

Father Flanagan

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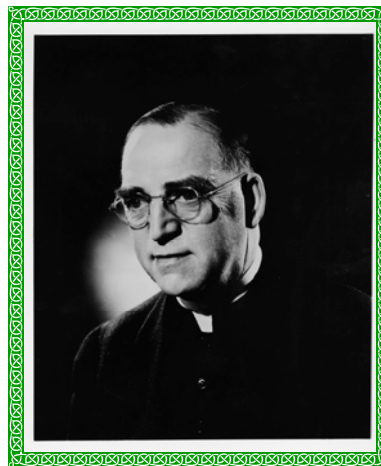
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Father Flanagan's Speech, Radio Station WOAW November 14, 1925

Dear Children, there is no life that can be called a success if it has put God out of its consideration. You may be good in your school work, you may have a certain talent for making friends, you may have all the qualities that make for success in life, but if your sole purpose is to gain success in life to the exclusion of God and eternity, what have you gained? And children, we hear a great deal about citizenship and the need of developing children so that they will become useful members of society. But I challenge the world with this statement that unless you take God into your lives and live according to His Divine Law, you cannot be good citizens. If you do not recognize God's law, you will necessarily violate it. If you do not care to know or learn anything about God, your Creator, you cannot love Him. And if you don't love Him, there will be no inclination on your part, in your daily life to avoid offending Him. If you regard your parents only in the light of protectors and suppliers of the necessities and luxuries of life, and maintain a faint hearted and deceptive attitude of respect toward them, then you do not love them truly because you do not love God and do not look upon them as God's representatives over you, and the time will come when you may dishonor their gray hairs and compensate them with broken hearts for their love and sacrifice for you.

And then again, we must love our

neighbor other than our parents, not because our neighbor can or may help us, but because he is our brother and it is God's law. What kind of a world would this be, my dear children, if we regard our neighbor merely from a utilitarian standpoint, of merely using him for our



personal advantage? If there is no golden chain to link humanity together, built on the love of God, how can man be expected to regard his fellow man in any other light than a mere mercenary slave to crush him for personal gain or use him as a tool for the same mercenary and selfish purpose...Patriotism would find no niche in our citadel of citizenship; justice no consideration, morality will be a virtue just to be trampled upon and the

(continued on page 2)

Tribute to Father Flanagan on KBON, May 20, 1948

by *Dr. Thomas R. Niven, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Omaha*

I have seen him in all sorts of situations... He was a many-sided man of God, who had the broad, generous spirit toward all good men of all faiths, a man indeed who recognized the catholicity of goodness and genuineness. The world will long look to Boys Town as a center where a great man interpreted the mind of Christ...

FATHER FLANAGAN



Born July 13, 1886,
Leabeg Farm, Ballymoe,
County Galway, Ireland.

*

Ordained, July 26, 1912,
Innsbruck, Austria.

*

Founded Father Flanagan's
Boys' Home,
25th & Dodge, Omaha,
December 12, 1917.

*

Moved Home to
German-American Home,
South 13th St., Omaha,
June 1, 1918.

*

Moved to Overlook Farm
(present site)
October 17, 1921.

*

Invested as a monsignor,
November 21, 1937.

*

World premiere of movie,
"Boys Town,"
September 7, 1938.

*

Spoke out against child
abuse in native Ireland on
visit there, June, 1946.

*

Met General MacArthur
in Japan to develop care
program for war orphans.

*

Sent to Europe by President
Truman to aide war or-
phans. February 26, 1948.

*

Died May 15, 1948,
Berlin, Germany

A Boys Town Alum's Story—Dan Shields, Class of 1978

Editor's Note: Dan has served as president of the Alumni local chapter and national board and as mentor at Boys Town middle school.

February 18, 1975, my life changed. I made a decision with the help of my pastor, Fr. Reilly that I would leave Deptford, N.J. and pursue an opportunity that would help me succeed in life. I was only sixteen years old. Father and I talked and planned for some time to determine where I could go and live. I knew and he knew my best chance would be to leave New Jersey. Father showed me an article in the Camden County Catholic Voice about Father Flanagan's Boys Home. We pursued getting me accepted to Boys Town. I was turned down.

My Dad was a disabled veteran. My mom stayed at home. I had four wonderful sisters and I was the only brother. I knew I needed this chance. After informing my Mom and Dad about my application and the refusal, we called my cousin in North Jersey. Father Reilly talked to him and read him the refusal letter. My cousin Buddy said he would call us back after contacting Boys Town. This was in September, 1974. Twenty minutes later, Buddy called us back and said I would be leaving on February 18th.

Public school was called off that day. My family and two best friends planned to attend morning mass at our church, St. John's. To my surprise, the church was packed. Every little old lady and gentlemen to whom I had delivered newspapers or cut grass was at the mass. They prayed that I would have a safe journey. After mass they all wished me well.

The neighbor had a breakfast in my honor and then she took us to the Philadelphia airport—my sisters, my mom, dad and my two buddies. I had never been on an airplane or in the airport before. I was excited about going to Boys Town. It was my decision and I was looking forward to the opportunities ahead of me. The flight number sounded over the loud speaker; it was time to board.

Tears of fear and of saying good-by filled the room.

The plane would take me through Chicago to Omaha, Nebraska. My life would be changed forever.

I arrived in Omaha and was met by a couple of guys from Boys Town. There was so much snow on the ground I asked if I was in Alaska. My journey had just begun. I was in orientation for a week then moved into cottage 25. The house had ten guys; I would make the 11th. I moved into a room with two other guys. I had three meals a day, I had heat during the cold, this was a whole new world I had entered. I recognized the opportunities that were laid out in front of me.

That Easter, I was writing a letter to my Dad and was crying and sobbing like a baby. I knew I had more than my family and that made me sad. My Dad, God rest his soul, asked me to do two things: to go to church and to never give in to loneliness.

I used to say I grew up a poor kid; my sisters and I took care of each other, of the family. But Boys Town opened my eyes to the love that the family had. I realized I was the richest person in the world. Love to me is another form of richness and I had lots of that—my aunts, my uncle, the neighbors, the parish for all the food baskets, the people who wished me well the day I left home, and the dedicated people who were carrying on Father Flanagan's dreams. I was the richest kid in the world. I love Boys Town. I have made many new friends and I remain connected to the Home. It is because of the love and the opportunities Boys Town gave me, that I am successful today. I do not know what I would be doing if I had not made the decision to go to Boys Town; I can tell you what I have done because Boys Town was part of my life. I often visit Father's gravesite and thank him privately for the opportunities I was given. I thank him and I let everyone know I graduated from Boys Town. I will continue to serve and to thank Father Flanagan for the rest of my days.



Dan Shields Family
(Clockwise, beginning top left):
Stefen, Matt, Patrick,
Lori, Dan, and Michael

(Fr. Flanagan Speech, continued from Page 1) rights of womanhood violated at the will and command of the passions of brutal humanity... Might will be a weapon in the hands of the powerful to trample under foot all the just claims of weaker humanity. As a result, too, poverty, sickness and disease will pervade the land, and our National pride of boasted citizenship will be but a dying echo of the truly great religious men and women of self-sacrificing living who handed over to us a great country to safeguard, but we were found unworthy of the inheritance. No, my dear children, no country or no people can become or continue to be truly great without being imbued with and directed by those great moral precepts of God's law, and you, dear children, are a part of this country and this people. Oh, if I could only impress upon you the great significance of these truths. If I could really brand them deep in your very minds so that the vicious snares of adult humanity would not fetter your trembling feet and become a stumbling block towards your progress; then I would feel something of lasting good would be accomplished for God and country...

Several years ago, the Boys Town Alumni began searching for an official way to thank Boys Town for the gift of new life they had received through the legacy of the Founder. As they reflected on their blessings and benefits, they realized the exceptional scope and depth of love that had generated the founding and ongoing development of The Home, their home—the center of nurturing and sustenance that literally transformed them. They recognized holiness in the person who so positively had affected their lives. They realized that they were the fruits of his labor; they were his family, his heritage and not only was it appropriate to return thanks for the new life they had received, but it was time to spread the good news about the sanctity of their earthly, spiritual father.

And so, the Alumni initiated two endeavors:

- 1) Promoting devotion to Father Flanagan
- 2) “Twinning” of Boys Town, Nebraska, with Ballymoe, Ireland, Father Flanagan’s birthplace.

Father Flanagan League

The work of the League continues:

- Second Tuesdays, after the 11:40 A.M. Mass, 15 to 30 people gather in Father Flanagan’s tomb to ask his intercession and to ask God to raise him to sainthood as Protector of Youth for the Church.
- Another group gathers at Fr. Flanagan’s home parish in Ballymoe, Ireland and additional groups are being formed throughout the U.S. and Ireland.
- Prayer cards, prayer leaflets, photo posters, biographical materials, reprints of Father’s writings, video clips, a teaching unit for children, instructions for initiating prayer groups, and presentations to groups are available upon request.
- Testimonies about Fr. Flanagan and testimonies of answered prayers are being gathered and recorded.

Two Statues and a Twinning

On October 7, 2001, Father Flanagan returned to his birthplace in the likeness of a life size bronze statue commissioned by the alumni association and created by sculptor Fred Hoppe. The village of 75 swelled to over 800, as representatives from church, government, family, alumni, friends of Girls and Boys Town, schools, organizations, parishioners and residents gathered to acknowledge the gift of the “Son of Ballymoe”.

Dr. Christopher Jones, Bishop of Elphin, blessed the statue: “God our Father, we thank you for the life and ministry of Fr. Edward J. Flanagan who made such an impact on the lives of countless children in helping them to realize their dignity and worth...”



Fr. Val Peter, Director and “Caretaker of Fr. Flanagan’s Dreams,” said “three words of thanks...to the Republic of Ireland, you gave us Fr. Flanagan...to...the counties Galway and Roscommon, you raised Fr. Flanagan...and... To...the citizens of this village, Ballymoe, this was the place Fr. Flanagan dreamed his dreams. He believed he could make a difference in the world. He did.” **Fr. Peter McVerry, SJ**, caretaker of homeless youth in Dublin, said: “What Fr. 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.”

On October 5, 2002, at Girls and Boys Town, the official twinning ceremony took place following the dedication of an identical bronze statue erected in front of Fr. Flanagan’s Boys Town residence and the declaration of October 5th as “Girls and Boys Town Day” in the City of Omaha. Again, representatives from multiple groups and Fr. Flanagan’s birthplace and workplace, gathered to acknowledge this protector of youth, an immigrant priest who heroically responded to God’s call to love, knowing that “The work will continue, you see, whether I am there or not, because it is God’s work, not mine.”

Manifestation of the work of Fr. Flanagan was recognizable not only in the children of Girls and Boys Town, the alumni, government officials and delegations who gathered that day, but also in the presence of two sons of Boys Town: **Fr. John Rizzo** who celebrated the dedication mass, and **Monsignor Joseph Ariano** who led the closing prayer at the dedication. What the Alumni began has become more than a statue, more than a project; their inspiration launched an ever-deepening relationship of sharing and support between Girls and Boys Town and the people of Ireland, rekindling the inspirations of a holy man whose work continues to challenge us to respond with the mind of Christ.

-Sharon Nelsen, Editor



**Father Flanagan League:
Society of Devotion**

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Boys Town, NE 68010

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“The gentleness of this great man’s soul is traceable to the fact that he fellowshipped with the Eternal Son of Man.”
Rev. Dr. Thomas R. Niven, 1948



One hundred Founders’ Edition 18” miniatures have been cast of the Fred Hoppe statue of Fr. Flanagan. Some are still available for sale at \$1,850.00.

To reserve yours or request more information, call (800) 345-0458. Credit cards are accepted.

Some of the Signs of Holiness in Father Flanagan:

- His ministry flowed out of a love for Christ.
- He was a man of deep and constant prayer, who urged those who worked with him to pray.
- He generated a community of loving concern in those who served youth with him.

League Prayer

✻ Send to: ✻

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 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 favors: _____.

Mail all requests for prayers, materials or presentations, all testimonies of answered prayers, to:
Fr. Flanagan League: Society of Devotion
14957 Flanagan Blvd.
Boys Town, NE 68010

*Please place my prayer request at
Father Flanagan’s tomb.*

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