

# FEATURE

## Letter drew deacon to Boys Town

By Charlie Wieser  
Catholic News Service

OMAHA, Neb. — Fifty-three years ago, Lester Dreifuers wrote a letter that changed his life.

A native of St. Cloud, Wis., Dreifuers was teaching in his hometown when he wrote to Father Edward Flanagan, founder of Boys Town.

"I was hoping to work at Boys Town," he said. "Father Flanagan wrote back and said to come ahead, so I took the next train to Omaha."

When he met Father Flanagan, Dreifuers knew he was in the presence of someone special.

"Father Flanagan had the old Irish faith," Dreifuers said. "He was gentle as a lamb with the little kids, but he could be stern with the older boys when they were rowdy."

For nearly three decades, Dreifuers worked as a counselor.

"I enjoyed every bit of my time as a counselor," he said. "Some of the kids I took care of still keep in touch with me."

Evidence of this last statement can be found on the door to his sitting room: Handwritten notes from former Boys Town residents cover the door.

Some of the notes were left by men who visited Boys Town when Dreifuers was away from the campus: "In town for a family reunion. Sorry I missed you." "Stopped to say hi. Think of you often." "Sorry we missed you. Have a great day."

Dreifuers said it is heartening to receive visits and cards from some of the young men he helped through the years.

"Every Christmas I receive a lot of cards," he said. "These cards bring back many memories."

Those memories include attending what was once the traditional midnight Mass at the Boys Town chapel, decorating trees in the dormitories and passing out gifts on Christmas day.

"In the old days, the boys would stay at Boys Town during Christmas," he said. "Now, most of the boys go home for Christmas."

When Dreifuers stopped counseling, he worked at the Boys Town Visitor Center until he was ordained a permanent



deacon in 1981.

"Since my ordination, I've kept busy with the chapel here," he said. As a deacon, Dreifuers visits the residents at Elkhorn Manor. He also spent 15 years visiting inmates at the Douglas County Jail until retiring from jail ministry in November.

Thanking Dreifuers for "this important ministry and compassion in the name of the Gospel," Omaha Archbishop Elden F. Curtiss said in a letter, "I'm told that your influence and impact at the jail reached beyond those who have been imprisoned to those who were the staff and others who offered support and ministry."

Dreifuers said he stopped making weekly trips to the jail because it's more difficult for him to get around, especially in bad weather, now that he is 80.

"It was hard giving up jail ministry because I always enjoyed bringing the word of the Lord and the Eucharist to the prisoners," he said. "You never know what grace can do."

Dreifuers now resides in the house once occupied by Father Flanagan. On the second floor, where he lives, the rooms are filled with books, old photographs and awards.

"Les Means More to Us" is inscribed on one of the awards from Boys Town alumni. Another award, presented by executive director Father Val Peter, recognized Dreifuers' "golden jubilee of service to Boys Town."



Lester Dreifuers

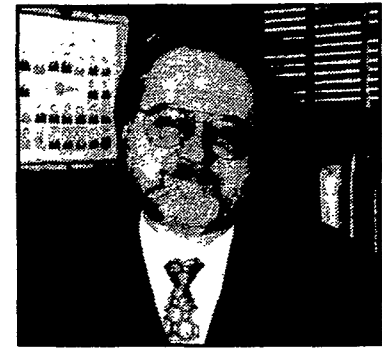
Along with daily chapel duties, Dreifuers keeps busy by staying in touch with former Boys Town residents and watching his favorite NFL team — the Green Bay Packers — on TV.

"I grew up near Green Bay, so I've been a fan my entire life," he said with a laugh.

Dreifuers also enjoys attending Boys Town alumni parties.

"We have a big time when we get together," he said. "Writing that letter to Father Flanagan all those years ago was one of the best things I ever did."

### Thoughts to Consider



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