

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of the Youngstown Diocese

Personal Experience

O.H. 1567

REVEREND FRANCIS JOSEPH HUGHES

Interviewed

by

Patrick H. Downey

on

November 16, 1992

REVEREND FRANCIS J. HUGHES

Reverend Hughes was born on March 15, 1918 in Youngstown, Ohio. His parents, James and Mary Agnes Hughes' only daughter became a nun and two of their five sons entered the priesthood. Reverend Hughes worked for Republic Steel in Youngstown for two years before deciding to become a priest. After prep school at St. Charles in Cantonsville, Maryland, and having graduated from St. Mary's Seminary in Cleveland, he was ordained in 1945.

His first assignment was at Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Ashtabula. During his stay in Ashtabula, he was responsible for the altar servers, CCD [Confraternity Christian Doctrine], the hospitalized, and taking the census for the parish. He was transferred to St. Joseph's in Massillon until 1959 when he was assigned to St. Ambrose in Garrettsville as Pastor. After just over a year at St. Ambrose, he was appointed to St. Joseph in Mantua. With the parishioner's aid, he constructed the first Catholic elementary school and a temporary church. He also taught a religion class at Hiram College. Another of his fond memories at St. Joseph's was the first Ox Roast Fair, implemented to raise funds for the school and parish. From 1966 to 1970, he went to St. Stephen's in Niles. As Pastor of St. Patrick's, Hubbard, Ohio from 1970-1988, he was proud of the mens' and womens' renewal program and of the gym and stage erected under his direction.

Although retired, Reverend Hughes remains active in church ministry. Since 1988, due to the present shortage of priests, he has been asked by the Bishop to temporarily serve at five parishes. He is currently at St. Paul the Apostle Parish in New Middletown, Ohio. Reverend Hughes' favorite leisure activity is golf.

-Patrick Downey

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INTERVIEWEE: REVEREND FRANCIS JOSEPH HUGHES

INTERVIEWER: Patrick H. Downey

SUBJECT: Vocations, Assignments, Manua

DATE: November 16, 1992

D: This is an interview with Reverend Francis J. Hughes, for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the History of the Youngstown Diocese project, by Patrick H. Downey, on November 16, 1992.

Reverend, maybe you could tell us a little bit about your childhood and growing up, and your home environment.

H: Well, I was born in Youngstown, on the Southside, at 68 E. Earle Avenue, just off Market Street. There were five children in our family. There was a girl who was the eldest. Then, there was a boy, James. Then, there was myself. I was the middle child. Then, [there was] a brother, John, and finally, a brother, George. I attended St. Patrick's Elementary School for eight years. I graduated from there. Then, I attended Princeton Junior High. Then, I went the next three years to South High School. I graduated from there in 1936. Really, I didn't have any idea of what I wanted to do in life. So finally, with my dad's help, I got a job at the Republic Steel. I worked there for two years. Along the way, I decided what I wanted to do.

My older brother was studying for the priesthood. My sister was in at the convent at St. Joseph's, Community of Cleveland since 1932. So, I made up my mind that I didn't want to work for the Republic Steel for the rest of my life. I needed another credit in Latin, so I

went to night school at South High. I picked that up. I entered the prep seminary in the Fall of 1938, which was at Baltimore, Maryland, St. Charles College. I went there for two years. Then, I applied for the Cleveland Diocesan Seminary, a major seminary, and I was accepted in the Fall of 1940. Then, I went through the Cleveland Major Seminary.

The war came on. So, they had us attend classes during a couple summer periods. So, we got the six years of the major seminary in five years. I was ordained with my class in the Spring of 1945.

My first appointment was Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish in Ashtabula, Ohio. I was there as the associate for ten years. The pastor who was there when I first went there died after I had been there seven years. Then, a new pastor came in, Father Joseph Feicht. I was with him for three years. In 1955, I was transferred to St. Joseph's Church in Massillon, Ohio, where I was the associate for four years. Then, according to the Diocesan practice--at the time [it was by] seniority--I became a pastor in 1959. I was pastor of St. Ambrose Church in Garrettsville, Ohio, in Portage County. I was there for a year and three months. Then, I was transferred to the neighboring parish, at St. Joseph's in Mantua, Ohio. The previous pastor had purchased at the edge of the village ninety-five acres with the idea of building the first Catholic elementary school there. So, I thought that was my purpose in being there.

So, together with the parishioners, we put up the first Catholic elementary school. It amounted to eight classrooms, a temporary church, which we thought would eventually become a gymnasium, and a parish hall that had a common wall with the temporary church in length and dimension.

