

Backer Award Presentation
Given by David Laughlin
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The Backer Award

The highest honor that St. Louis University High School bestows upon its alumni is the Backer Award. Named for George and Anna Backer, whose generosity brought about the creation of our campus, the award is presented to an alumnus of the school.

Purpose of the Award

For nearly 200 years, SLUH has dedicated itself to a tradition of creating Catholic leaders. Outstanding alumni from the Backer Memorial have fulfilled this mission by serving as leaders in their communities, their professions and their church. In 1983, the Board of Trustees, the officers of the Alumni Board and the administration of the school established the Backer Award to honor those distinguished alumni who best embody the principles and traditions of a Catholic, Jesuit education.

As articulated in the Profile of the Graduate at Graduation, Jesuit education aspires for alumni who are “open to growth, intellectually competent, religious, loving and committed to doing justice.” This also describes appropriate criteria when considering nominations for the Backer Award.

Qualifications

The Backer Award is presented at the discretion of the SLUH President, with the consultation of the Chair of the Board of Trustees, the Chair of the Alumni Board and the Superior of the Jesuit Community. Backer award nominations are received from alumni and friends throughout each year. It is awarded to a deserving SLUH alumnus, either living or deceased.

The award is presented to those who embody, in outstanding fashion, the mission of SLUH. The mission at SLUH is derived from the Jesuit idea that man is a free son of God who develops and utilizes his talents so that he has more to give to others, and does it all for the greater glory of God.

Backer Award nominees shall have achieved outstanding success in one or more of the following areas:

- * Service to their family, their church and their fellow man
- * Contributions to their business or profession
- * Leadership in civic or social work
- * Promotion of intellectual or cultural pursuits

The first alum to receive the Backer Award today is **Mr. Robert Barnidge '58**. Bob Barnidge is the husband of Nancy Barnidge and the father of Robert '95; George '97; Partick '99; Peter '00 and John '03. He is a proud grandparent three times (so far).

Following his graduation from SLUH in 1958, Bob attended St. Louis University and graduated in 1962 with a degree in Psychology. He then obtained an MBA from Washington University in 1964 and began a professional career in New York City with Citibank. In 1970 he was one of four investment bankers involved in developing a growing AG Edwards. AG Edwards was among the first brokerage firms to go public and Bob advanced to become part of the executive leadership team as the Vice President of Investment Banking. For 32 years, Bob was a well-respected leader of this major St. Louis-based national corporation. At AG Edwards, Bob was known for his work ethic, his high integrity and his gentle nature.

Long before the advent of Community Service Programs or even Senior Service Projects, Bob Barnidge took to heart the works of a faith that does justice. For when not utilizing his talents and skills at AG Edwards, Bob was applying the development of his faith in combination of service in his community and service to his family.

In his parish, Bob Barnidge has regularly been involved in leadership. But the leadership was both servant leadership and formal parish leadership. At once, Bob might be at the parish school helping to install school lockers, while also serving as President of the school board. In his parish, like many dads, he coached youth sports. And he also served as president of the parish men's club. He has been a campaign leader for his parish as well as a member of the St. Vincent DePaul Society. Through St. Vincent DePaul Society, Bob has been a regular volunteer for Catholic Charities, distributing food and clothing to the local poor. Bob has been a daily communicant.

Outside of his parish, Bob has been deeply involved in assisting various works of the Society of Jesus. First, he has personally been engaged at White House Retreat Center continuing a life long journey developing his relationship with God. Even more, Bob has served as the President of the Board at White House Retreat. The accomplished professional executive has also been found mowing lawns at Loyola Academy or playing chess games and getting to know their students. As a loyal alumnus to SLUH, Bob was a parent here for twelve consecutive years, serving as the President of the Father's Club. Bob's love of things Jesuit has included his own personal interests in reading and studying Jesuit spirituality; making an Ignatian pilgrimage to Monserrat and Manresa as

part of his trip to serve the sick at Lourdes, France. Bob's interest in Ignatian Spirituality led to a list of recommended sources for our own SLUH high, many of which can be currently located in the Campus Ministry Office.

In addition to these various components of Bob's lived faith, he has been involved deeply in Habitat for Humanity. As the coordinator for Habitat for Humanity in his parish, Bob has coordinated volunteers, schedules and supplies for multiple churches and faith denominations for the goals of building homes for the poor. He has coordinated parish fundraising events to secure funds necessary for the success of Habitat Homes. In many respects, he continues to live out today the type of activity we see in our Honduras Senior Project and Mission Mexico Programs, only Bob continues to work to serve the poor in our local community.

Bob has also served the Vietnamese community at St. Pius V parish by helping students develop their reading skills for success in their studies.

