

Former Catholic priest now teaching Spanish at KHS

by Monica Burkett

Career changes are common in today's world, but becoming a public high school teacher after having been a Catholic priest is quite a drastic switch.

Thomas Dullard, who currently teaches Spanish at Kilgore High School, began making career-related decisions at a very early age. As a child he was greatly influenced by the priests in his neighborhood in Chicago.

"I lived in a parish where

there were 5000 families and six priests," Dullard said. "The priests were the most intelligent, personable guys that children could look up to."

With such role models, Dullard's decision to seek the priesthood was quite natural.

"I went to a seminary in Holland, Michigan when I was 15 years old, and then I went to Novitiate in Wisconsin where I spent a year and a day -- literally -- preparing to take my vows,"

Dullard said.

"I spent four years studying philosophy and four more studying theology at seminaries in St. Louis and Chicago," Dullard said. "In 1965, I was ordained at my parish church, along with a dozen of my classmates."

"The next day I said my first Mass, with one of the priests who had influenced me as a child giving the sermon," Dullard mentioned.

During part of Dullard's ministry, he served as Missions Director for missions in Peru and Japan, which primarily involved raising funds throughout the Midwest United States and Canada.

"Most of the funds were raised by way of preaching and taking collections," Dullard said. "I preached from Killeen to Toronto, from New Orleans to Grand Forks, North Dakota."

After eleven years in the seminary and nine years of the priesthood, Dullard began to contemplate a career change.

"I decided to take a leave of absence. I really had decided that I wanted to start a family," Dullard said.

"I asked for a leave of absence from my superior and then moved to Kansas City,

where I got a job at a Ramada Inn," Dullard said. That was in 1974.

By 1975 Dullard had earned his insurance license in Kansas. "I was single and enthusiastic, so there was plenty of time and energy for selling life insurance," Dullard said.

His successful channeling of time and energy into insurance sales led to numerous awards for Dullard, the most notable of which was being named "Man of the Year" in his region.

Tired of traveling five days a week, in 1980 Dullard moved to San Antonio where he went to work for North American Life. Settling down had definite benefits.

"I met my wife while living and working in San Antonio, and we got married in May of 1982," Dullard said.

With over ten years of married life behind him, Dullard has realized his goal of having a family. Dullard and his wife, Kay, have two sons, ages nine and six, and a two-year-old daughter.

But how did he get into the teaching field?

Dullard had taught high school in private Catholic schools during his last five years as a priest.

"I had always missed the kids, but I was afraid it (public school) would be a zoo," Dullard said. "However, I've come to realize that these (KHS students) are the nicest group of kids I've ever met."

Kilgore High School is Dullard's first public school teaching experience, and this is his first year at KHS.

"This school has great potential academically. The kids here are bright and full of personality," Dullard said.

Although Dullard does not regret any of his life-changing decisions, he does have some observations regarding his past role as a priest and his current role as husband and father.

"I think that when I was prayerful (as a priest), I was happy and content," Dullard said.

"A priest's life is easier than being a husband and parent," Dullard continued. "You have more responsibility in a family to set an example -- to be positive and enthusiastic all day long as an example to your kids."

All in all, Dullard has certainly led an unusual and interesting life so far.

Only time will tell what lies ahead.



FROM PREACHER TO TEACHER -- KHS teacher Tom Dullard has exchanged a priest's collar for a necktie. (See related story above.)