In the year 1966 in June, the Bishop called me and asked me if I'd like to go to St. Stephen's parish in Niles, Ohio. I accepted the appointment. I was at St. Stephen's in Niles for four years, from 1966 to 1970. Again, the Bishop called and asked if I'd be interested in being transferred to St. Patrick's parish in Hubbard, Ohio, where the pastor had had, in the early part of the year, a near fatal stroke and could no longer administer the parish. I told the Bishop I'd go there if he wanted me or I'd stay at Niles. So, he decided to send me to St. Patrick's in Hubbard, Ohio. I was pastor there from 1970 to 1988.

According to Diocesan policy, when I was at the age of seventy, I was required to retire from administration. So, I retired on July 1, 1988. During my time at St.

Patricks, one of the fruitful events that I was happy to be a part of was to erect a building that was a combination gym and stage, which the parish never had before, which was much needed. I decided that I would live at the priest's retirement home in Louisville, Ohio, called The Emmaus House. One of the important reasons I decided to live there was the fact that two of my classmates were living in that particular area. I have my apartment there and regard that as my home. Since that time, the Bishop has asked me to go out on special assignments. The first one was four months at the parish I had been at earlier as a pastor in the early 1960's, at St. Joseph's in Mantua. I was there for four months in the spring of 1989.

Then, in the fall of 1989, the Bishop asked me to go down for three months to St. James parish in Waynesburg, Ohio, in the southern part of Stark County. After that, the Bishop asked me to go to St. Paul's parish in Salem. I went there in July of 1990, and I was there until July of 1991. Then, after that, the Bishop asked me to go to Regina Coeli parish, [in] Alliance, Ohio, as interim pastor for five months, from February 21, 1992 to July 15, 1992. Then, I returned to my regular place of living at The Emmaus House.

This year, the Bishop called me and asked me to come down to St. Paul the Apostle parish in New Middletown, Ohio. He indicated to me that he'd like me to stay here until the end of this present year, 1992. So, that's where I'm at now. I'll continue to be here, according to his wishes.

D: If you had a favorite assignment over the years, one that really stuck out in your mind, what do you think it would be, and what are some of the reasons you think that you really enjoyed it?

H: Well, I really enjoyed all of my assignments. The longest one was at St. Patrick's parish in Hubbard, where I was for eighteen years. One of the reasons I enjoyed my second appointment, which was St. Joseph's in Massillon was that they had a Catholic school there. Most of the time when I was at Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Ashtabula, we didn't have a Catholic school. But, as I said, I enjoyed all my appointments. I never had any serious problems.

D: What was your first assignment like? What were some of your responsibilities, that we can go back and discuss?

H: My first assignment was Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish in Ashtabula, Ohio. I had charge of the altar servers. I helped out with the CCD [Confraternity Christian

Doctrine] program. I visited the hospital quite regularly. I took census there for people of the parish.

D: As a young priest, when the new Diocese of Youngstown formed, what do you think were some of the major reasons there was a split with Cleveland?

H: That happened before I was ordained. As I said, I had an older brother who studied for the priesthood, and he became a priest in the Cleveland Diocese. He was assigned in Cleveland. So, the rule at the time the Youngstown Diocese was formed was that the priests that were already ordained would continue to function in the diocese where they were stationed. For the young men in the seminary at the time, of which I was as one, it depended on where your home was, which diocese you belonged to. Of course, my home was in Youngstown. So, I automatically belonged to the Youngstown Diocese.

So, my brother and I were each in a different diocese. The fortunate part of it for me was, getting a parish according to the practice of seniority. I got my first parish when I was ordained fourteen years, in 1959. My brother, a priest of the Cleveland Diocese, didn't get a parish, nor did my classmates in Cleveland until they were ordained twenty-five years.

D: Over the years, in your opinion, what was it that aided the Diocese of Youngstown in its growth and development?

H: Well, I think we had a very fine "esprit Decorps." We were always a diocese that had a good spirit. We had fine bishops. Bishop McFadden, he ordained me. Bishop Walsh, who gave me my first parish, and also my second parish and Bishop Malone our current Bishop who is my classmate.

D: So, Bishop McFadden was the first bishop?

H: Right.

D: How long was he bishop?

H: Bishop McFadden was Bishop of the Youngstown Diocese for about nine years. It was 1952 when Bishop Walsh came.

D: What were the reasons for Bishop Walsh coming?

H: I believe Bishop McFadden's health was declining. Bishop Walsh came in as what they called a conjutor bishop, meaning he would automatically succeed Bishop McFadden.

D: Was there a twelve to thirteen year limit on assignments?

H: Not at that time. There was no limit on any assignments whether it be a pastor or an assistant pastor. Those limits have only come in recent years.

H: The limits were first on associates. Then later, it was applied to pastors. As I recall, they made it retroactive for pastors, back to around 1976. Then, of course, that would have meant that I would have had to take a new assignment around 1986. However, part of the rule was that if you were getting close to retirement, you wouldn't have to take a change.

D: What were the years of your service in the diocese?

H: I was an active priest of the Diocese for forty-three years.

D: What, if anything, do you think was a hindrance to the diocese and its growth?

H: I can't think of anything. I think our Diocese developed very well, and it kept pace with the times.

D: Do you think there is a problem now with new priests and new nuns entering the religious life?

H: The biggest problem is the small number.

D: What do you think are some of the reasons behind that?

H: It's kind of hard to say. Life style now days in the home. . . . There are more distractions on account of television and other activities. There doesn't seem to be as much, say, concentration and cultivation of spiritual values as there used to be. In many instances, everybody is busy doing his or her thing.

D: Was this a gradual trend in your opinion, or was there a certain point where you could see a large, substantial drop-off? A particular period?

H: No, I think it has been kind of gradual in recent years.

D: What were some of the reasons why you became a priest?

H: Well, my sister went into the convent. My brother was studying for the priesthood. Our family was, I would say, close to the church. Not physically, but spiritually. I just decided that that's what I wanted to do, without anybody using any undue influence on me. My parents were for it as long as I was for it. They

supported me in my wishes. My sister and brother didn't use any pressure on me in any way whatsoever.

D: So, it was pretty much your own decision?

H: Right.

D: In your schooling in the seminary, was there any particular part that you really enjoyed in your studies?

H: Well, I had my goal set. I just worked toward that. I never had any doubts or questions. I was never sorry in my decision. I feel the same way now.

D: When you first became pastor, what were some of the responsibilities that you had to handle? Maybe, at its best and at its worst.

H: Well, the first parish I was ever at was St. Ambrose in Garrettsville. It was a small parish. I had the responsibility of the whole parish. I got some Dominican sisters from Ravenna to come up and help with CCD religion classes once a week.

D: Now, was there already a school and parish which were both physically built when you got there?

H: No, there was no school. It was just a small parish. We had a CCD program which went from elementary grades on through high school. I was responsible for that, for all the services, giving the people the opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist, and all the other Sacraments of the Church.

D: So, there was obviously some pretty good growth taking place at that period?

H: Yes. The pastor just previous to me built the first church. His name was Father Carl Nicolay. Then too, as pastor of St. Ambrose, I had charge of Hiram College, which had some Catholic students there at the time. It was only two miles away from the church in Garrettsville.

D: What did you do there?

H: We held a class there for Catholic students. We met on a regular basis. At the time that I was there at St. Ambrose, the Cleveland Browns used to use Hiram College as their summer camp. That's when Otto Graham, Jimmy Brown, and Chuck Knoll were there.

D: What were some of the greatest changes in the diocese in your years of service, would you say?

H: I would say the changes brought about by Vatican II. While I was at St. Joseph's in Mantua, we started something special, the Ox Roast Fair. It's still going today.

D: How did that get started?

H: At Mantua, the Erie train used to run through there. It would run at least one train in the morning to downtown Cleveland and back home at night. A number of people would get on the train and go into Cleveland to work. Then, they'd get back on the train at night and come home. Some of the men of the parish got acquainted with one of the Riders, who was in advertising. He suggested that we do something, like an Ox Roast Fair. It was kind of a catchy idea. Then, the people of the parish got behind this new project.

The fellow that really ran the Ox Roast had never done anything like that before, but, he got some information and tried it. They had it cooking in a dugout in the ground; they didn't know how it would turn out. It turned out just about perfect. That same man, through the years continued as the chairman of the Ox Roast itself. He may be still doing that for all I know.

D: That's interesting.

H: They dug a long pit, then they burned branches of wood in the bottom of the pit. They got like a bed of coals and then covered it with sheet iron. The ox was roast beef. They prepared it in large pieces, wrapped it in muslin, and put it in the pit. Then, they put more sheet iron over it. They filled in the pit with dirt and let it cook. Then, after a number of hours, they uncovered it, sliced it, and served. They're still carrying on the Ox Roast Fair up there as a support for the parish and the school.

D: Now, when this first started out, was it small or was there a pretty large response?

H: Well, there was a good response right from the beginning. Another attraction in the Ox Roast Fair was a tractor pull. It has become more popular through the years.

D: What were some of the other developments during your years of service that come to mind?

H: One of the things that I was very pleased about was at St. Patrick's in Hubbard. That's where we ran the renewal program for six or eight years. It was called "Christ Renews His Parish." It was a really great program. It really helped many people. A lot of them

were the younger, married people, as well as some of the older ones. It helped them in a great way to really appreciate and cultivate the spiritual life. It not only helped the individuals but also families, because many times, the husband would make renewal, and then, the wife would make it or vice versa. It had two segments. The women's program and the men's program.

D: Were there any other programs at St. Patrick's that you were involved in that were helpful to the parish?

H: Well, we had a fine school. It helped many, many youngsters to develop their talents, grow in the spiritual life, and prepare for High School and college.

D: Were there any social programs in the diocese in your years that you can think of that were helpful to the diocese?

H: You better ask Bishop Malone that one!

D: Okay. Maybe we can go back a little bit now to Vatican II. What are your views on Vatican II? Do you think it was fairly well accepted, or was there any negative reaction to it, in your opinion?

H: Well, Vatican II, I think had many good points about it. I think many of the aspects of it were beneficial. One of the great benefits from it was the Mass in English, the Mass in the vernacular. There were a number of people who had difficulties accepting the changes, even priests. I think it was kind of challenging as far as accepting some of the changes. I tried to cooperate with the changes. I figured that that was the way the church was going. So, I tried to go with the Spirit.

D: What do you think were some of the positive aspects of Vatican II?

H: I think that Vatican II has been a benefit by the fact that it has brought greater participation in liturgy and parish life by the lay people. It's also been helpful especially in regards to the sisters getting into other branches of service in the church, like becoming directors of religious education and pastoral ministers.

D: What do you think are some of the benefits of having lay people involved now with the church? Is it [happening] because there are not so many priests to carry out some of the work that was done traditionally by priests, or is it [having lay people involved] because there is a shortage?

- H: Well, by the fact that more people are getting involved with the church and say, participating in the life of the church, it not only helps the lay person in his faith life, but it relieves the priest who sometimes did everything, especially in a small parish. He can concentrate now on his more important work of his spiritual life and help the people in their spiritual life.
- D: What are some of the things that lay people do now that perhaps they hadn't participated in in the past?
- H: They are readers at Mass, they are Eucharistic Ministers. They visit the sick not only in the hospitals but also in the nursing homes. They bring communion to the shut-ins and also to people who are in the hospitals and nursing homes. When I was at Regina Coeli in Alliance, there were people who would come out with me to the nursing homes and help me to celebrate the Mass there and help with all the physical arrangements.
- D: What do you think are some of the challenges that face priests today and perhaps into the future, as compared to the past?
- H: With the increase in the number of Catholics and the shortage of priests, it seems to me that it's quite a challenge for a priest to take care of not just one parish but more than one parish, like Father Gubser down in Columbiana County who is responsible for three parishes now.
- D: It does seem kind of ironic. It seems like the Catholic Community is growing. . . .
- H: Right!
- D: And, yet, there is not enough priests to cover the new growth.
- H: Right!
- D: What is the Walking Together program? Perhaps you can elaborate on that a little bit.
- H: I really don't know too much about the "Walking Together" program except the fact that it was initiated to look at the problem of the shortage of priests and get the people more aware of the necessity of vocations to the priesthood, not only to be aware of the shortage but of help in the solution.
- D: What are some of the ways they go about doing that?
- H: Well, as I said, I'm not too familiar with the "Walking

Together" program. That has started, I think, within the last two years. I have been filling in at different parishes, but so far, I really haven't got overly involved in that.

D: What are some of the other challenges that you think are facing the diocese now as compared with the past, if any?

H: Well, I can't think of anything along that line. I will add to the subject of the benefits of the Vatican II Council. One of them is the fact that the people are more knowledgeable about the Mass and about the scriptures, which is good. They are also, participating better in the liturgy, and they are receiving the Holy Eucharist far more on a regular basis than in former days.

D: Has that led to a better spirit within the congregation, do you think, than in the past, that the people can be more involved?

H: Well, it's certainly bound to help them have a better spirit when they're participating in the Mass, their singing, their receiving Holy Communion more often, and their coming to know better the Holy Scripture, the Word of God, all of which will promote Christian love in their homes and in their everyday lives.

D: Can you think of anything that you could see in the history of the diocese that was a prominent change, or even that we haven't covered, that may be useful to mention?

H: I think the Youngstown Diocese has been one of the diocese in the United States that has made a fine effort to implement the decrees of the Vatican Council II. It has, I would say, taken a positive attitude toward all of the Vatican II changes, instructed and prepared the clergy, the religious, and the lay people to adopt them.

D: Is there anything else that you might want to mention that you think we may have skipped over, of importance?

H: I can't think of anything.

D: What would you like to be remembered for in your years of service?

H: Wherever I have been, especially since I've been a pastor, my ideals, my aim, and my goal was to be of service to the people in their spiritual and religious life. As Jesus said, "I came not to be served, but to serve."

D: That's a good note to end on. Thank you very much for your time.

H: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW