

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of the Youngstown Diocese

Personal Experience

O.H. 1566

MONSIGNOR ROBERT C. FANNON

Interviewed

by

Patrick H. Downey

on

November 20, 1992

MONSIGNOR FANNON

Monsignor Fannon was born on Jan. 15, 1922, in Youngstown, Ohio. His father, George Fannon, was originally from Mt. Savage Maryland, a highly concentrated area of Catholics who moved from Baltimore to practice their faith without problems. George Fannon moved to Youngstown to find employment as a bricklayer and eventually became a contractor. Monsignor Fannon's mother, Marie Hogen, was a court stenographer for Judge Jenkins in the Mahoning County Court. She retired after marrying George. Monsignor Fannon attended St. Edward's Grade School and Ursuline High School. He decided to become a priest after his freshman year of college at John Carroll. He attended St. Joseph's College from 1941-1942 for preparatory seminary courses. He entered the seminary in 1942 and was ordained in December of 1946.

His first assignment was at St. Nicholas in Struthers, a very small parish that blossomed after World War II. When he arrived, there were about 120 children in school. But, when he left in 1958, the school held 1400 students. He was very involved with the public school religious programs, or what, today, is known as P.S.R. In 1958, he became the principal of Central Catholic High School in Canton. At that time, he began attending summer classes at Notre Dame and received a masters degree in school administration to fulfill state requirements for principals. When Central Catholic's enrollment grew to the point where the administration had to turn away potential students, Monsignor Fannon was willing to head the construction of St. Thomas High

School in Canton.

He left Central Catholic in 1969 and became Vicar for the Religious of the Youngstown Diocese. As Vicar, he implemented programs to promote religious life at the time when vocations were declining and some of the priests and nuns were leaving. He helped get dispensations for them from Rome and continued as Vicar until 1977. He was also pastor of St. Rose in Girard, from 1971 until 1981. During that period, Monsignor Fannon "experimented" with new programs in the parish, such as greater lay ministry participation, parish council, and marriage renewal program.

In 1981, Monsignor Fannon was transferred to St. Michael's in Canton, where he still resides. He helps the parish by working with the divorced and separated people, getting lay people involved with the church, and visits the sick regularly. He is active in the Social Concerns Program, which provides emergency aid for the poor by building two habitable homes. Monsignor Fannon also participates in the Youth Ministry Program for public high school and grade school students.

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INTERVIEWEE: MONSIGNOR ROBERT C. FANNON

INTERVIEWER: Pat Downey

SUBJECT: PSR, Youth, Vatican II, lay ministry programs

DATE: November 20, 1992

D: This is an interview with Monsignor Robert Fannon, for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the History of the Youngstown Diocese project, by Pat Downey, on November 20, 1992.

Okay Monsignor, why don't you tell us a little bit about your family background and where you grew up?

F: I was born on January 15, 1922, in Youngstown, Ohio. I grew up on the Northside of Youngstown. My father's name was George Fannon, and my mother's name was Marie Hogen. My dad was originally from Mt. Savage, Maryland.

Mt. Savage was a small, little berg in western Maryland, where the Irish settlers had moved from Baltimore in order to be able to practice their faith and have their own church, without any religious problems that they had down in Baltimore. My dad's family was eleven children. There were nine boys in his family. They had a baseball team. The oldest of the brothers went to the seminary and became a priest. My dad was the youngest boy, and he grew up there. [He] came out to Youngstown in order to find work and met my mother. My mother, at that time, was a court stenographer for Judge Jenkins, in the Mahoning County Court. He married her, and [they] stayed in Youngstown. He was a bricklayer by trade and went into contracting.

My mother, who was a court stenographer, did not work after she was married. She retired, although she still had a lot of work with her profession. People were constantly after her for different things, as far as court was concerned. I grew up on the Northside. I was born on Laura Avenue, in Youngstown, and [I] lived on Selma Avenue when I was really young. My dad built the house. When the depression came, of course, we moved out. We rented the house in order to save the house. Everybody was losing their house at that time. I also lived on Saranac Avenue later on. I went to St. Edward's Grade School for eight years, and when I graduated from St. Edward's, I went to Ursuline High School. I graduated from Ursuline High School in 1940, and from then, I went to college. And, I was trying to make a decision on the priesthood. I made the decision, probably, pretty much after my freshman year. I went to St. Joseph's College in Indiana, where I took a year of preparation with Latin, Greek, and so forth, that we needed to go into the seminary. I went into the seminary in 1942, and Bishop McFadden came up to the seminary in 1946. Actually, we had only been in the seminary about four calendar years, at that time. The course was six years. We did pick up a year in summers. Then, we had dispensation from the last year's studies, and we were ordained.

