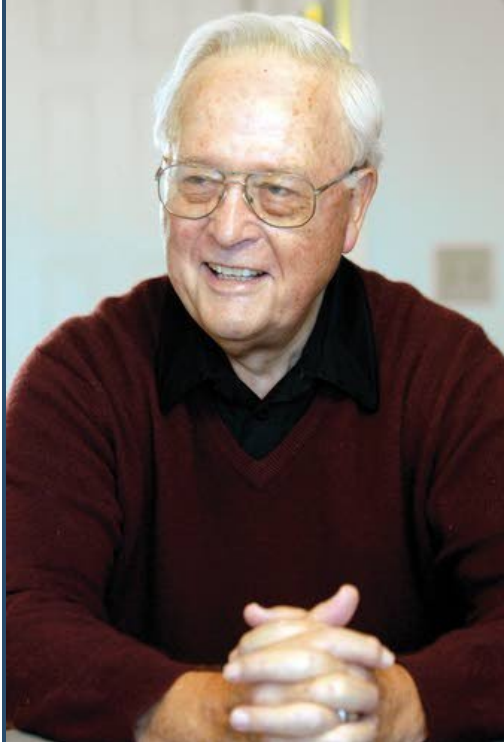


# His first prayer in life as a priest was a big success

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By Kerri Sandaine of the Tribune

**Golden jubilee celebration will honor Father Schumacher**



The Rev. Andy Schumacher's ministry has taken him from Idaho to Rome and back to Idaho. He is celebr... Kyle Mills / Lewiston Tribune



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The Rev. Andy Schumacher's journey to the priesthood began more than a half-century ago on a train bound for Oregon.

"I used to stammer and stutter," he recalled. "I left Lewiston on the train and the car transferred at Riperia. I was sitting there in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of the night. It was the first time I'd left home."

There in the cold rail car, Schumacher said a prayer. "Lord, if you want me to be a priest, please don't let anyone at Mt. Angel Seminary ever know I stammer. I stopped overnight. By the grace of God, no one ever knew."

At college, he took a speech course and even won a speech contest with a soliloquy from "MacBeth," "much to the surprise of my family."

Schumacher, 75, is being honored Sunday at a golden jubilee celebration at St. James Catholic Church in Lewiston. A special Mass will be celebrated at 10 a.m., followed by a covered-dish dinner at 3 p.m.

The youngest of eight kids born to Leo and Mary Schumacher, he graduated from Greencreek High School in 1952. "The reason I became a priest is because I couldn't find a girl in Greencreek I wasn't related to," he joked.

As a student, Schumacher was sent to Rome where he studied from 1956-60 at the Jesuit Gregorian University. He was in St. Peter's Square when Pope John XXIII was elected and had an audience with him Nov. 9, 1959.

"When I went in, I knelt down to kiss his ring. The pope told me to get up. 'I want to speak to you face to face.' "

The young Idaho native was at St. Peter's Basilica on the day the Second Vatican Council was announced. "I remember it very well," he said. "That was the buzz in Rome on that Palm Sunday."

As a result of the council, priests faced the congregation for the first time and Mass was spoken in English instead of Latin. "It was an invitation to have the people participate fully in the liturgy."

Schumacher returned to the United States in 1960, and his first assignment was at Our Lady of Lourdes in Lewiston as an assistant. Three years later, he became the first full-time chaplain at the University of Idaho and helped with the building of St. Augustine's in Moscow.

"One of my favorite times in my life," he said. "I was there 11 years. It was a wonderful time. I had the opportunity to share the changes of the Vatican with the young community of students."

He was next appointed rector of St. John's Cathedral in Boise and later served at St. James in Lewiston, "a wonderful parish," for four years.

"The emphasis I always made was to bring people together and establish a strong sense of community where people care for one another."

In 1988, he was sent to Coeur d'Alene to St. Pius X Catholic Church, where he replaced his cousin Bill Wassmuth, who left the ministry and dedicated his life to human rights.

There, a real effort was made to reach out to the poor, he said, which became the thrust of his future ministry.

Schumacher met Pope John Paul II while on sabbatical in Rome in 1991 and a second time while leading a pilgrimage. "He was a very deeply spiritual man, and it seemed like he knew how to carry the cross of suffering. He really sacrificed himself totally in his ministry."

After Coeur d'Alene, Schumacher spent three years at St. Mary's Church in Boise. "I was supposed to relocate the church and school, which was an impossible task at that time."

He was sent to Cottonwood in 1998 for his last assignment. In 2004, he retired and was appointed minister to priests and the board of directors for Catholic Charities of Idaho. One of his favorite activities is going to Boise once a month for a Mass for families who are dealing with disabilities.

During his 50 years in the Catholic ministry, Schumacher has witnessed some major changes. When he began his career, priests were respected leaders of their communities and placed on a pedestal, he said.

And many people thought priests had special powers from above, especially in times of distress. He remembers boarding a plane in Boise and a nervous passenger telling him how glad he was to see a priest on the plane. "I told him the only problem is I'm in sales and not administration."

Over time, the priesthood changed to a servant model, which Schumacher happily embraced.

"I was never comfortable on the pedestal. I prefer to walk together with my brothers and sisters on our journey of faith."

Schumacher is alarmed by the low number of people entering the priesthood. Church sex scandals have hurt the image, he said, and not as many parents are encouraging their sons and daughters to become priests or religious women.

"We are now living in challenging times," he said. "Few can deny that our society has become extremely secular. Materialism and the spirit of individualism have become the accepted norm for successful living."

As a priest, or even as a Christian, Schumacher said his role is to remain a person of hope.

"Hope is an attitude of the heart which tells me God is still present in our world," he said. "We must give hope to one another."

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