As the Backer Award recognizes service to family, it is a tremendous example to St. Louis University High students to note that his five SLUH sons described the following gifts he has provided as a father in a description of his priority of faith:

Paraphrased, they stated: At one time in his life, Bob must have asked himself the crucial questions: Who am I? What type of person do I want to be? What type of life do I want to live? And for our dad, these questions have and continue to have their answer in a total surrender to Jesus Christ. It was his faith that motivated the type of marriage he would establish and the type of family he wanted to raise. Bob lives an active faith life and stresses regular prayer centered on Christ. We remember family dinners where he read short newspaper stories about heroes and reiterated that the Christian life meant fighting for values even when it was not popular or incredibly challenging. Our father has responded to the call and challenge of Jesus by using these gifts for the good of his family, the Church and total strangers who have no way of knowing or recognizing his efforts.

It is my privilege to present the St. Louis University High School Backer Award to Mr. Robert Barnidge '58.

The second alum that I would like to recognize with the Backer Award today is **Fr. David Fleming, SJ '52.**

Following his graduation in 1952, Fr. Fleming joined the Missouri Province of the Society of Jesus and trained in Florissant for four years. He then completed

studies in Philosophy at St. Louis University before returning to SLUH as a scholastic and teacher from 1959-1962. After leaving SLUH for a second time and returning to theological studies, he was ordained a priest in 1965. Soon thereafter, Fr. Fleming completed a Degree in Sacred Theology from the Catholic University of America with a dissertation focus on Christian Spirituality. In the days that SLUH ranked its students, Fr. Fleming graduated among the very top of his class. His intelligence and serious study topics listed were also met with great wit. One classmate, who shall remain nameless relayed an episode during his studies in Philosophy logic. Then, Scholastic Fleming took to the very popular newly released production of My Fair Lady and rewrote the lyrics to the musical with lyrics originating in the study of logic and philosophy, all the while gently lampooning the instructor. Needless to say, the professors, upon hearing the presentation, likely saw few academic performances with such a peer. Nonetheless, it is reported that the presentation for philosophical studies was well received.

All of this training, ordination and studies crossed the historic Vatican II for the Catholic Church. Fr. Fleming's work, based upon his formation, would support the call of the Second Vatican Council for religious orders to renew their lives according to the charism of their founders. In this case, it was for Fr. Fleming to renew his spiritual vocation in the charism of St. Ignatius of Loyola. With a particular focus on the *Spiritual Exercises*, Fr. Fleming's efforts might best be summarized with three particular descriptors: communication, leadership and spirituality.

In Denver, Colorado in the 1970's Fr. Fleming, along with fellow Jesuit brothers, began "Ministry in Training" services, which assisted men and women in various religious orders to a discovery of the spiritual charism of their founders. At the same time, he was engaged in research and writing directed at the founder of his own Jesuit order. In 1978, he published *Draw Me Into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises, A Literal Translation & A Contemporary Reading*. This translation moved the language of Ignatius into a more modern and understood version, which has allowed the Spiritual Exercises to be more deeply understood by contemporary retreatants for the past 40 years. Ultimately, his efforts to reconnect the charism of Ignatius to contemporary times has meant that many more students, pastors, parishoners, faculty, staff and friends of the Jesuits have been able to experience the Spiritual Exercises and grow in their own relationship with Christ. This influence has covered not only the United States but throughout the world. In addition to *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, Fr. Fleming has also written books focused on Ignatian Spirituality including: *Lessons from Ignatius Loyola; What is Ignatian Spirituality and To Whom Do We Belong?* His efforts in Ignatian Spirituality have led for his invitation to direct retreats for faculty and alumni of Jesuit schools; bishops of the Church and Jesuit Provincials, parishes and retreat houses. He has presented before audiences across the world including: Australia, England, Canada, Japan, Chile, China and India as well as throughout the US.

You seniors have also heard many times the phrase “Men for Others”. It was a phrase coined by Fr. Pedro Arrupe, Superior General of the Jesuits. During Fr. Arrupe’s time as Superior General, Fr. Fleming served the Missouri Province as Provincial from 1979 to 1985 and represented the Province at the International gathering of Jesuits called the General Congregation 33, where he participated in the Jesuits receiving approval from Pope John Paul II on the appointment of Fr. Peter Hans Kolvenbach as new Superior General.

Following his time at Provincial, Fr. Fleming was an instructor at the prestigious Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, MA.

Over the years, in addition to his time as Provincial, Fr. Fleming has served as the Rector of Jesuit communities and in positions of Formation, overseeing Jesuits in the earliest years of their time in the Society of Jesus.

For the last 20 years, Fr. Fleming has served as editor-in-chief of the *Review for Religious*. *The Review for Religious* is an international publication to various religious communities throughout the world. It is an award winning religious publication focusing on topics of spirituality, religion, community and issues affecting men and women religious. The most recent issue, for example, contains information on the apostolic visit of the Vatican to women’s religious communities in the United States.

For his work in Jesuit Spirituality, Jesuit leadership, the extension of the Spiritual Exercises to countless modern experiences, writing, editing and publishing related to faith, the Church, religious orders and spiritual charisms, St Louis University High School is proud to award Fr. David Fleming, SJ, '52 the Backer Award.