I was ordained in December of 1946. My first assignment was at St. Nicholas Parish in Struthers, which was a very interesting assignment. It was a small town, adjacent to Youngstown. It was very interesting in the fact that, when I went there, it was a very small parish. Right after the war, everybody started moving in. As far as St. Nicholas in Struthers is concerned, when I went there, they had four classrooms and a little school and we had about one hundred and twenty kids in school. We had two grades in one room. We had a four room little school. I was there from 1946, after I was ordained. Well, I was really appointed there in January of 1947, and I was there until 1958. When I left there, we had fourteen hundred kids in school. That was the product of everybody coming home from war, and buying and building in that area. It was an exciting place, because we were doing many things that, when I went there--the church had just been dedicated on December the eighth, and I went there around the fifteenth of January, right around my birthday--it was a brand new church.

With the parish growing like it was, by leaps and bounds, we had many interesting things. I was involved a lot in the school, with getting new teachers and so forth, to keep up with the expansion of the school. I was also involved in the public school program. They

call it P.S.R. today--Public School Religion. We had an evening program. We had about 410 kids in that program. We'd bus them in, and we'd prepare teachers. We ran it just like regular school. They had an absentee list, and if they weren't there, we called their home. We were able to build up a big public school religion class, high school level, and we also had the elementary level. It was a very interesting endeavor at that time, because it was a new concept, in a way, and it's one that worked out very well for the families in that area.

Then, when I was there, I was involved in youth work. We had a new hall under the new church. We had a lot of activities for the youth. It was a very enjoyable appointment. My pastor was Father McFarland, and he was a good man to work with. He encouraged everything that you would do, and he gave you a lot of leeway to use your own initiative to do things. I'd say for me, it was a very good appointment, because I got the opportunity to do a lot of things in the church and be involved and even experiment, myself, in things that I found, later on, were of great use to me in the priesthood.

In 1958, I was sent to Central Catholic High School in Canton to be principal. I completed some of my work that I had to do to fulfill the state qualifications for principal. I went to Notre Dame University and got a masters [degree] in school administration. I went to Central, as I said, in September of 1958. It was a school that was growing. We had a school of about sixteen hundred young people in four years of high school, and it was a challenge, because education has such a diversity to it. It was a real challenge in a lot of different areas that, I think, the appointment helped me to learn about a lot of things. It's like, when you take on responsibilities, a lot of times, the main benefits are to the people themselves. It seemed that way. I enjoyed working with the young people.

We had a large faculty. We had to start turning students away. At that time, we built a new school, St. Thomas High School, on the other side of town. I was delegated to be in charge of the building of the new school. It too, was set up in, what we would call, a co-institutional school. We had brothers teaching the boys, and we had the sisters teaching the girls. Of course, we always got chided that there was an iron curtain, that we were separating the boys from the girls. But, high school kids took care of that pretty well. It was a co-institutional school, probably until 1966, when the brothers left. Then, we made it co-educational. We built the new school, and of course, in so many years, because of higher tuitions and so

forth, there became a decrease in enrollment. Both Central Catholic High School and the new school, St. Thomas, are doing very well at the present time. I was in school work until 1969. And, when I left Central Catholic High School, I became Vicar for the Religious in the Youngstown Diocese.

At that time, there was a lot of upset, particularly after the Vatican Council. I was Vicar for the Religious in order to establish programs and support for religious life in the Diocese, and also, to talk with people at that time in religious vocations. Because of the changes and so forth, some people were leaving their vocations. I got dispensations for them from Rome. It was an interesting job. We bought the House of Prayer on the Northside of Youngstown, just up on Fifth Avenue right by the park, by Crandall Park. We ran a House of Prayer for the religious--it was Women Religious that [we] ran it for there--and [they] ran it for some years, probably up to 1976, 1977, sometime like that. And, I continued on as Vicar for the Religious.

But, from that, [I] went to St. Rose Parish in Girard. I was Pastor there from 1971 until 1981. St. Rose is a very good parish. I think that we, in the post Vatican era, really experimented with lay ministry. [We started] getting more of the people involved in the activities of the parish by expanding that [the parish] and giving lay people responsibility, by establishing a parish council, by helping people take responsibility for their parish, [and by] installing some really good programs, I thought at the time, one of which was a marriage renewal program. The responsibility of the lay people, I really have to name the marriage renewal program. Many of those couples became host couples, who would spend about four sessions with young people who were getting married. They helped prepare the young people for marriage. There were many different programs like that, that we put into St. Rose.

In 1981, I was appointed as Pastor of St. Michael's Parish in Canton, where I am at the present time. We've done many of the same things, I think, probably because of things that I have learned in experimenting with getting lay people involved and having an active representation in ministering the parish on the part of the lay people. We installed many of those programs at St. Michael's, where I am at the present time.

We have a high number of people involved in different ministries in the parish, visiting the sick in hospitals and rest homes, and taking the sacraments to them. We have programs, also, for divorced, separated people. [We have] family life programs and the Marriage Renew-

al. These are helpful programs. We have a Social Concerns Program in our parish at the present time. This is the second year that we've been able to build a Habital home. The parish has raised the money. The men and women of the parish have gone down and built the house last year, and they've built another house this year. They've been really involved in Social Concerns and the things that a parish should be involved in, like reaching out to the community in which we live. Social Concerns has been very operative, with emergency aid to people who knock on your door, people who are seeking help; plus, gas, electricity, or rent, help at times, together with the United Way or with other parishes. With their programs . . . of course, we have an extensive education program, naturally. We have five hundred and fifty kids in school, and we have a good Youth Ministry Program. Also, [we have] a good program for public education, for elementary as well as high school students, in order to try to help them get a sense of where they are as people and help them mature and grow as they should.

We also have been involved in retreat programs recently, where we have retreats. We believe very much in peer ministry. The young people will work in those retreats. They will work to help younger people. By doing this peer ministry, I think, they really help themselves a lot. Today's meeting that I'm attending, is very important. We're talking about a shortage of priests, and the present parish that I'm in, we have a staff of people. We have different people who are involved, staff people who are hired--full time people--to be involved in Music Ministry. Another one is in Liturgy. Another, is for Social Concerns. [We have] a lay man who is the director of Religious Education.

And, it's through these people that we will involve other people. Lay people, by their baptism, have a responsibility to minister one another. I think, that's where we are in church, and I think maybe, there's not so much a shortage of priests, as there is a great need for lay people to be doing the things that they are able to do in church. I think that their involvement would be something like Peer Ministry. It'll be awful good for them, a great learning experience of what Christian life is all about.

D: So, you mentioned that there may be a shortage of priests, and at the same time, a need for more lay involvement. What period of time would you say [that] you saw a decline of priests entering the priesthood? What may be some of the reasons, in your opinion?

F: For lack of vocations?

D: Yes.

F: I think that we're living in American society. I think that we have lived in a rather affluent age, I would say. As a young person, as a little kid, I experienced the depression. People who remember the depression really remember it, because it was just a very difficult time in many ways. People did not have money and so forth, but they were very much present to other people, even in the neighborhoods, to help one another. Today, in a more affluent, successful society, the young people growing up are looking for vocations where they can be a professional person and make a lot of money. Ask the kids, and they'll tell you. They want to drive a jaguar, and they want to live in a big house. You know, they want to be a doctor or a lawyer, or something like that. Talk to the kids around eighth grade time. I don't say that it's all one thing, but I think, the society in which we live today, is not really provocative of people being self-sacrificing for the good of other people. I think there's a comeback in that at different times. When you take the Peace Corp and things like that, where, it seems today, we're getting more people interested in that type of thing. I think that's a good sign, that people are interested in giving their life for their fellow men.

But, people talk about celibacy. Celibacy isn't the only reason. The different things that are very attractive to them, as far as the material goods of the world and everything like that. So, I think, there are a number of things that are taking place. I think the Lord has something to do with it. If we do the things that we can do to enable lay people, to live their Christian vocation, I think, the people would care for a lot of things that the priests are caring for today. They would be in their right to do so, because, by their baptism, they are ordained to minister to other people. That's kind of the one thing that baptism is all about.

D: You mentioned Vatican II as having something to do with, maybe, the period. What kind of repercussions, in your opinion, did you see with Vatican II? Perhaps, not just with vocations, but also, in other areas as well?

F: Well, you see, Vatican II renewed the church. If you take liturgy, it renewed the liturgy. You know, in the early days in the church, they were always saying mass in their vernacular. So, we inherited their vernacular. We were saying mass in Latin and so forth. So, in renewing the church, it renewed customs that have been present in church [from] years ago. There's a

general renewal of the church, as far as the worship of the church is concerned. We have lay people reading the scriptures at mass. We have lay people giving communion. Our parish alone, if I were to count the number of people that are sick--we have twenty-three hundred families--that we have lay people visiting, I suppose it would be something like one hundred and eighty people in hospitals and rest homes. We visit [them] at different times, call on most of them, and we try to keep in touch. It is a good way of keeping in touch, as we have lay people taking communion to them on Sunday. There's somebody in touch with those people to let me know their condition. We always try to bring them their sacrament and prepare them for death, things like that. The ministry is not debilitating the priesthood. It produces a greater need, having to have more contacts with the lay people and so forth, to get people actually involved.

So, Vatican II renewed quite a few things. I think, [they were] very much for the better. [It] made us a more active church. When you read the newspaper, the media always presents it as conflict, a lot of conflict in the church. I just had an interview yesterday from a paper. They asked a lot of questions about the new catechism, and subjects like that. You know, they're interested in conflict. Well, I think, there's a parallel that fits this. We're educating young people to get married. One of the things we try to do is teach them how to handle problems. They love each other. They're very much present to each other, and they hope to have a good life. But, they'll find out. They'll find they think a lot different. They have to be able to bring things together, sit down and talk, negotiate differences, know where the other person is, and hear each other out.

So, what we say is, "conflict can produce a lot of good," and I think it's the same way in the church. The church is alive. There is a conflict: are they going to ordain women? Are they going to do this or that? All these things are being considered, but sometimes, they're written up as conflicts. But, they're good. Because, if you're going to live in a relationship, if husband and wife are really going to solidify their relationship, if they're going to talk, they have to understand where each other is. They have to make decisions together, and it's through conflict, really, that a bond develops between them. They thought [a bond] would develop in other ways, but it's going to develop real good through conflict, if they can understand what it is, and work through it. Because of their love for each other. . . . They will solidify their relationship and deepen it, actually, through conflict. Whereas the media sees conflict as

an end in itself, I think, we in church have been around long enough to see that it's a good thing. It's a sign that the church is alive.

D: Change. . . .

F: Change. It's got to be. It's a human organism. The basic beliefs--really, you might say in a way--some of the basic beliefs are eternal to us, but as you go through history, how are those things going to relate to our present situation? What [do] we have to relate to in the United States? [The year] 1992 is a lot different than what they were relating to in the first few centuries. It isn't a change of belief, but it's a change of ways of doing things. And, the more controversy there is, the more discussion. It lets you know that people are really trying to do things. They're trying to, maybe, find better ways to do things. It isn't the principle that's at stake, but it's the way of doing things. Why shouldn't women today [be ordained]? They were baptized. They're Christian people. Some of the other religions have now . . . the church of England, just last week, decided to ordain women. So, who knows? Maybe this is the first of it in the Catholic Church. . . . There were probably some Decons in the early church that were ordained. But, maybe women will be ordained in the Catholic Church. Why should people fight it all of the way? But, through all of the discussion and every-thing, people, through conflict, will be able to talk these things through.

D: And, how do you feel about some of these challenges: maybe, facing the church with the ordination of women, or perhaps, priests being able to be married--some of these new things that are arising?

F: Well, I think that they're all pretty good. I don't have any objection against priests marrying, ordaining women, or any of these things. I think that we live in different ages and different times. I think there was a need, perhaps, for what they did at certain times. Up until 1100, we had a married clergy, and because of the times or because of certain situations, we decided that priests should not marry. That's just a rule of the church and not a Divine teaching. Those things, Christian faith has to be present to the situations in all different eras. The basic teachings of the Lord: Love one another as I have loved you--and all those types of things may be best served by changing certain things as we go along. So, who knows.

D: What was it, in your opinion, that may have aided the growth of the Youngstown Diocese in your years of service?

F: When I first went to the seminary in Cleveland, I was studying for the Diocese of Cleveland. I went into the seminary in 1942, and in 1943, the Diocese was divided from Cleveland. Fortunately, it seemed to be the grace of God, perhaps. We had a pretty good number of young men studying for the priesthood that were from the Youngstown area. They automatically belonged to Youngstown. I think it was very interesting. We were part of a new Diocese. There was a lot of, I think, good feeling about them and working towards helping the Diocese get established. That was in 1943, and I was ordained in December of 1946. We were ordained a year early, because there were some priests that were in the service, Chaplains and so forth, and the Diocese needed priests. It was a new Diocese, so it helped us. We were ordained a little bit early, but I think there was an enthusiasm at the time. The year the Diocese was established was an exciting time. The boys were coming home from war. The war was over. It was a big relief to everybody. Things were really positive. It was kind of, something like a Mardi Gras for a while. It was kind of a celebration. Everybody was happy. The thing was over. The guys were home. They were marrying and getting established, and so forth like that.

So, I think the Diocese was established at very good times, as far as that was concerned. I think that there was a good positive attitude. I think that enabled the growth of the church in Youngstown. Whereas, when it was just part of the Diocese of Cleveland, naturally, they were interested in our Diocese and so forth. When it became the six counties and there was a Bishop that was responsible over them, I think everything was getting closer attention. One of the examples of that, certainly, was the school system expanding very much at that time. As I mentioned, in Struthers, from 1947 when I went there and the years that I was there until 1958, we went from 120 kids to 1,400 [kids]. So I think it was all part of the new enthusiasm. It was taking care of all of these things that, maybe, needed closer supervision. When it was our own Diocese, there was an attitude. There were a lot of needs that were examined, and people set goals to fulfill the needs. And, I think that there was an enthusiastic beginning of the Diocese.

D: So, the organization ran fairly smoothly.

F: It did.

D: I know you were very young at the time. Did you notice any changes, other than administration, when the Cleveland Diocese split into Youngstown and Cleveland, or maybe, any new social programs that may have developed

at that time? Or, was it pretty much the same in both?

F: See, I think, when you become a local Diocese like this, it helps. They had Catholic charities, like I said, in Cleveland. But, when you have your own Catholic charities in the Diocese, it turns local. Locally, they're interested in programs for the needy and programs for social concerns, but I think if you just have your six counties and you have a local center for things like Catholic charities, I think that it builds up to serving more people better. I think, if you take a look at the records, a lot more people were served by Catholic charities, after the split in the Diocese than before, just because of the local supervision, seeing the need, and trying to take care of the need.

D: What, if anything, hindered the Diocese in it's growth, in your opinion?

F: Well, I don't know of anything.

D: That's what I mean: maybe, what you would have liked to have seen differently, too.

F: I don't know. My feeling of it was, there's just so many priests and parishes and so forth. I think that they were certainly strengthened by having a local center--the Diocese. I don't know of any big things that I would say I was disappointed that they never did or anything like that. Everybody was kind of busy getting it established and getting this thing on the road. I can't think of any negative features. I would say, maybe, that it could have been better or bigger, or more cohesive, or whatever. But, I don't think so. I think we were limited in some of those areas, like office areas: things had to be set up, marriage tribunal, and Chancery offices. They were set up, but that took a while. And, that took a while. But, the Diocese seemed to work at it and do all of those things, and get the things set up that should be set up.

D: So, this was fairly, a big time growth, after the war and the post war boom, with the economy. I'm sure you're familiar with the collapse of the steel mills in the late 1970's. Do you think that had any effect on the Diocese?

F: Well, I think, when I was in college, I worked in Briar Hill, in the open hearth for a while. My dad was always afraid that I would make that big money and not continue with college. I told him, after a year of working in the mill, they shouldn't worry about me going to college. (laughter) But, I think that, yes, when you have bad times economically--of course, that's the time that the church has to try to do things. The

church was involved in the economic effort to buy the mills locally.

Father Stanton, who is dead now, he was very much involved in that, and--an interesting thing--there was an event that occurred to me. I was at St. Rose at that time, and Reagan was being elected. The time Reagan was elected, the first time, he came into Youngstown three weeks before the election. He was trying to make a little head way, because Carter had not been able to swing this or didn't swing it. The economical coalition were not really able to get involved in buying the mill, put people back to work, and things like that. Reagan was coming to town three weeks before the election, and Father Stanton called me. He said, "Reagan is coming to town. He's going to stay at the Metroplex, the Holiday Inn up there." We're not too far from that. And he said, "The steel people want to meet with Reagan." You know, we have a big rectory there. And he said, "They want to meet with him off the side, the owners of the mill, the union, and the economical people involved in the economic coalition. Could we use your rectory?" I said, "Yes."

