

BRO. JEROME BOMMER

Celebrating 60 years of profession

I am the oldest and the only male of four children of Marcella and Ernest Bommer. I was born on October 19, 1933, in Milwaukee. Eventually, I grew up with three wonderful sisters: Micki, Carleen, and Jeanne. During my grade school years I attended two parish schools on Milwaukee's north side: St. Leo's and St. Michael's. In both parishes the schools were under the direction of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. I graduated from St. Michael's in June 1947. Though I wanted to go to a school on the north side, my dad decided that I would attend Don Bosco, a new high school on the south side of Milwaukee run by the Marianists.

During my high school years, many good brothers influenced me. Bro. John A. Leies (Smiley) was my freshman and junior homeroom moderator and taught me religion and English for both of those years. He was a capable teacher even though he looked as young as his students. Bro. Jim Powers was my boxing coach. Bro. John Kurz was the athletic director and I was one of his managers. We spent a few evenings washing football uniforms; getting the grass stains out of gold pants was a challenge that required Fels Naptha and a scrubbing board. Bro. Dan Sharpe was my best high school teacher. Bro. John Donohoo was a talented, energetic teacher who enjoyed life and shared that joy with his students. Bro. Fred Schilling was my senior homeroom moderator and religion teacher. He also was my Latin and German teacher. At times when he thought a student was not paying attention in his class, Bro. Fred would bring him back to the task-at-hand by saying, "I do not wish to waste my sweetness on the desert air." I especially remember my principal, Bro. Ed Houston, who never raised his voice, but always had our attention. At one time or another during my junior and senior years, I was invited by Bros. Powers, Kurz, and Schilling to consider joining the Brothers. The Marianists at Don Bosco had a powerful effect on me; a week after graduation I turned in the necessary papers.

I spent a year at the Marianist novitiate in Galesville, Wis., with 40 young men, mostly from San Antonio and St. Louis. I made my first vows on Aug. 15, 1952. I spent the next year studying at Maryhurst Normal in St. Louis, where I especially appreciated the guidance of Fr. Norbert Moellering and the English literature course of Bro. Al Stein. Two more years of study at St. Mary's University in San Antonio provided me with a bachelor of arts degree in history with minors in English and education. Though I had many good teachers, I was especially impressed with Bro. Joe Schmitz, who

taught U.S. and Latin American history. He was knowledgeable, organized, and taught in a dynamic and interesting way--traits I tried to imitate as a teacher. During my days at St. Mary's I also learned how to prune trees; I spent most of my work periods in the pecan grove.

My first teaching assignment was at St. Mary's High School in South St. Louis. I spent eight wonderful years there, teaching courses in religion and social studies, and for five of those years being the athletic director. The highlight event of those years was winning the 1961 city championship in football. Under the leadership of a great coach and even better person, Bill Newhouse, St. Mary's upset the public school champions in the Thanksgiving Day game. We had come so close before, but this time we did it! I also learned a lot about teaching from my older brothers, especially Bro. Leo Drexler, who had a genuine respect for his students, and Fr. Charles O'Neill, whom I found to be an able and willing counselor. During the summers I attend St. Louis University in pursuit of a master's degree in American history, which I earned in 1964.

After a year in the second novitiate at Glencoe, Mo., I spent five years as assistant principal at St. John Vianney High school in south St. Louis County. I was not familiar with the responsibilities of the position, but I managed with the patient guidance of Bro. Fred Weisbruch, the principal, and with some assistance from my fellow brothers, especially Bro. Bob Godfrey, who taught me how to create a master schedule the "E-Z Benz" way. For five years I was disciplinarian, registrar, sophomore guidance counselor, and taught two classes of U.S. history. During the summer I would oversee the summer school, manage the office, create next year's schedule and attend St. Louis University to obtain the necessary credits for a lifetime Missouri certification in high school administration. I had no trouble sleeping at night.

In 1969 I asked my superiors to free me from high school administration and was subsequently assigned Director of the Marianist Community in Pueblo, Colo. For two years I enjoyed teaching history and religion at Roncalli High School and moderating the future teachers' and the ski clubs. In 1971 the bishop of southern Colorado closed all the Catholic schools in the city of Pueblo. So after two years, I was back in St. Louis serving as assistant principal of St. Mary's High School for one year and then principal for four years. Next, I moved to St. John Vianney High School where I served as principal until 1982. With the prodding of Vianney's able football coach and Athletic Director, Don Heeb, lights were added to Vianney's stadium and night high school

football was reintroduced to the St. Louis community. The faculty at Vianney was very professional; it was the best faculty I have ever had the pleasure of leading.

During the following academic year I spent a spiritually and physically rejuvenating semester in the renewal program sponsored by the Christian Brothers at the Sangre de Cristo Center in Santa Fe, N.M., and another semester studying the economics and politics of the third world at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. I used some of what I learned that semester in my religion classes at Daniel J. Gross High School in Omaha, Neb., where I spent four very restful and rewarding years. The kids were a joy to teach, and I had no administrative responsibilities except to be director of a pleasant group of my fellow brothers.

In 1987 I became principal of Nolan Catholic High School in Ft. Worth, Texas. These were the most challenging years of my professional life. Besides operating a middle school and a high school for eight hundred and 50 students, \$2 million dollars needed to be raised, an academic wing had to be designed and built, and all the asbestos throughout the school had to be removed. In addition, bleachers and lights for the athletic field were put in, and the school was air conditioned. Thank God I had a lot of help. I am especially grateful to Bro. Peter Loehr, who supervised the building of the academic wing.

In the spring of 1992, much to my surprise, I was appointed assistant provincial of the St. Louis Province, a position I held for 10 years. Serving in this capacity I grew to appreciate the generosity and goodness of my fellow brothers. I also developed a clearer understanding of a need among us brothers for a strong belief in a loving God. Religious life can only survive with individuals who are not only dedicated to humanitarian causes and institutions, but also have a deep faith in a loving God. Responding to God's love for us is the force that drives our ministries.

After spending a semester back at Sangre de Cristo Center and another semester at in the Theodore Hesbrugh Renewal Program at the Theological Union in south Chicago. I was assigned to the wonderful position of rector of Chaminade University of Honolulu in the summer of 2003. I served in that position until the summer of 2011. At Chaminade the rector is responsible for the Catholic and Marianist spirit within the culture of the University, a demanding challenge. Thank God many of my confreres believe in the Marianist Catholic values that give this university its distinctive character and have been working to strengthening that spirit in conjunction with my efforts.

My avocation over the years has been freshwater fishing. It was from my parents, who were avid fishermen, that I acquired a love for the sport. I thank the Lord for the gift this activity has been for me. I enjoy the challenge of trying to catch a fish or two, the pleasant hours on beautiful streams and lakes, and the camaraderie of my fishing companions. I especially appreciate the late Gene Kwasinski, who for many years made it possible for some of us to enjoy northern Wisconsin fishing right after school ended in early June; my sister and her husband, Micki and Jim Lewandowski, whose hospitality on their farm in northeastern Wisconsin has given me a home in the midst of great fishing and loving company; and my nephews who have invited me on some great fishing trips in northern Wisconsin and Canada.

Finally, the blessings of these 60 years revolve around my relatives, friends, and colleagues whose support and love have carried me through the good and the bad times. May God bless them for they have been God's blessing to me.