

Forming Intellect, Mind and Heart

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WEST TAMPA - At 44, the **Rev. Richard Hermes** has lived a rich and full life.

He has taught high school theology, studied in Rome and Jerusalem, been ordained a Catholic priest, attended a private Mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II, been pastor of a New Orleans parish, survived Hurricane Katrina and spent a six-month sabbatical in the Philippines.

Now, the Shreveport, La., native is president of Jesuit High School, 4701 N. Himes Ave., where he oversees 81 faculty and staff and 677 students.

Q. Why take on this role?

A. I have a special calling within my Jesuit vocation to this kind of ministry. You are forming young people at a time they are ready to be formed. We are forming their intellect, mind and heart. ... That carries through the rest of their lives.

Q. You stayed in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina?

A. I stayed right through the storm at Jesuit High School in New Orleans - five Jesuit priests, six lay people who stayed with us. We had to get out by boat. The storm hit on Sunday night. We got out Wednesday afternoon.

Q. What was it like?

A. By Tuesday morning, there were 50 people from the neighborhood housed at the school. They were trying to escape the rising floodwaters. ... Everyone was just stunned watching the floodwaters rise. When we were leaving, we wondered when the floodwaters were going to go down and when would we be back.

Q. What are your impressions of Tampa?

A. The people here at Jesuit High School are so proud and loyal. They have been so hospitable to me. I like the Gulf Coast. I like the fishing towns. There is kind of a laid-back attitude. There is a lot of history.

Q. What are some of your interests?

A. I like to read theology, philosophy, history and politics. I follow politics pretty closely. ... I love college sports. I am a big Louisiana State University fan. I played baseball in high school and coached basketball at Jesuit High in New Orleans. I like to play golf. I'm a terrible golfer.

Q. Tell us about your family?

A. I'm the seventh of eight siblings.

Q. How was your childhood?

A. It was great; a lot of boisterous fun. You learn a lot growing up in a big family.

Q. Do you miss New Orleans and Louisiana?

A. Louisiana is in my blood. But I feel at home here. All my energy is focused on Jesuit High School and Tampa. I don't have time to miss Louisiana.

Q. What are your goals as school president?

A. Maintain and, if possible, help deepen the Catholic and Jesuit identity of this school. The second thing is keep Jesuit as affordable as possible and open as possible to boys from every family regardless of their financial means. Right now, 20 percent of the students are on financial aid.

Q. What do you think about being school president at 44?

A. I'm blessed with good health now, and I have a lot of energy. I see my relative age as an asset. I have plenty of wiser and older people to give me advice.