So, we had Reagan at St. Rose about three weeks before the election. I ended up in the middle of it. One of Reagan's guys said, "You're about the only neutral guy here. Do you want to go in there and be the facilitator." He said, "Just facilitate the questions from them." I said, "Well, I'll do what I can. You better stay around and tell me what to do." But we did it, and I heard Reagan respond to all the questions about what would happen. He said that, if he was elected, he would meet with them in the oval office and talk it over. I think he did. But I don't think anything happened with Reagan. It was just like Carter. They had the same questions that we had the last election. They were saying, "How come we can't sell cars in Japan? They're cleaning up in the United States. We can't sell cars there. They have extra things they have to put on them." And so, people have a protective tariff. Reagan said--well, it was interesting--he believes in free trade, but he'd have to look into it.

I met Reagan. He's a very nice guy, personally. [He's a] very nice man. Social Secret Service was all over the place, and doing their job. But there was an effort to revive the mills and, I think, to revive the economy of Youngstown. I've been out of Youngstown since 1981. I think Youngstown, from the outside--if you take a look at it--it's really done a marvelous job, a transition, to service industries. People are eating. Maybe, they're not making big money like they used to make in the mills. But, it's a great credit to

the town. I think that the churches, any way that we can ever enter into that, should help. At those times, I think the church has to become alive to try to help the poor and the needy. At that time of the mills moving out, there was an effort to revitalize the town. There's a lot of needy in Girard--we reacted and responded to that. We had an active St. Vincent De Paul. We sent guys out often. We got some news that somebody needed help. We knocked on the door and saw if they needed food. There was more of that when the mills closed down. I think we lost fifteen thousand jobs in one fell swoop, when they first knocked the mills out! And, I don't think any of us feel that we ever did the complete job of helping the poor and everything. We never felt like we got the job completed. I think many places put forth some effort to try to respond to that. We put some effort forth in Girard, but I think, certainly, when there is less money, there's probably a great strain on the church.

D: What were some of the largest changes in the Diocese in your years of service?

F: Well, I think, the biggest changes, I would say, came with Vatican II. [The year] 1962 started Vatican II. We were privileged to have an audience with John Paul the XXIII, a little man who was Pope at that time. He said, "You must come over for the council." We asked if there was an invitation for us. (laughter) He laughed. He was a nice guy. I think the Vatican Council enabled the church, in many ways, to reach out better to people. Even from the idea of worship and liturgy, the renewal of that and renewal of different things, those were the big changes. When you put in big changes--some of the big changes were the lay people helping with the communion. They would pass out communion. Old timers didn't like that concept at all.

D: Was there a lot of opposition against some of it?

F: There was, but I think, we had to try to educate the people as to what was going on. I think that was what helped the whole situation, and in time, they kind of came around. It was a shock, doing things so differently after hundreds of years. Maybe I'm not doing the right thing. So, those were the days that--I wouldn't say were threatening--but, with change--the change came quick. It came in a hurry. It wasn't looked for, and there wasn't any chance to prepare people. These things [came] from the Vatican Council, "Here, this is what we're going to do." I think, with education and so forth, people got aboard, but it took a little time.

D: With Vatican II, was there a period of transition for the nuns, also, where some of the standards that were

implemented in an earlier period were laxed slightly? Do you think that had any effect on . . . maybe there were so many freedoms available, that some nuns just left the convent?

F: Well, I think it's like the psychologist in St. Louis; he runs a center there. He studied change. He said, "If change comes in a hurry, if change hasn't been experienced in quite a while, then you need to support people during the changes. In a way, psychologically and spiritually, it sort of pulls the rug out from under the people. I think that, at that time, priests suffered considerably. They remained Catholic. They felt concerned in the church. "I can live my faith in another way." Do you know what I mean? And that's fair enough.

Many of them have been involved, both sisters and priests, in very positive things, and [they were] doing things that they felt they could do positively for the church. But they were doing it from a vantage point of a different vocation. That too, I would say, in the long run--there might have naturally been some people there who leave with bitterness and won't come back--but, I don't think that was the situation, as I experienced it. I was in the mist of it, as far as getting dispensations. The dispensations that we got for religious women at that time, came from Rome. And that helped considerably.

