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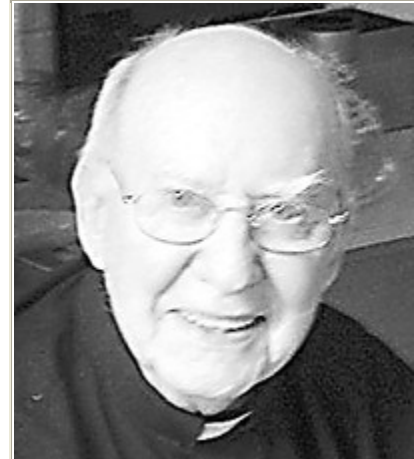
High school honors its 'father' of Marianist spirituality

by Barbara Watkins, Review Staff Writer

Sept. 8 was an emotional day at St. Mary's High School in South St. Louis, as the school honored Marianist Father Richard O'Shaughnessy, alumnus, educator and "father of our lay Marianist spirituality."

St. Mary's dedicated the Father Richard O'Shaughnessy Center for Faith Formation on the school campus.

"This dedication is not about a building or a place," said Father Mitchell Doyen, St. Mary's president. "It's about Father O'Shaughnessy's spirit and passion for Marianist education that permeates the entire mission of St. Mary's High School."



FR. RICHARD
O'SHAUGHNESSY

St. Mary's, an archdiocesan high school for young men, educates in the Marianist tradition.

"Here at St. Mary's, Father O'Shaughnessy is our brother, and he has been our spiritual father," said principal Kevin Hacker. "He has been a mentor to us, and he got the lay Marianist communities going here."

Nearly half of the St. Mary's faculty and some spouses are vowed lay Marianists, including Hacker. School president Father Mitchell Doyen said the Marianist charism is at the heart of the school. And that charism is tied to Father O'Shaughnessy, who has been an integral part of St. Mary's since his own high school days there.

"Perhaps Father O'Shaughnessy's greatest legacy is his passion for the formation of lay Marianists and the building up of our lay Marianist spirituality," Father Doyen said.

To honor him, St. Mary's held the dedication, which followed a Mass on the feast of the birth of Mary, celebrated in the school gym with the school's leadership team, board of directors, faculty, staff, students, parents and alumni, along with some special guests. The Mass included "our renewed commitment to be missionaries of Mary in the world today," according to the invitation.

Because of health issues, Father O'Shaughnessy, 90, did not attend the dedication in person. Instead he participated through a video conference between St. Mary's and his Marianist residence at St. Mary's University in San Antonio.

"It was very special and very emotional," Father O'Shaughnessy told the Review in a telephone interview. "I knew it was coming, but I didn't know exactly what would happen. I was very moved."

The garden area in front of the school now contains a pedestal with a plaque that bears Father O'Shaughnessy's picture and words of praise for his long service. "May his guiding spirit always be with us," the plaque reads.

In conjunction with the celebration, St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay, a St. Mary's graduate, proclaimed Sept. 8 Father Richard O'Shaughnessy Day.

Hacker said, "Father O'Shaughnessy spent his adolescence, middle age and old age here at St. Mary's High School — kind of the three ages of man. That's unique."

Father O'Shaughnessy graduated in 1936 from Southside Catholic High School, the predecessor of St. Mary's. "I was in the second graduating class," he said.

He went on to earn a bachelor's degree in education from the University of Dayton, a master's degree in English from the University of Notre Dame and pursued studies at St. Louis University, Catholic University of America, the University of San Francisco and Trinity University in San Antonio. He entered the Marianists in 1937, professed his final vows in 1942 and was ordained a priest in 1947.

Father O'Shaughnessy served at St. Mary's for many years over several assignments. "I think it was five times," he said. "The last time I came back was in 1984, and I remained all those years since."

He taught through the 2007-2008 school year, then moved to San Antonio.

Hacker said, "Father taught the college credit English class. He had a great passion for literature and very much enjoyed the kids. He had the passion to be in the classroom at close to 90 years of age, and the students had a great respect for him. He pushed them to be the best they can be."

Father O'Shaughnessy said, "I'm very grateful for the influence I have had on some of the students. To me St. Mary's is the greatest school. And that's not just because I went there. It's because of the spirit of the place. It's just delightful to be at St. Mary's High School."



Rebecca Venegoni Tower

GETTING READY - Father Michael Doyen, left, president of St. Mary's High School, watches as final preparations are made for the school's Sept. 8 dedication honoring Marianist Father Richard O'Shaughnessy, an integral part of the school for many years. Father O'Shaughnessy, 90, lives in a Marianist residence in San Antonio and participated through a video conference. The video equipment is at right.