

The Highlands School Welcomes New Director of Formation – Boys School



The Highlands School is excited to announce that Father Eamonn Shelly, LC will assume the duties of Director of Formation for the Boys School. Father Eamonn (pronounced AAY MON) was born in Ireland, and joined the Legionaries of Christ in 1991. He completed ecclesiastical studies in philosophy and theology at the Regina Apostolorum University in Rome, Italy. Ordained a priest in 2002, Fr. Eamonn has served as chaplain of the The Pinecrest Academy in Atlanta, GA from 2002 until the present.

We had a chance to talk on the phone with Fr. Eamonn shortly after he learned of his assignment. He's agreed to allow us to share our conversation with the THS community as a way of introduction and hopefully to anticipate several questions that many of you might have as we await his arrival later this summer. We hope you enjoy the following insights and ask that you join us in welcoming Fr. Eamonn to The Highlands School.

THS: Father Eamonn, tell us a little more about your family and your formative years growing up in Ireland.

I was born and raised in a very rural community called Templemore, which is in Tipperary, Ireland. Templemore's one claim to fame is that it is the training site for the police force of Ireland; otherwise it is a pretty quiet town. I have three brothers and two sisters. My older brother owns/manages a distribution company and is blest with three children. I have two older sisters, both married with children. One of my two younger brothers is also married, the other is single and lives at home with my Mom. My father passed away eight years ago.

I went to middle school and high school in Templemore. I attended the Irish Christian Brothers Boys School which in later years was combined with the Irish Sisters of Mercy Girls School. Growing up I enjoyed playing sports, but they were different sports than what you have here in the US. I played Hurling and Gaelic Football (which is kind of like rugby, very physical). Like many young people in rural Ireland, I thought that my life would involve working on a local farm or proprietor. So, at age 16, I dropped out of school and went to work at a local saw mill. I returned to school after two years of work and finished high school in Ireland at the age of 20.

THS: Was there a period in your life post high school, but prior to entering the seminary? If so, can you talk a little about that period and how you think it contributed to your formation?

Well as I mentioned, I left school at age 16, to work in a local saw mill. At the time I assumed that I would follow a path similar to many of the young people who grew up in our area of Ireland. I wanted to get into the real world and "earn my daily bread". This was a very good experience for me. I learned

what it was like to work and earn a daily wage. That period helped me realize that life is tough and you're going to be challenged.

THS: When did you feel called to the priesthood? Why the Legion? And how did you come to make that decision?

It was while working in the local mill that I began to feel God's call to the priesthood. Of course, to pursue a vocation I would need to graduate from high school and so, as I mentioned earlier, I returned to school. I joined the Legionary Seminary in Dublin, Ireland after graduating from High School. I was attracted to the Legion because I wanted to be a missionary and I wanted to travel outside of Ireland. I also loved the youthfulness and orthodoxy of the Legion. So I entered the seminary in July of 1991 and was ordained in 2002.

THS: Who was your role model as a young man growing up in Ireland and could you tell us about that person?

The first person that comes to mind is Father Pat Forgarty, who lived next door to us as I was growing up. By next door, by the way, I mean that he was about 100 yards down the road? Fr. Forgarty was 5 years older than me and I always looked up to him. He was an example of someone who is a great "people person"; a man of great joy. He was a great example for me.

Obviously, my father was a major influence on me as a role model. He was a very honest and hard working man. My Mom was and continues to be a role model in terms of her love for her family and her relationship with God.

THS: What are some of your personal interests?

Today I enjoy reading history, both World History and American History. One of my favorites is: "A history of the American People" by Paul Johnson. I also enjoy books on role models and leadership development. In this regard one of my favorites has been "Churchill on Leadership" by Stephen F. Hayward. I don't have a lot time for music CDs or movies, but my favorite musical artist is Bono and my favorite actor is Liam Nielson (both Irish of course!).

I really enjoy sports. Throughout the Legion, European Football or soccer is by far and away the most popular, so I have played a lot of soccer and I have become pretty good at it. I understand that The Highlands School has quite a soccer tradition. I look forward to getting to know the team and perhaps getting out on the field with them. Perhaps we can even have some father/son soccer events.

THS: Tell us about your assignment at Pinecrest Academy the past 8 years.

I arrived in 2002 as Chaplain of the school. At the time the school was Pre-K through High School, with the high school having just opened up. We had a number of challenges including convincing parents and students of the virtues of our educational approach, such as the single gender education within a co-ed campus. But over time people experienced the beauty and benefits of the approach. It was also helpful that we had a strong middle school that consistently fed the high school. This is probably one of

the most critical success factors, having families that have experienced our school in middle school and want to continue in the environment through high school.

Personally, I had a number of challenges. Not being American, I had to learn about the American High School environment. For example, in Ireland when the school bell rings at the end of the day it takes all of about three minutes and all of the students are gone! Here in the US, the students stay around the school long after the bell sounds. Sometimes it seems like some of them never leave! It is an example of how much more our schools here are a community. It is an aspect of our US Legionary schools that I really like.

THS: The Pinecrest Academy is a school within the US network of Legionary schools. Are there some “lessons learned” or ideas that you take away from your time there that you think are relevant to the continuing growth and maturing of The Highlands School?

Well, at Pinecrest Academy we have been blessed with a fine administration, faculty and staff who are very focused on the mission of the school; forming Christian leadership to change society. People really take it to heart. Everything else that can be an obstacle of the school figures itself out. We’ve also had lots of synergy between the departments and freedom within the departments to make improvements.

THS is a school that is well founded, older than Pinecrest Academy. Over the years, in talking with various people there is much that is already built and we just need to continue to build on what we have. I have a lot to learn and much to do in order to get to know the staff, families and the students.

THS: What do you think are some of the challenges in the formation of boys today?

One is continuing their spiritual formation. I want to continue helping the kids to cultivate a friendship with God. I want to help them realize that they will always be a friend with the Lord. So I want to talk one on one with them about that friendship. We are living in a tough world, a secular world. There’s a lot of technology oriented to images and the “least effort possible”. Many of these things can bring them away from God and focus on trivial things. I want to help them put God first in their lives.

From a human formation point of view, I want to guide them on their journey to manhood such as; take responsibility of my duties, form my conscience, follow through on my commitments. Be considerate; learn how to serve others. Our boys live in a selfish society with messages from popular culture coming at them such as: “Me! Me, Me! I want to help the boys know how to give and to know how to respect others: their community, families, and the school. Learn that basic respect for others. We live in an age where we don’t always have great role models who are respectful within their society

One of the things I want to emphasize is to build on what has already been done. Here I want to thank Fr. Alfonse. He and I are good friends and I know he is a great man and priest. He has done a lot of great work at The Highlands School and I want to build upon that. We can continue forward using the foundation that is already in place here.

I’ve also had a lot of involvement in Conquest while at Pinecrest Academy. I’ve also conducted boy’s camps in Hungary. So I know how important these programs can be in the formation of boys and young men. I worked with Matthew Reinhardt for two years when he was at Pinecrest Academy. Matthew is one of the best with respect to Conquest that I know and I’m looking forward to working with him again.

I also have a lot of experience working with the Consecrated women. I am their chaplain at Pinecrest and have worked a lot with the Challenge girls as well. I'm looking forward to contributing wherever I am needed in my capacity as Director of Formation, Boys School at THS.

THS: Please share some of your thoughts about your new assignment as Director of Formation, Boys School at THS.

I'm looking to build upon what is already here. I'm really looking forward to working with the parents and getting to know them personally. I'm looking forward to listening to the students with regard to what they would like to see, any initiatives they have. I want to work with them.

I also want to see how I can help in connecting with local churches; The more that we can be "part of the furniture of the diocese" the better it is for the school and the diocese.

THS: Beyond your explicit role as a priest and spiritual leader for the boys, do you have any preliminary ideas or goals for yourself and the school?

I've always wondered how we could organize some annual or semester activities, maybe with inter-legionary schools. I've always been interested in trying to organize something and I would like see if I could leverage my connections with Pinecrest Academy to do that.

I'd like to establish relationships with diocesan priests, maybe get them to know the school better, invite them to come to the school and celebrate Mass. They would get to know the school better and we would get more connected with their parishes.

I want to get to know the families. I will be available to come meet them in their homes and to bless their homes.

I'd like to see our kids doing some missionary work locally and outside the country, I think you guys do that already. At Pinecrest Academy we went to Nicaragua to build homes. It was important for the students to see others who are living in poverty and to help them to appreciate what we have here.

THS: What one or two messages would you like to share with the THS community in anticipation of your assuming the role of Director of Formation – Boys School?

I want to be your friend, first of all. That is very important as a priest, that you see me as someone who is ready to listen and help. Secondly, I want to give you Jesus Christ and I am hopeful that you see me in that way. It's not so much the talents and gifts that I have, but it is Jesus working through me. So I invite everyone to participate in all of the events of a sacramental nature at school. I also invite anyone at any time to come and see me. I am open to listen and work together on any challenges we may have.

Lastly, I ask for your support and prayer as well.

THS: When will we get a chance to meet you and welcome you to The Highlands School? What is the transition plan?

I'm already been in contact with my predecessor, Fr. Alfonse; I had a long conversation with him yesterday. I hope to have the opportunity to speak with him more over the next several weeks and

hope we can get together in person. He is a good friend of mine and will be a big help in my coming up to speed as quickly as possible about the Boys School.

As far as my personal schedule it is quite busy. I leave on June 7 for Rome and the conclusion of the year of priest. On June 12, I will travel back to Ireland for a family visit. I also ask for your prayers for my Mom who has been ill lately. On July 5, I will travel to Wisconsin with the Legionaries who work in the US. On the July 22nd I will return to Atlanta to wrap up my responsibilities at Pinecrest Academy, which I expect to take about a week. So I expect to be at The Highlands School by the end of July or early August at the latest.

(THS Administration Note: We plan on having a number of formal and informal opportunities for the THS community to meet and welcome Father Eamonn before and after school starts. As we get more specific details on his schedule we will send out THS Alerts with details of these events. We thank Father Eamonn for taking the time to speak with us and we look forward to his joining us here at The Highlands School.)