



FR. TOM ELEWAUT, transformed!

Currently serving as pastor of San Buenaventura Mission in Ventura, Fr. Tom Elewaut can easily reminisce about his SND teachers, remembering them as “exceptionally disciplined educators with high expectations of their students.”

Fr. Tom’s first encounter with the SNDs came in the fall of his seventh grade year. He describes himself as “a bit of a juvenile delinquent, not excelling much in school.” His parents transferred him to St. Rose of Lima School in Maywood to learn discipline and to, “climb out of an academic hole so I could compete with my peers.”

Many sisters helped shape his identity in his formative years, while attending St. Rose of Lima. He remembers that “Sr. Olga Ondash taught us to work independently, especially when her duties as the school principal required her to be absent from the classroom. Sr. Anita Hornack coordinated altar servers, and he admired her patience when he had difficulty memorizing certain Latin prayers. When the Mass was celebrated in English, he was always chosen to lead the entrance procession as cross bearer since he was the tallest, and Sr. Anita required precision—a lesson which he instills in his own altar servers today.

Fr. Tom continued to serve Mass during his high school years and became one of the first lay lectors at St. Rose of Lima. “Certainly the youngest, thanks to Sr. Anita and to Sr. Olga, who instilled in me a love for the Mass and public speaking,” as he puts it. To help students with public speaking, “Sr. Olga would have us dialogue at random

about a topic we were studying. For the quiz or test, every student would stand and add to the conversation; it had to be something poignant and relevant, and it had better not be a repeat from another student!”

During his final year of college, Fr. Tom felt called to the priesthood. He pursued his vocation and his love for education. As a priest, he taught for 30 years at two high schools (St. Joseph in Santa Maria and Bishop Garcia Diego in Santa Barbara) and was also principal for 20 of those years. With the skills he attributes to his formative years with the SNDs, Fr. Tom has earned national recognition twice—as the principal of a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, and as a 2008 recipient of the NCEA Secondary Schools Award for his leadership in implementing the president-principal model of school administration.

In addition to his parish responsibilities, Fr. Tom currently serves as dean for Deanery III in the Santa Barbara Region and as a member of the Board of Consultors for Archbishop Jose Gomez.

When asked what stands out most about the SNDs and their work within the community, Fr. Tom simply states, “Without hesitation, I would say the SNDs are outstanding women religious who serve the Church loyally, and are committed to excellence in all their ministries. They form young and old alike to know, love, and serve our God by serving others in charity, always striving for the highest possible outcomes.” Fr. Tom will always remember the profound impression they made on him, “a bit of a juvenile delinquent.”