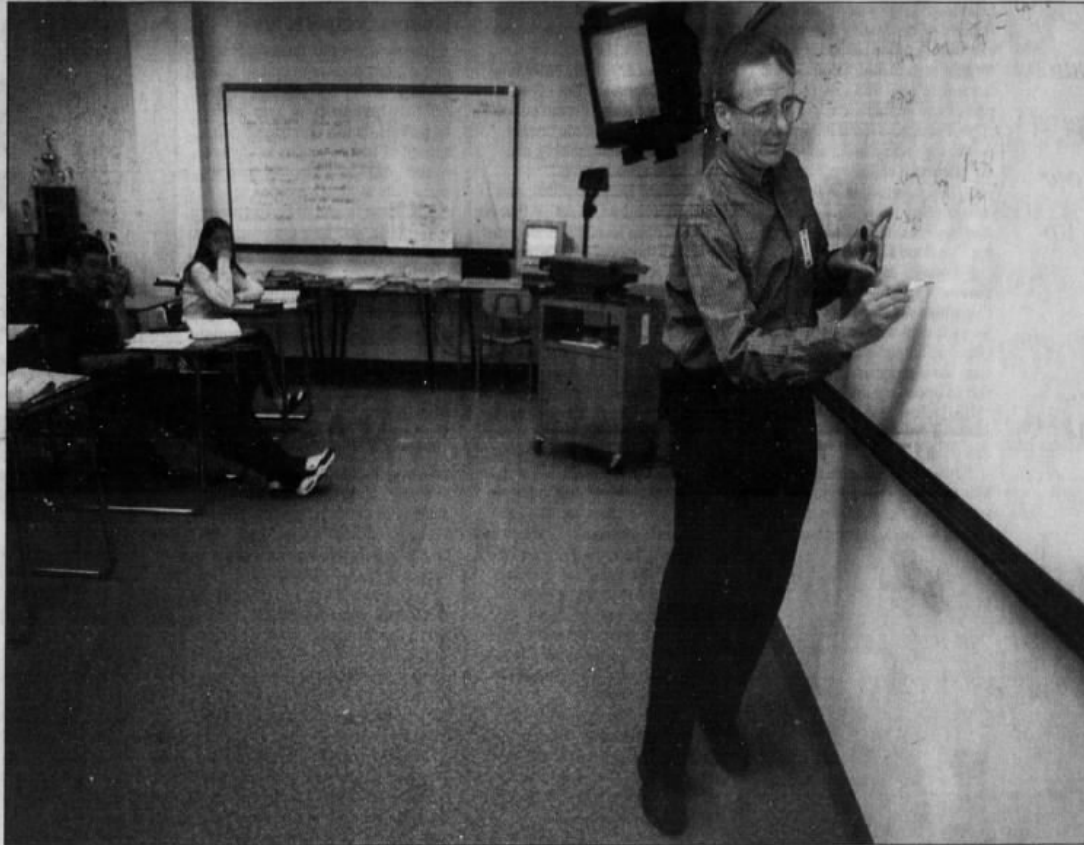


West Valley to lose teacher, priest, friend



The Rev. Phil Evanstock doesn't wear a clerical collar, so some of his students at Trevor G. Browne High School don't even know he's a priest. According to the diocese, Father Phil is the only priest working at a Valley public school.

Mark Henke/The Arizona Republic

Catholic order calls him to post in Houston

By Michelle Craig
The Arizona Republic

As a Catholic priest, the Rev. Phil Evanstock can be found saying Mass on Sundays at St. Augustine Church in Maryvale. At other times, military personnel and their families can call on him as an auxiliary chaplain at Luke Air Force Base.

However, it is Evanstock's "day job" that has allowed him to serve not only God but the people in his community.

For the past 27 years, Evanstock — Father Phil, as his parishioners call him — has worked at Trevor G. Browne High School in Phoenix, where he now heads the math department. According to the Catholic Diocese of Phoenix, he is the only priest or nun who works at a Valley public school.

But as much as the 64-year-old clergyman has enjoyed teaching for the past 30 years, he now has been

Farewell to Father Phil

called by a higher power to serve his own.

Shortly after school lets out this May, Father Phil will move to Houston to work with his order, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit.

Father Phil was invited to join the Trevor Browne staff when the school opened in 1973. Administrators had heard good things about him during

his time as a teacher at the now-closed Gerard Catholic High School in east Phoenix. Being a priest, he had to receive permission from his order to work in this type of setting. Permission was granted, and Father Phil said his life has been a joy ever since.

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W. Valley to lose popular teacher, priest and friend

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"It has been a very happy time for me," he said. "In a certain sense, teaching at Browne is probably more realistic than at other (parochial) schools."

Father Phil seems to have a natural knack for working with students.

"He's funny," said Jennifer Webster, 17, a calculus student at Trevor. "He brings things into context."

He doesn't wear a religious collar, so not all the students know he is an ordained priest. He's like many other teachers, attending most school sporting events and trying to be there for students who need help. In his spare time, Father Phil is an amateur astrologer, hikes Squaw Peak on Saturdays, is involved with the National Audubon Society and spends time with the five cats he said "have adopted me."

In his move to Houston and the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, he'll become director of finance of

the Western province and work with seminaries of the order.

"We're losing a great guy," Trevor Browne math teacher Ann Tunnell said. "We'll miss him."

Father Phil said it will take some adjusting to an institutional environment. Meanwhile, he's going to keep working with his West Valley community, sharing his message for living a happy, fulfilled life:

"Never lose faith in who you are and where you're going. Believe strongly in the school or community you're a part of. Each individual has great power within themselves to make the immediate environment where they are living a real tremendous place to be."

"Find the strength within yourself and give to others . . . and love the one you're with," Father Phil said, adding with a chuckle, "I think that's a song."

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