those that are helpful towards living a positive human life. This insight seemed to enable Father Flanagan to speak authoritatively on a myriad of relevant topics, judging from his Sayings. Topics covered in his Sayings include parenting; valuing young people and giving them (big) expectations; proper social relationships and respect for others; teaching and training; importance of discipline; importance of religion; and many more.

Surely we cannot but be enriched from reading and thinking deeply about all of Father Flanagan's five pages of Sayings, as contained in the above publication. **A significant portion of these Sayings are listed hereunder, while others are reproduced in Appendix C:**

When parents fail to do their job, when they allow their children to run the streets and to keep bad company, when they fail to provide them with good examples in the home, then the parents and not the children are the delinquents.

Christian charity does not consist in the shedding of tears, or in mere preaching, but rather in the doing of that which we preach and in the actual alleviation of the conditions that bring about those tears.

There are no bad boys.  
There is only bad environment,  
bad training, bad example, bad thinking.

I have yet to find a boy that wants to be bad.

A true religious training for children is most essential if we are to expect to develop them into good men and women  
– worthy citizens of our great country.

A young person should never be made to feel that no great thing is expected of him or her.

Let us not forget children always seek the goodwill, praise and love of others, and nothing is so certain to kill and destroy their ambition and spirit as fault finding and scolding.

The child that has learned to think and act constructively has already been given an important start to success and happiness.

Keep our youth busy; keep them occupied. Let us all work together and not let our youth down. They need guidance, supervision and religious training.

The boy goes where his father goes. He does what his father does, not what his father says he should do.

Youth who have not been loved and protected are not likely to love others and protect the rights of others.

Let us attend to first things first – our God given duties. Parenthood is the most sacred office, endowed with the highest responsible duties ever given to man or woman.

The family background could solve many a social problem which today is most perplexing to the sincere social worker. The home is the oldest established unit in human society. ...

Constant criticism is often the result of impatience in adults rather than imperfections in children.

Criticism should be constructive and given in a spirit of encouragement. Criticism should be tempered with praise.

A life without discipline is like a ship without a rudder. It is subjected to every whim. Contentment comes from knowing what to do and in doing it.

There is wisdom in the habit of looking at the bright side of life.

No boy's education is complete until he has been taught to accept nothing from life except what he can win with his own hands. We all must work. We all have some job to do.

More important than wealth and position in the determination of individual happiness are good manners. . . They give a person poise and dignity. They are evidence of real worth.

The person who lacks purpose makes a good follower, but a poor leader . . .

Thoughtfulness of others helps make others thoughtful of us . . .

The person who lacks purpose will never go far or do much.

The fact is that nothing earthly can fill the void in the human heart.

Without religious faith there can be no lasting enthusiasm. Man cannot lift himself by tugging at his own bootstraps.

The value we put on anything is revealed by what we are willing to sacrifice to possess it.

No one is too good to perform whatever is required of him.

Gratitude is the flower in the wilderness, the leavening of life, and the song amidst sorrows.

Nothing costs so little as a few words of recognition.

All growth must come from the inside – by starting with yourself, you realise that within you, you have the germ of goodness, based upon faith in Almighty God.

We are not created for time, but for eternity.

## SECTION 6

# What Today's Youth Carers, Educators and Parents, might Learn from Father Flanagan and The Boys Town Model

This is a very short section as no attempt is made to be prescriptive as to what youth carers and others involved with young people might, or should, learn from Father Flanagan and the Boys Town Model. To do so, would be very presumptuous of the Sligo Father Flanagan Committee. Rather the purpose of this section is to make an appeal to parents and all those people and organisations which have custody of young people, including those involved in their care, development and education, to honestly ask themselves if they could make improvements to what they are doing and in the way they are doing it, in the light of the messages coming through from Father Flanagan and the Boys Town Model.

We are all surely aware of the very big problems we have in Ireland (and no doubt elsewhere) concerning our youth. These problems would include:

- Public disorder and unsociable behaviour
- Alcohol abuse
- Drug taking and other substance abuse
- Theft (very often to feed bad habits of alcohol and substance abuse)
- Criminal attacks on fellow citizens, including murder
- Disrespect for property, the environment and indeed for society as a whole, including avoidable road deaths
- Suicide

Obviously, the foregoing problems are not confined to young people. However, in many instances where they do relate to older people they will almost certainly have had an origin in earlier life, as Father Flanagan discovered in his early days in Omaha, Nebraska, when caring for 'down and out' men.

Thus it behoves all of us in society to play our part in dealing with these problems. It seems that Father Flanagan may have the answer for us. Let us give him our serious attention. **If we only could manage to take his most pertinent 'sayings' to heart and try to apply them in our lives as parents, teachers, carers, custodians, or whatever, then surely the future horizons of many of our young people would be greatly enhanced.**

**“The fact is that nothing earthly can fill the void in the human heart.”**

## SECTION 7

# Promoting the Canonization of Father Flanagan

Father Flanagan was a deep spiritual man – a man of prayer who trusted in God. He had a heart filled with the love of Jesus Christ, which he channelled into society, particularly to orphans and neglected children. The authorities generally regarded the latter as a problem, and so placed these young people in prison or in custodial orphanages.

Father Flanagan was confronted with much criticism and harsh judgements for the stand he was taking in regard to these children. “He responded with patience and renewed dedication” ( quoting from “A Saint of our Own”, Teaching Unit, by Maureen Brady and Sharon Nelsen). It is probably very clear to everyone at this stage, that Father Flanagan was no ‘push over’ and he was not going to be derailed in his tracks. Love for God and his neighbour probably seen to this.

Despite being well known to many American Presidents and to many dignitaries, and being given various Government youth assignments outside of America, Father Flanagan remained a humble man. Despite poor health he pushed himself to the limit for the sake of his youth crusade. He wrote at length in the media and elsewhere, and spoke time and time again at functions and various events, in order to spread his message.

The Boys Town Model as it operates today is surely a great edifice to Father Flanagan's painstaking work and dedication. If Father Flanagan could be asked today about the outcome of his work, he would probably say ‘I was merely doing my duty’.

**“Love is patient; love is kind;  
it is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.  
It does not insist on its own way;  
it is not irritable or resentful;  
it does not rejoice in wrong-doing,  
but rejoices in the truth.  
It bears all things, believes all things,  
hopes all things, endures all things.”**

(1 Corinthians 13 : 4 - 7; New Revised Standard Version of the Bible)

# Prayer for the Canonization of Father Flanagan

The following is the prayer that is used by the Boys Town National Alumni Association, Boys Town Nebraska, to promote the cause for the canonization of Father Flanagan:

*God of mercy, love and compassion,  
we are grateful that You gave your servant,  
Father Edward Joseph Flanagan,  
special graces to love, protect  
and guide neglected, vulnerable  
and oppressed youth.*

*Thank You that the work he began with the foundation  
of Boys Town has continued to spread throughout the world.*

*We pray that You raise Father Flanagan to sainthood,  
and inspire many to adopt his caring,  
loving ways as mentor and protector of youth.*

*Loving Father, we bring our own needs to You now,  
asking that through the intercession of Father Flanagan,  
in accordance with Your Holy Will,  
you grant these special favours:*

*(Mention your needs here)*

---

*Thank You for Your Faithfulness and Providence,  
and for hearing these petitions which we ask  
in the Name of Your Son,  
Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.*



*Photo Courtesy of: Girls and Boys Town Hall of History*

Perhaps it is apt to conclude this publication on Father Flanagan and Boys Town, by quoting a slogan that has become a universal symbol of Boys Town.

**“He ain’t heavy, Father, he’s my brother”**

The following is a brief chronology or snapshot of Father Flanagan's life and achievements under the caption "Father Flanagan's Timeline" as downloaded from web site ([www.girlsandboystown.org/aboutus/history/Flantimeline.asp](http://www.girlsandboystown.org/aboutus/history/Flantimeline.asp)):

July 13, 1886	Edward Joseph Flanagan is born on Leabeg farm, near Ballymoe, Roscommon County, Ireland.
Late Summer, 1904	Sails with brother P.A. Flanagan to America aboard the S.S. Celtic, White Star Line.
December, 1906	Suffers from double pneumonia and is sent home from St. Joseph's Seminary in New York.
October, 1907	Enters Gregorian University in Rome under the auspices of the Bishop of Omaha
February, 1908	Is sent home due to recurrence of respiratory illness.
October 5, 1909	Enrolls in the University of Innsbruck, Austria, to study theology.
July 26, 1912	Is ordained a priest in Innsbruck.
1912 – 1917	Serves in several Nebraska parishes in O'Neill and Omaha.
January, 1916	Opens Workingmen's Hotel in downtown Omaha to serve homeless and jobless men.
December 12, 1917	With a borrowed \$90, rents a home at 25th and Dodge Streets and officially opens Father Flanagan's Boys' Home to five young boys assigned to him by the court.
February 3, 1918	Prints first issue of Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal.
June 1, 1918	Moves the home to the abandoned German-American home on 13th Street.
March 29, 1921	Sends his first letter appealing for funds to support the Home to Catholic residents in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa.
May 18, 1921	Purchases Overlook Farm, ten miles west of Omaha, as future site of the Home.
October 22, 1921	Completes the Home's move to Overlook Farm.
January, 1926	Begins weekly radio show with the Boys' Home Band on Mondays at 6pm on WAOW.
February 14, 1926	Institutes first student government at the Home. Boys elect first mayor and vote to officially change the name of Overlook Farm to Boys Town.
March, 1938	Meets with J. Walter Ruben and Dore Schary of MGM to review Boys Town movie script.
June 26, 1938	Welcomes the cast and crew of Boys Town to campus for ten days of location shooting.
April 7, 1947	At the invitation of the War Department, tours Japan and Korea to investigate the need for aid for war orphans and meets with Gen. Douglas MacArthur.
July 11, 1947	Reports the findings of his Asian trip to President Harry S. Truman at the White House.
May 15, 1948	Suffers a heart attack and dies in Berlin, Germany.
May 21, 1948	Following two funeral Masses on campus, his body is entombed at Boys Town.
June 5, 1948	President Truman visits Boys Town and lays a wreath on Father Flanagan's tomb.
July 14, 1986	U.S. Postal Service holds the first day of issue ceremony for its new four-cent Father Flanagan stamp at Boys Town, 100 years after Father Flanagan's birth in Ireland

### Brief Explanation of Current Girls and Boys Town Programmes of Assistance



## Girls and Boys Town

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## Program Highlights

### Girls and Boys Town

Girls and Boys Town, the original Father Flanagan's Boys' Home, is a leader in the treatment and care of needy, abused, abandoned and neglected girls and boys through its youth care and health care programs. Founded in 1917, the nonprofit, nonsectarian organization provides these children with a safe, caring, loving environment where they gain confidence to get better and learn skills to become productive citizens, combined with state-of-the-art treatment technology to help them heal and overcome the obstacles they face. That commitment to our nation's youth placed Girls and Boys Town on the list of the 100 Best Communities for Young People as named by America's Promise Alliance in 2005. Girls and Boys Town continues to further its mission to Change the Way America Cares for Her Children and Families through its programs by partnering with communities, schools and other child-care organizations, in order to meet the growing and more diverse needs of today's children and families across the country.



### Children and Families Helped Nationally

In 2004, a record number of children — 43,654 — received help, healing and hope from Girls and Boys Town's direct care programs at 19 sites in 15 states and in the District of Columbia and the Boys Town National Research Hospital. More than 510,000 children and families were helped through the Girls and Boys Town National Hotline, and nearly one million more were served through outreach and professional training programs last year.

## Girls and Boys Town Sites

Children come from across the United States to get help from Girls and Boys Town's programs in: Trabuco Canyon and Los Angeles, Calif.; Washington, D.C.; Tallahassee, West Palm Beach and Oviedo, Fla.; Atlanta, Ga.; Glenwood, Iowa; New Orleans and Gretna, La.; Boys Town, Grand Island and Omaha, Neb.; Las Vegas, Nev.; Brooklyn and the Bronx, N.Y.; Philadelphia, Penn.; Portsmouth, R.I.; San Antonio, Texas; Chicago, Illinois; and Newark, N.J. The Council on Accreditation accredits all Girls and Boys Town sites. Girls and Boys Town National Headquarters in Boys Town, Neb., and the Boys Town National Research Hospital in Omaha, are accredited by the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Health Care Organizations. For information about our sites and programs offered at each, visit [www.girlsandboystown.org](http://www.girlsandboystown.org)

## Direct Youth Care Programs

Girls and Boys Town operates several in- and out-of-home services for children and families. Any combination of these unique and innovative programs is available at Girls and Boys Town USA sites across the country, including: Behavioral Health Services, Residential Services, Short-Term Residential Services, Family Based Services and Treatment Foster Family Services. Boys Town National Research Hospital in Omaha, Neb., also provides direct care to thousands of children each year.

## Health Care Programs

Boys Town National Research Hospital in Omaha, Neb., is recognized internationally as a leader in the diagnosis and treatment of deaf or hard of hearing children and children with speech disorders. Since opening in 1977, thousands of children from Nebraska, the United States and several foreign countries have received care at the Hospital. Countless others are touched by advances in diagnosis and treatment, parent training, professional education programs, and the world-class research of the Hospital's clinicians and research scientists. The Hospital is accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). In partnership with Alegent Health, Boys Town National Research Hospital physicians also provide general pediatric care to thousands of children, from infants to teens, at seven Boys Town Pediatrics clinics in the Omaha metro-area.

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## FATHER FLANAGAN'S SAYINGS

This Appendix contains the balance of Father Flanagan's Sayings (as contained in "A Saint of our Own", Teaching Unit, by Maureen Brady and Sharon Nelsen) which were not listed heretofore in section 5 of this booklet:

- Our young people are our greatest wealth. Give them a chance and they will give a good account of themselves.
- The war is over, but there is still no peace because there is everywhere too much hatred and envy, and too little love.
- Pray, for prayer can work miracles. The child in an unreligious home hasn't got a chance.
- I have little patience with people who are constantly talking about the difficulties of raising good children in an age so filled with distractions as this, and at the same time they themselves are part of that age, and adding to the pitfalls of the young.
- The poor, innocent, unfortunate little children belong to us, and it is our problem to give them every chance to develop into good men and women.
- The higher the ideal the more work is required to accomplish it. Do not expect to become a great success in life if you are not willing to work for it.
- Often, it has been said that youth is the nation's greatest asset. But it is more than that – it is the world's greatest asset. More than that, it is, perhaps, the world's only hope.
- The whole family should unite in a community prayer each night to bring God Back to the home and rebuild it as a spiritual unit of a hoped-for new world.
- Don't let your children down. Draw close to them, help them prepare for sound, Christian, American manhood and citizenship.
- We, as citizens, must necessarily be united by a bond unity based on the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man.
- Youth needs the force of good and attractive examples. Children are not philosophers, but they are apt imitators. They may be easily led to follow where they cannot be driven.
- If we are to build citizens of tomorrow, we must emphasise today the importance of proper incentive, of wholesome recreation, of sympathetic guidance and helpful environment.
- When you help a child today, you write the history of tomorrow.
- It has always been a source of great satisfaction to me to watch a child acquire strength and dignity of character. Children acquire character through their desire to emulate and practice the principles of right living laid before them by those they love and respect.
- Youth is a time of dreams, of high aspirations and enthusiasm. Criticism, neglect, and indifference have a withering effect on the spirit of the growing boy or girl. They take out of them the zest for life which God put under their ribs.

- Parents stand on a pinnacle of honour in society, and in their hands are the precious souls of their loved ones to be formed and shaped into types that will meet with the wish of the Creator.
- Isn't sacrifice the real measure of love? Genuine love in married life comes only to two people who are mutually and supremely unselfish.
- Some of the finest people in the world go through life under a handicap because they never learned how to play when they were children.
- Just as the way to have friends is to be a friend, so too the way to win respect is to show respect.
- To be the kind of person God intended one to be is the crowning achievement of right living. Get an education, get friends, get a worthwhile goal to strive for – but first get character, for character is the foundation upon which the superstructure of a successful life is built.
- You and I must pray. We must pray unceasingly, perseveringly. Our homes must become sanctuaries of prayer. We must grow strong through prayer and sacrifice.
- If we want to live in a good world, then we must help to make it that kind of world by our acts and prayers. If we want goodwill to reign, then we must see first that we are people of goodwill.
- I like to think of music as being the language of the soul. It reveals to us truth and beauty beyond the power of words to describe. Music goes beyond the barriers of race, creed, or geography. It is a spiritual medium of mutual fellowship for all people – for the rich and the poor, for the mighty and the meek, for the old and for the young.
- Every act of courtesy is a recognition of the rights of the person to whom courtesy is shown.
- Every child is better off for earning at least part of what he or she spends. It is a parent's responsibility to teach a child to be thrifty, to pay his or her own way, and still be willing to share with those in need.
- Character is formed by doing the thing we are supposed to do, when it should be done, whether we feel like doing it or not. We sometimes forget that without happiness there is no such thing as success, and no one can be truly happy unless he or she is of service to others.
- Faith and work make a triumphant combination.
- Achievement is the meter of growth, and we must grow mentally and spiritually as well as in years.
- What we are or hope to become is revealed by the values we cherish. Value is the wellspring of action. To value is to desire, to desire is to strive, and to strive is to become.
- Through music, melody and rhythm find their way into the secret places of the soul, radiating joy.

"Boys Town, A Photographic History"  
*Published by The Donning Company*

"A Saint of our Own"  
*Teaching Unit by Maureen Brady and Sharon Nelsen*

"Images of America, Boys Town, The Constant Spirit"  
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Boys Town Times  
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Girls and Boys Town Hall of History  
*Mr. Tom Lynch, Curator*

Girls and Boys Town Public Relations Department  
*Mr. John Melingagio, Director*

[www.girlsandboystown.org/aboutus](http://www.girlsandboystown.org/aboutus)

[www.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark](http://www.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark)

[www.catholichomeschooling.com/curr](http://www.catholichomeschooling.com/curr)

*The story of Father Edward Joseph Flanagan who died in 1948 is an amazing and gripping story and one that is totally relevant today for anybody with responsibility for young people.*

*The story is beautifully captured in this short booklet, and also in poetic form in the lovely poem written by John Duggan.*

*Young people too and indeed all age groups, reading this booklet, will surely find the 'signposts for life' clearly marked out from the many quotations from Father Flanagan.*

EDITOR

“I have yet to find a boy  
that wants to be bad.”

FR. FLANAGAN

“There are no bad boys  
... only bad environment”

FR. FLANAGAN

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