D: Previously, before you had the drop off of nuns entering Religious, of course, they were instrumental in building up the school systems and so forth. Do you think there has been a problem with enrollment in the schools, or has it been pretty much static over the years? Because, with the decrease of nuns, of course, you have to hire lay teachers and raise tuition and so forth.

F: I would say, for instance, when I was principal of Central Catholic in 1958, the tuition per year was ninety dollars. And I was out to a celebration. A class had their 30th anniversary or something like that. I went to that. They were making fun of all the things they had to do in high school. You know how people take on the authority, and they're having a good time. They asked me, afterwards, if I wanted to say anything. I said, "Well, I don't have anything to say. I just have a question." They said, "What's that?" I said, "I just wondered what you guys wanted for ninety bucks." (laughter)

The tuition, then, was low. Today, it's two thousand dollars. So, you know that's going to limit some families that have two or three kids. Our grade school

tuitions are lower now. If you're going to go to a Catholic high school in a family, and you're looking forward to sending them to college . . . everybody has their limitations. I think some people are limited. I think, the school enrollments are down somewhat, because of that. The sisters got a salary; what ever it was, was limited. Those changes that came in through the years, I think, have semi-limited catholic education. On a parish level, the parish finances their own schools and so forth. We're all struggling with that, too. I mean, to keep those going. I think, people want to pay a just salary to those teachers, too. We try to do our best to remunerate them as well as possible.

D: Perhaps you can tell us a little bit about the Walking Together Program for retired priests?

F: The Walking Together Program is not for retired priests.

D: Oh, okay.

F: It's for the people of the Diocese. Walking Together means, we talk of people walking together, priests and lay people, to meet the priest shortage. The priest shortage is something now. It will get worse. I think, the response to that, too--to the priests shortage--is going to mean the lay [people] are going to have to be more involved. And I think that's good.

So, I don't know what the Lord wants, but maybe he wants everybody to be more involved. I don't know. We're working on something now, where there have been recommendations at certain parishes, that they might have a pastor and an assistant. In five years, they're just going to have one man there, and a man there. Some of the smaller parishes might close, and there may be one priest to take care of two parishes, but with limited personnel. That's what you have to do, but the answer to that problem is. . . . And we're meeting and talking this over. I think there's a pretty good attitude towards the priests. Seeing that it's here, there's nothing you can do about it. We just have to try to organize a program to meet the needs of the people. I think the only problem is getting the lay people involved.

D: At it's best, describe working in the Diocese of Youngstown, and at it's worst, describe the same thing.

F: What do you mean, "at it's best"?

D: That's a Diocese question.

F: Well, I think that . . . I suppose, at it's best, would be being involved in the ministry and the priesthood, and [to] feel supported by the Diocese. The Diocese, in such, needs a lot of different offices and so forth, down town; and many work and assist the ministry of the whole Diocese. To have support, help, from the Diocese--really not financial support, because every parish is self-sufficient; you have to support yourself. But, I suppose, at it's best, would be a good situation where there's a lot going on as far as the Diocese was concerned, help and support for the parishes, good personal relationship with the Bishop, and good personal relationships with the people who work down town. As in the help for training people in the ministering of parishes, the Diocese takes care of a lot of things, like hospitalization for the Diocese, and other concerns. We pay for it, but they make the arrangements for it. So, to have things that are available and meaningful, as we've said, support the efforts of the people. And, I think, it would mean running programs--perhaps, on the Diocese part--to help to educate the lay people. Then, we would have a staff in more parishes, to help to educate them, to form them.

When you're involved in a big parish--I really don't have time to train people, personally; so a training element, where the Diocese sets up opportunities for training lay people who are going to be involved in working in parishes, that would be helpful. And, if we're going to be successful in that, there has to be some planning from the central office to see the needs of parishes, plan, and to help educate and train personnel. Then, through the offices of the Diocese, be supporting and helpful and help to do things that we need help at.

D: Is there anything that you can think of that we might have missed, that you would like to add? [Anything that] had importance in the Diocese?

F: Well, I would say that my experience with the priesthood has been a good experience. My experience with the Diocese has been a good experience. I think that it has to be looked upon as a vocation. We're called to serve the Lord and to serve the people. I just think that we have a lot to be proud of in our Diocese. I think that Bishop Malone has done an excellent job. He's a very competent person, and I think that he organized the schools well. I think he's been really dedicated to the church, and I think that the type of dedication that he has, should be mirrored in other people that serve the Diocese.

D: Okay. Thank you very much Monsignor Fannon.

F: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW