



Girls An Important Part Of The Famous Boys Town Family

by Father Val J. Peter, JCD, STD

(NAPS)—An 83-year-old organization like ours has many landmark moments, but the most recent extension of our name to girls is important in propelling us into the new millennium.



Father Val Peter

At the beginning of the last century, Father Flanagan, our founder, saw the problems faced by young boys and dreamed of a home and a family for his boys.

Last August 24 was an historic day in the life and dreams of the place Father Flanagan built—The Village of Boys Town, Nebraska, and its 18 sites in 15 states and Washington, D.C.

It was the day all of its citizens voted to extend the name of Boys Town to girls. This vote by our children from across the country reflects the fact that girls, too, are part of our family. In fact, half of the 33,000 children directly cared for by Girls and Boys Town last year were female.

Just as with boys, young women come to us today as victims of a society that throws away childhood. These young women come to us with a teddy bear in one hand and a syringe in the other.

Years ago, they might have been abandoned on the streets. Today they are abandoned in their own homes—victims of abuse and neglect. They do not like themselves, and they usually do not like anyone else either.

Yet every girl and boy wakes up one morning and says: "I wish I had a second chance." A second chance means giving them the skills and virtues they need to get their needs met in prosocial ways. We don't believe in sitting around praising kids and doing nothing else. If we did, they would wake up the next morning realizing they still didn't have the skills to succeed, and the praise was empty.

One of the keys for children in the 21st century is performance must proceed self-esteem. They must work and sacrifice to be successful. They need to learn skills, build relationships and learn to take control of their own lives.

Self-government also is a hallmark of Girls and Boys Town. It has been for decades. Our founder named his original Nebraska home for children "Father Flanagan's Boys' Home." On Valentine's Day, 1926, the boys voted overwhelmingly to change the name to "Boys Town." They said the original name sounded like a place for bad kids, and they knew Father Flanagan believed there was no such thing as a bad boy or girl.

The vote to extend our name to girls was an acknowledgment of who we really are. A "yes" vote meant all the girls of America would know Father Flanagan was opening his arms to give each of them that very, very important second chance. The vote was acknowledging girls are part of our family and have been for more than 20 years.

A "no" vote would be a vote for keeping with tradition.

The boys and girls spoke with a 67 percent response in favor of extending our name to Girls and Boys Town.

After the vote, one of our twelve-year-old girls said it best: "I was so proud to vote yes and be part of historic change. I am sure that Father Flanagan welcomes us girls as his daughters as much as he welcomed boys as his sons."

"He ain't heavy, Father, he's my brother." "She ain't heavy, Father, she's my sister." The legend continues.

Father Val Peter is executive director of Girls and Boys Town, the original Father Flanagan's Boys' Home in Boys Town, Neb., and in California, New York, Louisiana, Texas, Florida, Nevada, Rhode Island, Iowa, Pennsylvania, Georgia and Washington, D.C.