



From Deacon Mark Miller's Desk

Did you know, that one of America's earliest acknowledged childcare experts was a Catholic priest? Father Edward Flanagan founded Boys Town outside Omaha Nebraska in 1916, and the Congregation for Saints' Causes is now reviewing his life's work

The Irish-born Fr. Flanagan was ordained a priest for the diocese of Omaha in 1912. Life was hard in the primarily rural Nebraska when he arrived. He began working with the homeless. That work led him to recognize the larger problem of homeless, often troubled, youth. In 1916 his bishop granted the young priest approval to devote his energies towards helping and rehabilitating troubled young boys. And Boys Town was born. [Girls were first admitted in 1979.]

His first residents were five newsboys who were wards of the court. More boys arrived under court order from throughout the Midwest. Some boys were sent by their parents or by well-intentioned citizens. Other boys made the trek to Boys Town on their own. Boys Town welcomed all boys regardless of their race or religion – a practice unheard of at that time and one for which he received much criticism. He addressed the issue this way: *"I know when the idea of a boys' home grew in my mind, I never thought of anything remarkable about taking in all of the races and all of the creeds. To me, they are all God's children. They are my brothers. They are children of God. I must protect them to the best of my ability."*

Fr. Flanagan once explained his philosophy in this way: *"There are no bad boys. There is only bad environment, bad training, bad example, bad thinking."* The daily schedule at Boys Town was designed to be as normal as that of any boy living at home. Residents spent the day in school and vocational training. Hobbies were encouraged and work on the Boys Town farm was part of the regimen. Boys Town success was so well known that Superman placed Lex Luthor's nephew Lenny there in *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace* telling the priest Lenny was raised under a bad influence.

Spencer Tracy portrayed Fr. Flanagan in the 1938 Film "Boys Town." Tracy won the Academy Award for his portrayal, and the resulting publicity brought greater recognition to Fr. Flanagan's work. He died in 1948 while in Germany where he was helping devise a plan to care for post-war orphans. He always believed his work would continue after his death. He said: *"The work will continue, you see, whether I am there or not because it is God's work, not mine."*