

# Father Val Peter, longtime director of Boys Town, is remembered for his dedication to his vocation



Father Val Peter, of the Archdiocese of Omaha, Nebraska, [who died June 30](#), was a longtime member of the board of directors of Our Sunday Visitor. For 20 years, he was director of the legendary Boys Town USA in Nebraska.

He was a very special man and a very special priest. May he rest in peace.

He was one of two brothers, both priests in the Omaha archdiocese. From the beginning, they were whiz kids. Father Carl Peter became one of the best known and most highly respected theologians in the United States. His death, when he was in the prime of life, was a great loss to the Church.

Father Val was the younger brother, by a few years, but equally gifted. When Father Val died, he was 85 – an age when most people are ready to fade away and spend their days with their memories. Such was hardly the case with Father Val. He never lost a single grain of his zest for life and eagerness for his vocation as a priest. No day was long enough for him to serve his priesthood.

A bishop, now deceased, who studied with Father Val in the seminary in Rome, said that he could never forget the enthusiasm with which Val Peter approached his vocation. Excitement about being Christ's disciple, especially in the calling of the priesthood, utterly enveloped him.

After ordination in 1959, Father Val returned to Rome, to

graduate school. He had the brains, and the academic record, to be accepted into a doctoral program. The school had an iron-clad rule. A student could pursue only one doctorate at a time, in just one given field of study.

It would not work for Father Val. Life is too short! He had too much to do for the Lord as a priest. He would not, could not, wait, by achieving one doctoral degree before proceeding to seek another.

In a move not surprising to anyone who knew Father Val, he somehow undertook two doctoral programs simultaneously. He passed both courses, and secured both doctorates, with flying colors.

Returning to Omaha, he was a pastor, and he taught. In 1985, he was appointed to head Boys Town.

Boys Town is one of the glories of American Catholicism. In brief, it began when an Irish-born priest in Omaha, Father, later Monsignor, Edward J. Flanagan, working in less advantaged neighborhoods, met many boys on the streets with serious problems and no future. He invented Boys Town not as just a residence – God forbid a reformatory – but as a Christian community filled with hope, security, wisdom and understanding.

Father Flanagan had a motto: “There is no such thing as a bad boy.”

Cherishing the example of Msgr. Flanagan, Father Peter, as Boys Town’s director, oversaw a period of considerable growth as 12 satellite locations around the United States were opened, additional family homes on the Omaha campus were built, and the Boys Town National Hotline to help parents with the challenges of raising children was formed.

Great accomplishments, but Father Val’s greatest contribution was his abiding attention to his Christian, and priestly,

vocation. An Omaha archdiocesan official recalled that Father Val began every day by praying at Father Flanagan's tomb, and he made a point of knowing every single resident of Boys Town by name, the resident's background, personal circumstances, family details and everything else that made each and every resident an individual, a person, a wonderful child of God.

The official said that Father Val was "Christ for them."

Father Val lived through storms in the Church. He wholeheartedly embraced the Second Vatican Council because it was of the Church.

His philosophy? Cut away all the bad, now! Get to work! Make everything right. Waste not one moment. We are working for the Lord!

*Msgr. Owen F. Campion is chaplain for OSV.*