

June 7, 2009

Dear Friends,

I heard about Father Edward Flanagan when I was young. He was a priest from Ireland and the founder of Boys Town made famous in a 1938 movie starring Spencer Tracy and Mickey Rooney.

Even though he died in 1948 his name appeared on the internet in the wake of the recent scandal that came to light in Ireland. Clericalwhispers.blogspot.com described Father Flanagan as a lone voice in condemning Ireland's industrial schools back in the 1940s.

Father Flanagan established Boys Town in 1921 on an abandoned farm ten miles west of Omaha. Findagrave.com praised Father Flanagan as a social reformer who changed the way our country handled troubled children by substituting education and vocational training in a setting that resembled a small town with self government operated by the boys themselves.

It is difficult for us to imagine how Boys Town must have changed things. Prior to the concept of Boys Town, prison was seen as a solution. At Boys Town, the residents enjoyed living in an environment that was not fenced in. Father Flanagan said he was "Not building a prison. This is a home. You do not wall in members of your own family."

Father Flanagan returned to Ireland in 1946 and was unhappy with what he saw. It was "a scandal, un-Christ like and wrong." In County Cork, at the Savoy Cinema, Father Flanagan said "I do not believe that a child can be reformed by lock and key and bars, or that fear can ever develop a child's character."

Boystown.org offers parents good advice. "Parenting is one of the most important and challenging jobs many of us will undertake. At Boys Town we strive to be a beacon of hope to parents and children across the country. Here are a few ways we can help:"

- Boys Town National Hotline for parents and teens. Call **1-800-448-3000** to get help with your toughest parenting challenges. It has helped thousands of parents and children deal with crisis that could have led to some very unhappy circumstances.
- Parenting.org is a Boys Town owned and operated website, which offers free parenting tips, advice, resources and guidance. It is dedicated with helping parents with everyday issues. Advice on school, safety, parenting and life's lessons are designed to give you ideas that are easy to use and effective. There is even an area on how to teach social skills to your children.

I listened to Demarco's success story. He said he was grateful for Boys Town. He was in foster and group homes since he was three years old. He began rebelling as a teenager and went to Boys Town at the age of 15. Without Boys Town Demarco said he might have been in prison or even dead. Instead he has a good job, a wife of eleven years and two children of his own. He credited Boys Town with providing him stability and the chance to watch a functional family.

Father Paul Q. Gary