



FAMILY SPOTLIGHT

THOUGHTS FROM GIRLS AND BOYS TOWN

The Original Father Flanagan's Boys' Home

If Not For The Irish

Father Val J. Peter, JCD, STD

(NAPSA)—Of all the Irishmen to remember on St. Patrick's Day, Girls and Boys Town founder, Father Edward J. Flanagan, easily ranks in the Top 10.



Val J. Peter

The ranking is not for the great things he accomplished, which were many, but the way he accomplished them. Father Flanagan is as much a role model to youth today, as he was nearly a century ago.

Eddie Flanagan immigrated from the Emerald Isle in 1908 with his family, fleeing British oppression. While most immigrants would rightfully consider the trip across the Atlantic and the struggle to succeed in a strange land a victory in itself, Eddie Flanagan had a dream and role model that inspired him to greater things.

His dream was to help others. His role model was St. Patrick, himself.

Eddie began life in America with people telling him he did not have the right stuff to succeed. While applying to study for the priesthood in New York City, he was dismissed as an "Irish immigrant lad of little promise." He left for Omaha, Nebraska, after being told to go to the Midwest where they will "take anybody."

The Omaha bishop quickly determined he was a lad of significant promise, and immediately sent him to Rome for his education.

Young E.J. only lasted about three months. The climate exacerbated the health problems that plagued him his entire life. He returned to Omaha a failure.

However, he was resilient and determined. He went to work in the Omaha packing plants, restored his health, and applied to study for the priesthood again. This time, he was sent to Innsbruck in Austria, and he flourished.

After his ordination, it was

Father Flanagan's great faith—a faith that was passed down to his family from St. Patrick—that set him in motion.

He began helping down-and-out men, yet they lost hope in spite of Father Flanagan's efforts. Determined, Father Flanagan hatched his plan to help what he called "embryo men."

His faith was evident when he was forced out of Omaha into the surrounding rural farm country because he helped children of all races and creeds live together in peace.

This faith kept him and his young enterprise going during the hardscrabble days of depression and war, and led him, in spite of ill health, on two missions for the President of the United States.

Father Flanagan became a national hero after traveling to Asia and Europe for President Truman. Tragically, he died of a massive heart attack while on the second mission in 1948 in Berlin, Germany. But his faith continues to carry his dreams.

He once said, "The work will continue you see, because it is God's work, not mine."

That is what the thousands of children he knew and those his dream continues to help will remember—that he was a man of faith who was not afraid to fight for them and change their lives for the better. And, how he loved St. Patrick's Day.

Girls and Boys Town, the original Father Flanagan's Boys' Home, is a leader in the direct treatment and care of abused, abandoned and neglected girls and boys. Through 19 sites across the country, the organization directly cares for more than 37,000 girls and boys annually.

Girls and Boys Town also assists 1.5 million children and parents through its National Hotline (1-800-448-3000), outreach and training programs and community partnerships.

