

Grace upon Grace: Fr. George Sullivan, SJ

By Amy Korpi

Father George Sullivan's memories of what inspired him to enter the Jesuits are marked by humor.

"I was drawn to the Jesuits through the wonderful variety of educators at Omaha's Creighton Prep," he recalls. "One teacher, Jim Hoff, would go on to become a Jesuit priest and president of Xavier University in Cincinnati. Looking to pique our interest in biology, he put the biological definition of a kiss on the board. When another Jesuit saw him, Mr. Hoff asked the students if he might visit someone's home for dinner that evening. He could not face eating in the Jesuit dining room!

"Somehow," says Fr. Sullivan, "that was a pivotal moment in my wanting to be a Jesuit."

Father Sullivan went on to teach at Marquette University High School in Milwaukee and Creighton Prep, where he also served as assistant to the president. After earning a law degree from Creighton University, he served as Creighton Prep's 27th president and was appointed to Nebraska's Unemployment Insurance Advisory Council. In 1989, Fr. Sullivan accepted a vice presidency with the Gregorian University Foundation.

"I came to know the Church

universal, through clerical and lay students from all over the world," he says. One person he met was Fr. Paolo Dall'Oglio, the Jesuit priest who restored a monastery in Syria before being kidnapped by ISIL in 2012.

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In 2006, Fr. Sullivan returned to Creighton Prep as assistant to the president, also serving on the board of directors at New Cassel Retirement Center and on the Priests' Council of the Archdiocese of Omaha. Father Sullivan now lives at St. Camillus Jesuit Community in Wauwatosa, Wis.

"I am buoyed by the companionship of so many Jesuits I have known and admired through the years. I do pastoral work and am taking an art class given by Janet Merkel, the mother of Fr. Thomas Merkel, SJ.

I also have caught up with some students I taught as a scholastic at Marquette High.

"My journey has been unexpected, yet not surprising. I was inspired to become a lawyer like others in my extended family; however, my use of the degree was in keeping with that of many 'external' Jesuits working in administration, fundraising, or pastorally representing an institution. It has been an honor to serve and to be served by so many amazing people who assist the vital institutions that support the Church in educating exceptional leaders.

"I am always brought back to 1 Corinthians 12: 4-7," he says, "as an encouragement that we all have gifts. We need to ask God to help us continue to lead from our strengths. The grace to be a part of so many families' faith lives from baptism to burial has brought me the most satisfaction. I did not expect this when I started. It has been grace upon grace." ✠

During his time with the Gregorian University Foundation, Fr. Sullivan met Pope Saint John Paul II.

