



Fr. Miles Riley



Class of 1993

Silver Circle Profile
By: **Kevin Scott Wing**



Whether you've lived in the Bay Area or have worked in the television business here for the last four decades, you've undoubtedly seen or heard **Father Miles Riley** on television and radio.

Throughout these last 40 years, Father Riley has been a mainstay in the Bay Area mass media. Sure, you haven't seen him reporting the news or anchoring behind a desk in a glitzy studio. And certainly, you haven't seen him toiling in a newsroom writing stories or producing a newscast.

Even if you've never heard or seen him over the airwaves, you may have read one of his 13 books, the latest of which hit bookshelves this year.

Father Riley, a Montara resident who lives in a modest "little cottage-by-the-sea," is known for his boundless amounts of energy, his quick wit, his gentle demeanor and his thousand-watt smile. For his work in television, he was nominated by his peers and inducted in 1993 into the *Silver Circle* of the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

Did you know he's an Emmy® Award-winning priest?

Ordained a Catholic priest in Rome in 1963, the Indiana native who has called California home for most of his life has a unique distinction in our Chapter: he is the only priest to have won an Emmy® award. Not only has he received one of those coveted statuettes for his work in Bay Area television, he has won three.

Born 73 years ago in South Bend, Indiana, and raised there, Father Riley grew up just down the street from Notre Dame. The oldest of seven children, his mother became the first female airplane pilot in the state. Not only were his parents talented, so were each of his brothers and sisters.

In school, Father Riley and his siblings performed skits, played musical instruments and wrote songs and poetry. Father Riley got an early taste for the media when he wrote and edited for his high school and college newspapers.

But, at an early age, he also knew that his devotion to God would one day see him to the priesthood.

Father Riley's family eventually relocated to California, moving to the Peninsula in 1945. In the 1940s, his parents read children's stories on Bay Area radio, which inspired him to get into broadcasting years later.

But first, it was the seminary. Father Riley became a seminarian in 1952, when he joined St. Joseph's College Seminary in Mountain View, and later, St. Patrick's Seminary in Menlo Park. From there, he studied in Rome, and there, was ordained in 1963 at the North American College. He also studied theology at the Gregorian University in Rome and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. He eventually studied marriage and family counseling at the University of San Francisco and communications at Stanford, Notre Dame and Loyola, in New Orleans. He also earned his Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley.

Upon his return to the Bay Area as an ordained priest, Father Riley served as a priest in several parishes, beginning with Mission San Rafael Arcangel in 1964. In 1968, he was assigned to St. Paul's Parish in San Francisco. In 1970, Father Riley began a 12-year stint at San Francisco's Mission Dolores.

Father Riley entered Bay Area broadcasting in the 1960s, starting off with his own show on KSFO radio. It was a 15-minute weekly program called *Something More*.

After that, the legendary **Don Sherwood** returned to KSFO as the station's program director.

Sherwood allowed Father Riley to trade the 15-minute program in exchange for four to five 60-second spots per day, renaming it *To Whom It May Concern*, with the sound of a typewriter in the background.

Sherwood also gave Father Riley 15 minutes on Saturdays and Sundays to "remind people that God is alive and well in northern California." It was a different kind of show – listeners would be treated to the sounds of the wind, trees rustling, children playing, the sound of a baby's cry, even a heartbeat.

The program was called *God Talk*.

"We did it for a year and a half," Father Riley says. "There was a sense of humor about it. Even the deejays liked it."

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1970 was a monumental year for Father Riley. He formed the Communications Center for the Archdiocese of San Francisco.

It was also the year that Father Riley met **Don Curran** (*Silver Circle, Class of 1988*), the vice president and general manager of KGO-TV and KGO radio.

Curran, who Father Riley calls "a very devout Catholic," called him to say that the station wanted some kind of religious voice.

"He asked if I was interested," Father Riley says. "And, I said yes, that'd be super. So we started a 30-minute public service program."

The show was called *What On Earth Are You Doing For Heaven's Sake*.

Father Riley jokes that the title was so long, *TV Guide* would list the show as *What On Earth*, so KGO-TV officially changed the title to *For Heaven's Sake*.

He also hosted a show on KGO radio, *Family Matters*.

The call-in program became very popular with listeners.

"Most of our problems in the U.S. stem from the breakdown from family. I think so many of our modern crises can be traced to that breakdown in society."

At one time, Father Riley was seen on nearly all of the Bay Area's television stations, in addition to KGO-TV. He was also seen on KTVU, KRON, KPIX, KEMO (now KOFY) and KBHK (now KBCW).

"**Dave McElhatton** (*Silver Circle, Class of 1988*), the longtime KPIX anchor who died last summer, once said to me, 'Father Myles, you should open a drive-through confessional. You can call it 'Toot and Tell or Go to Hell.'"

Father Riley says his programs have always had a lot of humor.

But, what he was doing almost seemed very unique, at least here in the Bay Area.

"At the time, the airwaves were not a good place to sell religion," he remembers. "Televangelism was just starting to come into the fold. But, it dawned on me early to start up some kind of broadcasting ministry."

When KPIX moved its operations from Van Ness

Avenue to Battery Street in the 1970s, Father Riley orchestrated a real estate coup. Hoping to find a physical home for his broadcast ministry, he convinced KPIX to give him the Van Ness Avenue facility, consequently writing off three million in charitable donations, including building improvements.

"I had to be really creative with the office, staffing and supplies," Father Riley says. "There was no budget for the first ten years. There was no money."

Through the years, Father Riley also was heard on radio stations KFRC, KYA and KYUU.

"I've enjoyed this immensely," he says. "This is my love. My family. My commitment. My family has been, in large part, the media."

Father Riley has become a big part of that media family.

He's written five musical comedies, written 13 books and hundreds of articles about religion. He's also produced a dozen films and has hosted more than 1,500 TV and 4,000 radio programs. Besides the Emmy® awards, Father Riley has also received 10 national Gabriel awards for outstanding radio and TV productions.

In recent years, Father Riley has become successful inspiring others on the speakers' circuit. Besides his teachings throughout the United States, he's visited 47 countries, teaching bishops how to use the media to spread the word of God through communications workshops.

Father Riley tells his stories best through his own brand of humor.

"Just make people feel good about it," he says.

"They'll figure it out."



Kevin Scott Wing pens the *Silver Circle* and *Gold Circle* profiles for *Off Camera*. He is a two-time Emmy® Award-winning Bay Area journalist, currently with KNTV/NBC Bay Area in San Jose as a freelance news writer/producer. Reach him at kevinscottwing@gmail.com.

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