
Tom Whitman '55
2017 CBHS Distinguished Alumnus
(Address – November 19, 2017)

Christian Brothers High School and its graduates are woven into the fabric of my life. My father, William G. Whitman, Sr. was a 1908 graduate of the original school on Adams. My brother, Bill Jr., was a 1933 graduate, and I am a 1955 graduate of the school on Parkway. My father-in-law, Vallie Handwerker, was a 1932 graduate, and my two brothers-in-law, Monsignor Val and Lee Handwerker, are graduates of CBHS.

My sons, Chris and Michael, graduated in 1985 and 1990. In addition, I have four nephews, three great nephews and four first cousins who graduated from CBHS. This school has been an integral part of my family's life, and we are indebted to the Christian Brothers and the lay faculty for the positive impact they have had on our lives.

When my dad graduated in 1908, he received a master of accounts diploma from the high school division of CBC. It was described as a commercial diploma. It was the extent of his formal education, but he left CBC with the ability to express himself both verbally and with the written word and a wonderful understanding of basic math. He went on to a career in sales and, at age 25, he was named sales manager of the E. L. Bruce Company, which, at that time, was the largest manufacturer of hardwood flooring in the country. He spent the next 45 years in the hardwood flooring industry and served as president of the National Oak Flooring Association and as the industry's representative to Washington during World War II.

Dad attributed his success to his Christian Brothers education, and he reciprocated by serving several terms as president of the "B" club which was a support group for the athletic programs and by serving as chairman of the capital campaign to build the De Lasalle gymnasium which still graces the CBU campus. I distinctly remember that Brother Luke Constantious would come to the house regularly to discuss giving prospects. The entire process was a living example to an eleven-year-old boy that we have an obligation to give back to the institutions that have formed our lives.

Over the years, I have been privileged to serve on the boards of a number of entities. Not surprisingly, many of them were Catholic or Catholic-related. I am a proud product of the Catholic school system, having spent eight years at Sacred Heart and Immaculate Conception, four years at CBHS, and four years at Notre Dame. It may be hard to comprehend, but I never had a lay teacher until my freshman year at Notre Dame. I have remained very loyal to my Catholic roots.

When I served on the Diocesan Development Board, our chairman was Lance Forsdick, and I served with Bill Crawford and Raymond Fracchia. I currently serve on the Diocesan Finance Council. Bob Orians is our chairman, and I serve with Billy Griesbeck, Ross Harris, Joe Evangelisti, and Monsignor Peter Buchignani. What do we all have in common? We are graduates of CBHS.

In 1990, I was asked to join the board of Saint Francis Hospital. Serving on the board with me, among others, were Ed Duke, Dr. John Pera, and Phil Zanone, all graduates of CBHS. In 1993, the changing competitive environment and the advent of TennCare caused the board to conclude that the hospital should be sold and the proceeds used to fund the Assisi Foundation of Memphis.

The little-known story is that the hospital was owned by no one. To explain that would require more time than we have tonight. Suffice it to say that on Feb. 25, 1972 the advisory board of St. Joseph Hospital which was located on property now occupied by St. Jude Children's Research Hospital borrowed \$2,970,000 of equity money from St. Joseph Hospital and the Poor Sisters of St. Francis Seraph, the order of nuns who owned St. Joseph Hospital. The note was signed on behalf of the board by Edward F. Barry, who was an affiliate of the Christian Brothers and chairman of the advisory board. The board consisted of twelve Catholic laymen, three members of Protestant faiths, and three members of the Jewish faith. Three of the Catholic laymen were John D. Canale, Jr., Joseph F. Canepari and John S. Montedonico, all graduates of Christian Brothers High School.

These men foresaw the need for a hospital in east Memphis and personally assumed responsibility for the note despite receiving nothing in return. The note was fully repaid in September 1978, and ownership of the hospital was offered to the nuns. They declined the offer, and, as a consequence, when Saint Francis Hospital was sold in 1994 for \$127,000,000, the proceeds flowed directly to the Assisi Foundation.

Over the past 23 years, the foundation has funded grants of \$204,000,000 while maintaining an asset base of \$225,000,000. I genuinely believe the foundation under the outstanding leadership of Dr. Jan Young has impacted our community in a very positive manner, and I am pleased to have been a small part of this process and to have served as a board member with John Zoccola, James Gattas, Charlie Schaffler, Will Zoccola and Joe Evangelisti, graduates of CBHS. It has been a privilege and a joy for me, but I sincerely believe it would not have happened except for Mr. Barry and the advisory board of St. Joseph Hospital.

There are two other non-profits where my involvement has been personally gratifying. One is the day foundation which is the legacy of Clarence Day. Mr. Day established the foundation during his lifetime with the help of Richard Buchignani, his attorney, and Billy Griesbeck, his accountant. Richard and Billy are members of the CBHS class of 1966. Mr. Day had made them trustees of the foundation and executors of his estate. At his death, they invited me to become the third trustee of the foundation.

We have continued Mr. Day's work with the transitional living program at Youth Villages. This program helps young adults who are aging out of foster care make the transition to either college or the work force. We have also established the Day Scholars program at Rhodes College, an institution of which Clarence Day was very fond. Each year, ten graduates of Memphis and Shelby County high schools receive full, four-year scholarships to Rhodes. Rhodes chooses the recipients, and I am pleased to say that thus far we have had a very diverse, impressive group, and ten of the 70 recipients have been graduates of CBHS.

The second non-profit is Memphis Opportunity Scholarship Trust, which is better known by the acronym, MOST. MOST provides scholarships to families who qualify for the federal school lunch program and wish to have their children in a private school setting. The typical family has a gross income of \$35,000 per annum and provides \$5,600 per annum toward their child's education. That is 16% of their gross income. Seventy-one private schools participate in the program, and MOST has awarded approximately \$19,000,000 in scholarships to 3,150 students. While I was a founding board member and served on the board for eighteen years, the driving force has been Bob Solmson, a member of the CBHS Class of 1965. Bob conceived the idea and has been the principal fund raiser, and he is driven by his belief that every child deserves the opportunity to receive a quality education. I am pleased to say that nineteen MOST scholars are graduates of CBHS. Six MOST scholars are current students.

Christian Brothers High School graduates are ubiquitous in this community. We are a brotherhood that is united by a shared experience and shared values based on Lasallian principles. We are proud to call ourselves "Brothers' Boys."

In closing, I want to thank you for honoring me by your presence here tonight, but, more importantly, I want to thank you for supporting Christian Brothers High School. Under the leadership of our president, Brother Chris, our principal, Chris Fay, and our board chair, Gary Stavrum, CBHS is offering our students a comprehensive, contemporary curriculum which allows our students to develop the skills required to think critically in an ever-changing environment. Keeping CBHS on the leading edge of a highly competitive private school market is going to require your continued support.