

In the fall of 1997, the CHS Alumni Committee launched a new initiative, the Catholic High Alumni Hall of Fame. This initiative was implemented to honor Crusader alumni who stand out among the more than 8,900 graduates of Catholic High. To date 32 exemplary alumni have been inducted into the Alumni Hall of Fame. These men and women, ranging in graduation years from 1941 to 1993, have been selected for their embodiment of the CHS Core Values of Commitment to Excellence, Commitment to Service, Personal Integrity, and Selfless Love and for their generosity, commitment, and loyalty to Catholic High. On Friday, March 15, yet another outstanding CHS alumni was inducted into the Catholic High Alumni Hall of Fame—Fr. John Licari, a member of the Class of 1972.

Born in the Bronx, N.Y. in 1954, our honoree moved to Pensacola in 1967, the year of Sgt. Pepper! He began playing the guitar in the mid '60s—mostly music by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. His family was pretty musical—he even had a great-grandfather who taught music in Italy. Fr. Licari began performing professionally while in high school with a five member band called Lyman Slack who practiced in the St. Ann Catholic Church Gulf Breeze Parish Hall. By 1973 the band broke up and our honoree followed the solo path, spending more time writing songs. This led to a move to Atlanta In 1978 to try his talents in a new

town. During this period, he found this big city a bit lonely, coupled with the spiritual emptiness he felt. About that time, Bob Dylan, already a rock-n-roll legend, released 'Slow Train Coming' a spiritual album that mirrored Dylan's recent conversion to Christianity. In this album, Fr. Licari had a blueprint. He could rock. He could roll. And do it all in Jesus' name. This gave our inductee a tool that would reconcile these two different worlds.

Having lost touch with his faith, Fr. Licari picked up a copy of "Peach of Soul' by the late Archbishop Fulton Sheen. This book struck our inductee immediately. It talked about the Catholic Sacrament of Reconciliation, which our honoree had avoided for years. Suddenly a lot of things about the Catholic faith began to make sense. Not really knowing anyone in Atlanta, Fr. Licari began volunteering his musical talents at the Transfiguration Catholic Church where he worked with shut-ins and also in Atlanta's soup kitchens. It was here that his faith began to grow.

In 1979 Bob Dylan came out with an album that was sort of 'Gospel-flavored.' It showed Fr. Licari how he could write music about the Lord and how the Lord had affected our inductee's life. As a result two

prayerful songs were written—‘Man on the Cross’ and ‘I want to give my life to You’ that were played everywhere Fr. Licari performed.

Through the early 1980’s our inductee’s spirituality and faith deepened to the extent he even questioned whether he was being called to the priesthood. Although he recognized this call, he was afraid to take a step away from the musical career that he loved.

In 1985 Fr. Licari moved back to Pensacola and once again began attending St. Ann’s in Gulf Breeze. He began performing in Pensacola clubs again but this time around he mixed his own spiritually-based songs into the act. Songs that he played were more thought-provoking. He’d go from ‘Pinball Wizard’ to ‘Man on the Cross.’ He was active in many mission activities through St. Anne Parish in Gulf Breeze. He joined mission trips to Chimbote, Peru, where he aided the poor and also volunteered locally at Loaves and Fishes Soup Kitchen. Both of these nudged him closer to his religious awakening. It was in Peru that Fr. Licari met Rev. Jack Davis, a man who would influence him in his decision to become a priest. Ever since his spiritual awakening in Atlanta, he realized he was being called to the priesthood but he just wasn’t ready. So in 1993 Fr. Licari decided to get a degree in special education which he received in 1996. It was that year that he called his

sister Aida and said he had some news for her. Her question was, “What, are you going to get married?” to which he responded “sorta.”

In 1997 Fr. Licari entered Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans where he graduated with a Master’s Degree in Divinity in May 2002. While he took his musical instruments into the seminary and was encouraged to hold on to his love of music, he began to distance himself from music to pursue a closer relationship with the Lord. He stopped writing music and traded the harmonica, acoustic guitar, keyboards, and vocals in the local bar scene to studying theology at the seminary. His spiritual advisor thought he was distancing himself too much from music and said he should write at least one song a week. He was encouraged to use his gift of music for God’s glory.

Fr. Licari’s devotion to God and the Catholic Church was celebrated May 18, 2001, at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart when he was ordained as a deacon, the final step before priesthood. His 27-year career as a singer/ songwriter had led him to the priesthood and it was on June 28, 2002, that Fr. John Licari was ordained a priest by Bishop John Ricard.

Since being ordained, Fr. Licari's positions in the Diocese have included serving as Parochial Vicar at St. Mary Catholic Church, Ft. Walton Beach, FL; serving as Parochial Vicar at Nativity of Our Lord; Administrator at St. Anne Bellview; Administrator of St. Mary Parish, FWB; Administrator, St. John the Evangelist Church in Pensacola and from January 1, 2018, to the present, Fr. Licari serves as Pastor of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Pensacola

Although he's still a fan of rock and roll, Father Licari's current 'gigs' more include ecumenical gatherings along with ongoing performances at the Saufley Field Prison Ministry, the Rangers at Hulburt Field, Blessing of the Ships, and concerts for fundraisers such as 'Blankets for the Homeless,' 5K Sunset Run, events for St. John's Parish and, of course, joining other Catholic High alumni priests every year at the Spring Mass and Fish Fry at Catholic High.

It is with a great deal of pride that we honor our newest member of the Catholic High Alumni Hall of Fame, a member of the Class of 1972, the curly-haired explosion of energy and a true friend of Catholic High, Fr. John Licari.

