

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of the Youngstown Diocese

Personal Experience

O.H. 1569

MONSIGNOR JOHN J. LETTAU

Interviewed

by

Stephanie Fisher

on

October 22, 1992

MONSIGNOR JOHN J. LETTAU

Msgr. Lettau was born on February 7, 1920 in Youngstown, Ohio. He attended St. Joseph Church and school. In the eighth grade, he went to St. Patrick's and later graduated from Ursuline High School. His two cousins and brother were priests and were the major influence in his decision to enter the Seminary.

In 1938, Msgr. Lettau attended St. Joseph College in Indiana, and later, St. Mary's Seminary in Cleveland, Ohio, 1940-1945. On May 26, 1945, he was ordained and assigned to St. Ann's for one year. His next assignments were: St. John in Canton, Ohio, 1946-51; Assistant Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, and Vicar General to Bishop Walsh; and later in 1965, pastor at St. Edwards, 1965-90.

Assisting the Bishop in the Chancery, Msgr. Lettau's duties included filling in when the Bishop was out of town, locating and buying property for churches in Poland and Canfield, and attending to the every day activities in the Chancery. This position was very important to him, but was given to another by the new bishop, Bishop Malone. In 1990, Msgr. Lettau had to retire at the age of seventy. Although this still saddens him, he has been very happy in his new position in Pastoral Care at St. Elizabeth Hospital.

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INTERVIEWEE: MONSIGNOR JOHN J. LETTAU  
INTERVIEWER: Stephanie Fisher  
SUBJECT: Churches, pastoral care, Vicor General  
DATE: October 22, 1992

F: This is an interview with Monsignor John Lettau for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the history of the Youngstown Diocese, by Stephanie Fisher.

L: I'm very happy. It's the best job I ever had. I work turns like the nurses and personnel here. I go home at 11:30 and sleep. I don't have to worry about the roof leaking. I never have to ask people for money again for the rest of my life, which is the thing that priests hate.

F: I don't think anybody likes to do that. Okay, I just want some background. I just need when you were born and where.

L: I was born in Youngstown--I'm not sure whether I was born at home or at the hospital--[on] February 7, 1920. We belonged to St. Joseph's Church, which later became the Newman Center, by the way. Now, it's [the Newman Center] torn down. I went to school there until the eighth grade. In the eighth grade, our family moved to St. Patrick's Church on the Southside.

F: St. Pat's?

L: St. Pat's, yes. It was too costly to ride a streetcar

through town. So, I graduated from St. Patrick's. [I] went four years to Ursuline High School. Then, [I] went to St. Joseph's College in Rensselaer, Indiana. Then, [I spent] six years at St. Mary's Seminary in Cleveland. I was ordained on May 26, 1945.

F: So, what made you become a priest?

L: Well, I don't know. I had a cousin who was a priest. [He was] older, and we always admired him. So, I graduated from high school, and I decided I was going to give it a try. I entered and went through the six years at St. Mary's Seminary. Then, my cousin followed him. Then, my brother followed both of us. So, there were three priests.

F: All in Youngstown?

L: All in Youngstown. The one that I followed died, by the way, and my cousin and my brother both retired. So, there were three of us.

F: What was your first assignment?

L: I was sent to St. Ann's in Briar Hill, in 1945. That's been torn down, by the way. I was there one year, at St. Ann's. It was on West Federal Street. Then after one year, I was transferred to St. John The Baptist Church in Canton, Ohio. I was there from 1946 to 1951. Then, we got a new Bishop in Youngstown, Bishop Emmet M. Walsh. He came from Charleston, South Carolina. He appointed me to be his secretary, so I came over and started working as a secretary. But I lived at St. Edward's, where I would be for the next forty-two years.

But anyway, I started as his secretary. I became Assistant Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, and Vicar General. Then, Bishop Walsh died. Bishop Malone took over, and then, I went back to St. Edward's as Pastor in 1965. I was Pastor there from 1965 to 1990, twenty-five years. Then, in 1990, I had to retire on age. I came to St. Elizabeth Hospital to work in Pastoral Care.

F: Did you have the option to work under Bishop Malone after the other Bishop died?

L: Well, I didn't have the option to work. He asked me to leave the Chancery.

F: Oh. But what were your duties when you were on the Chancery? What did you do?

L: Well, a Chancellor and Vicar General, you were one with

the Bishop. When the Bishop would leave the Diocese, the Vicar General was in charge of the Diocese, if he went to Rome or something. You were "number two" man in the Diocese. That's really what it was, Vicar General. But, you had authority, like when the Bishop went to Rome. You were in charge.

F: You don't lose that title?

L: Yes.

F: You do. It's not a title that is yours.

L: Well, it's a title. But, it's also a position of authority. I had it after I became Pastor. Then, the Bishop said he wanted to appoint somebody else. I said, "Alright, go ahead and do it." I gave it up. Then, I just became "Pastor." Then, he put in the rule, "retire at seventy." We had no choice. We had to retire and move out. Then, July 15, 1990, [I had to] retire. They had already asked me, "We'll hire you at St. Elizabeth Hospital the day you leave St. Edward's?" And, they did. So, I loved it working here. [It's] very important work, too--the sick and the dying, the families.

F: What can you tell me about the formation of the Diocese?

L: About the formation?

F: Yes.

L: Well, when we grew up, we were part of the Cleveland Diocese.

F: Right.

L: And, they had talked for years about splitting the Cleveland Diocese. You know how rumors go. It never happened. So, we go into the seminary as members of the Cleveland Diocese. And, we kept hearing those rumors. One day, in 1943, when we were two years from ordination. We woke up, and they said, "Rome has established the Diocese of Youngstown." So, what does that mean to us? Well, every seminarian who came from the Youngstown Diocese, now belongs to the Youngstown Diocese.

F: But, you had an option, didn't you, to stay with the Cleveland Diocese?

L: Oh, no.

F: You didn't?

L: No we did not. No.

F: If you would have been ordained, would you have the option?

L: Yes. Some of them who were ordained, they gave an option to, not too many. In any case, we were very happy to come back to Youngstown. See, there are six counties that were cut off: Ashtabula, Mahoning, Trumbull, Columbiana, Stark, and Portage. Any of us who lived in those counties, automatically belonged to the Youngstown Diocese. It was just an automatic cut off, see.

So then, they appointed Bishop McFadden, the Bishop of Youngstown. He had been the Auxiliary Bishop in Cleveland. So, that started the Youngstown Diocese in 1943. So, we're talking about fifty years, 1943-1993. He [Bishop McFadden] was the Bishop, and then, Bishop Walsh came. That must have been around 1950. He had been Bishop in Charleston, South Carolina for twenty-two years. He came up here, and he was Bishop until, fifteen or twenty years. I'm not sure of the dates. Then, Bishop Malone became Bishop of Youngstown.

F: Why do you think? Because, Cleveland was too large?

L: Yes.

F: It had to be done.

L: And--if you want the truth--Cleveland was too large, and the Youngstown end of the Diocese was neglected. If you want the truth.

F: Why do you believe, maybe, Canton or Akron wasn't chosen as the new Diocese?

L: Well, Akron was closer to Cleveland than Canton, so that made sense. You have Cuyahoga County. You have Summit County, Akron and Stark County. That was a good choice. The furthest away from Cleveland was Stark County. They've been talking for the last thirty-five or forty years, of another Diocese cutting off Akron from Cleveland, and Canton and Massillon from Cleveland.

F: Would Akron be the new Diocese?

L: Yes.

F: Because, Cleveland is still too large.

L: Oh, Cleveland is far too large.

- F: It's too large.
- L: Then, they're talking about another Diocese: Dayton, or Toledo. Dayton is a big city, too. That [another Diocese] would be a Dayton Diocese and an Akron Diocese. That still can happen. But, Cleveland was too big, and our end of the Diocese was neglected. And so, it was a break for Youngstown.
- F: But, [they] also [formed a new Diocese], because Youngstown was economically strong at the time.
- L: Oh, yes. The steel mills. . . . Pittsburgh, Birmingham, and Youngstown were the three big steel centers in the United States. It was a break for Youngstown. We weren't going anywhere under Cleveland, and now, we have our own Diocese.
- F: What do you think has helped the Diocese grow? Did it need help? Economically, it just boomed. We just boomed in the forties. It didn't even seem like it needed a push. Do you believe that anything helped it along?
- L: Well, I think, what helped it along was having a Bishop here, rather than in Cleveland--here on the scene, with leadership on the scene. So, we have the Bishops and the leadership. Then, you have the disaster of U. S. Steel, the Sheet & Tube, and Republic [Steel]. Then, the roof fell in on us.
- F: Can you compare it to what's happening now with the Diocese?
- L: Yes, I would say so. Of course, that's a different thing now. I don't think Youngstown is that badly off.
- F: No? You don't think so?
- L: I'll come back to that. I was listening to Dan Ryan, and they were talking about the economics. Dan said, "What is the unemployment rate?" The man said, "[It is] 7 percent." He said, "That means seven percent are out of work, but 93 percent are working." Then, Dan Ryan said, "Go out on 224 any evening of the week and check those restaurants." They are always busy.
- F: That's right.
- L: Or, up here on the Strip. They're all full! The bigger point being, not only the valley, but the whole country, was doing well. Not to minimize the people who are out of work, but 93 percent of the people are working. That was part of it, but the other thing that

has happened, which is more disastrous, is the loss of vocations to the priesthood and the sisterhoods. That's the big disaster in the Diocese.

F: That's what's hurting it. That's what's really plummeting the Diocese and causing the schools to close.

L: Yes.

F: Okay, look at the statistics you're quoting. We're not as bad off as they say. Then, why are those Catholic Schools systems closing and consolidating?

L: Well, schools are one thing. Churches are another. In regard to schools--and, I'm not saying this in criticism of teachers or unions or anything--Catholic schools are closing because of falling enrollments and shortage of money. I remember when I was first ordained. Schools were free, but then, we couldn't handle the cost. The teachers--as I well know, I was a pastor--get a raise every year in the parochial school system, just by the fact that they have stayed in the classroom. In other words, the costs have gone up. [They have] continually gone up. The only source of income in a Catholic Parish, like St. Edward's or St. Dominic's, in the school is the collection and tuition. For example, there's two sources. One is what you put in the collection, and the other is tuition. That's it. We don't have Government help. So in other words, the Catholic schools are going down, because the people can't support them. I feel sorry--that's why I don't want to ask the people for money again--for you, the parishioners who have to contribute. You have your own problems.

As far as the church is, why don't we have many vocations any more? Well--this is my own theory--people say, "I'll let women be ordained priests," or, "Let priests get married, and you won't have any problems." I don't buy that. I've worked with some of the Protestant ministers. They don't have vocations either, and they're married, as you know.

F: The pastors are having just as hard a time.

L: Yes, absolutely. And another thing--and, I keep saying this; I don't know who believes me--the nuns are short of vocations.

F: What do you think?

L: Now, as far as priests, I have faith in God. But, people say, "Let priests get married." I said, "Forget it." Priests left the priesthood in great numbers since the council. They left the priesthood, not to

get married, but because they were unhappy with their vocation. Today--believe me, in my opinion--the biggest bar to vocations are our parents, Catholic parents. If a boy says, "I want to become a priest." Well then, the parents say, "Oh, no. Forget it." They want their children to get big paying jobs: lawyer, doctor, whatever, industry. And, they know they're not going to get it if they become priests. Then, as far as the young people are concerned, they don't want to make a life-time commitment. In my opinion, that's the reason why the marriages are all busting, too.

F: That's right.

L: You know, it's just the same problem in marriage. They don't want to make a life-time commitment to this girl and this fellow. A boy doesn't want to make a life-time commitment to be a priest [for] all his life, or a nun. That's my theory as far as the church. This "Walking Together" program for the shortage of vocations, I really think it's too negative.

F: What is this "Walking Together?"

L: You don't know about that?

F: No.

L: That was a recent plan. The plan on closing parishes all over the Diocese.

F: Okay. I saw it in a newsletter.

L: Yes. Well, it's all negative, presuming that we're not going to get any more vocations, so they're going to close parishes. This church belongs to God. The Holy Spirit is in charge of the church. We have to have faith in God, [remember] that God has always taken care of his church, and [believe] that he will provide vocations to the priesthood, particularly, in the convents, the sister nuns. We have to have faith in God. [The Diocese] proposed this plan. The whole Diocese then said that it's going to happen over eight years. The people, they heard their parishes were going to close, and they're upset. Like, down in Columbiana County, one priest in Lisbon would take care of Lisbon, Salineville, Summitville, and West Point.

F: You can't work.

L: It's not practical. On the Eastside, Immaculate and Sacred Heart--they're going to close Immaculate Conception, close it! The people [at Immaculate] will have to go to Sacred Heart.

F: What are they going to do with all of this property of the church? Are they just going to let them stand?

L: Well, they have to keep them up, or the people will destroy them.

F: That's right. Look what's happened around this side of town.

L: I was at St. Edward's for forty-two years. If you have a house vacant for six months, the next thing you know, there are no windows. It's the same thing with the churches.

I don't know. I might be wrong on that [how long it will take to close the churches]. It may be over a period of eight years. But, to announce something like that to the people in mass is just devastating, I think. That's the way I feel. We have to have faith in God. I don't have the pessimism that they have in that report. I don't buy them.

F: So, if that doesn't work, do you think they'll go to the extreme and propose what you have just stated?

L: Well, if they do it gradually, it will be different. Like, what happened at St. Paul in New Middletown--I know you've read about them. I'm living at Holy Family in Poland. St. Paul in New Middletown is one of the finest small parishes in the Diocese. They have no school. [They have] no financial problems growing. So, the Bishop appointed a missionary of the Sacred Heart to be pastor, which was fine. So, I was there. The day he reported, he died suddenly. Do you know what a shock that was to the parish? And so, what then? Where are you going to get a priest? The bishop appointed a retired priest, like me, to take over until the first of the year. Now, I can see that.

That was the other thing; he had mandatory retirement for us at seventy. And, seven to ten of us in the last five years had to retire when we didn't want to, which made for a shortage.

F: Right.

L: But, what I would say, if it's done gradually, it has to be. But, there might be a real small parish. Put that together with another one. But, to announce the whole thing was devastating to the people. And you have your ethnic parishes, like Slovak or Polish or Lebanese or Italian. You start closing them, and these people . . . that's their home. That's the other thing that worries me.

F: I want to back up a little more to what you told me before I had the tape on. You're the first one who touched upon a bias or racism towards Catholics.

L: Yes.

F: Could you talk about that a little bit?

L: Well, I would say there's still racism in the suburbs. In the city, the Catholics and Protestants, Jews, get along pretty well together. If there's any racism in the city of Youngstown, it is not in the open.

F: Well, my parents are Catholic and Methodist. So, I do have both. Well then, I am sure that the Protestants in Youngstown, maybe, didn't want the Diocese, the non-Catholics.

L: Oh, I'm sure they didn't. The other thing about--and, you get this from Professor Jenkins' book. He pointed out that the Klan--this is rather interesting--was strong south of the river, the Southside, Westside. North of the river were the more affluent Episcopalians. They were not involved in the Klan at all. For whatever reason, I don't know. And so, I'm sorry to say, the Methodists were. (laughter) They were--this is according to Professor Jenkins--the Methodists Churches on the Southside, they had bake sales and everything. It's part of the Klan. The Northside Episcopalians, St. John's and Presbyterians, would have nothing to do with them.

F: So, the Klan was not able to push the Catholics out, no matter what?

L: No.

F: The immigrants were just moving in.

L: They were moving into the steel mills in greater numbers. St. Edward's Parish, where I was a pastor, that was the Irish Parish. Very influential, but. . . . Five or ten years ago, I took the list of our parishioners, sixteen hundred parishioners, families. Half of them were Italian background. Two of the three most affluent parishes in Youngstown today, are St. Charles in Boardman and Holy Family in Poland. There were a lot of Protestants who were good people, but the Klan was terrorizing Catholics and Blacks and Jews. They were riding high. I'm going to have you look up in Jenkins book and read that. It would open your eyes.

But, I grew up in there. What sort of angered me, my father and all these people had served in the Army, Navy or the Marine Corp in World War I, and they came

back to Youngstown. All of a sudden, "We don't want you." That's pretty hard to swallow, because all of those Catholics served in Europe during World War I. All of a sudden, "Sorry, you don't fit into our plan here," and they tried to run them out.

F: It just seems kind of odd. If it was so racially divided and biased, [with] everything going on in the Klan--and, even in 1943 when the steel mills were running good--it still seems odd that Youngstown would be chosen. Did Akron and Canton have these same problems?

L: Yes. Yes they did. Akron was the Rubber mills. And, Akron was heavy in--like West Virginia, Appalachia, those people. Canton was an old Protestant town. I was over there for six years, but in both places, Catholics came into the rubber factories, to the mills in Canton and Massillon, and to the mills in Youngstown, in great numbers and ethnics. And they worked hard, you know. They worked their way up and built homes, and raised families. They became a factor in these communities.

F: Now, I was talking to Msgr. Prokop. He was talking about strictly in Youngstown, and he kept mentioning the Jewish population in Youngstown.

L: Well, they were definitely a minority, the Jews. My experience with the Jewish population in Youngstown--when I was Chancellor, that was in 1951--we got along fine with the Jewish people in the community. Rabbi Berkowitz was the "number one man" for years. We got along fine with the Jewish population. I never really had any serious problem with them as an influence. If you were to come to me and be marrying a Jewish boy, I wouldn't like that, because it wasn't going to work. That was the only part I saw at St. Edward's.

And, we were on the Northside. We got along fine with them, but the Jewish people--if you came in as a girl marrying a Jewish boy, his parents might disown him for marrying out of the. . . . We ran into a lot of that, but as far as getting along with them, no problem at all. I'd be invited to synagogues when I was in the Diocese, so our relationship was very cordial; but I'm talking about the family relationships.

F: Okay, with the Protestant Churches, what was the relationship?

L: I would say it was very good in Youngstown.

F: Oh, okay.

L: Oh, yes. Now, just remember, the Klan was dead.

F: Right.

L: In the 1920's [it was dead].

F: But, the bias is still there.

L: Not in Youngstown.

F: Okay. Now, you were talking about buying property. What position did you have at the time, that you were asked?

L: I was Chancellor.

F: Okay.

L: I oversaw all financial matters in the Diocese, the offices and everything.

F: What year was this?

L: That was 1951 to 1965.

F: What Bishop did you say you were under?

L: That was Bishop Walsh.

F: Okay. You were overseeing financial matters, and Bishop Walsh had the insight that he really wanted to expand the Diocese further. He didn't want to just make it in Youngstown.

L: That's right. And, there were communities out there that were Catholic, who had to drive long distances from Canfield to St. Christine's or St. Patrick's, or from Poland in to St. Nicholas, Struthers. He [Bishop Walsh] saw the need for churches in their neighborhood. He said, "Buy property," which he did all under the Diocese. And, we found a [piece of] property in the middle of Poland, right across from the Village Green. John Shipski, who was a contractor developing in Poland Township, heard about this, and he sent word into the Bishop that he would sell his property for what he put into it. And, that's how we got the property, which is still--by the way--not in the village. It's right on the edge.

F: On the edge of town.

L: Bishop Walsh started a parish in Columbiana, too, although it was not tough. He had no problem down there. There were two men. One was Catholic, and one was

Protestant. The Protestant was married to a Catholic, Irish girl. We started the parish. They asked for a parish, and so, we rented rooms in Joshua Dixon Grade School. I would have never forgot the name. They were very fair. We used that for mass and CCD [Catholic Christian Doctrine], until they built the church in Columbiana.

F: What do you think is the weakest county within the Diocese?

L: Portage or Columbiana, mostly because of the population. Portage County, because Cleveland is expanding. Some of our parishes up there, like Aurora--they call them the bedroom communities of Cleveland. Real well-to-do people live out in Aurora and that whole area in Portage. And then, Columbiana County--I don't know if you're aware of it, but Pittsburgh Airport is expanding north. People from Pittsburgh, the city and airport and the pilots and others, are buying property in Columbiana and Southern Mahoning County in great numbers. Because the property is cheaper, the homes are cheaper. There's suburban living, and they can drive to work in Pittsburgh in less time than they can drive from the other side of Pittsburgh. And so, there's a tremendous. . . . And when that's finished--that's Route 60 tying up with Route 224--that whole area is expanding all over the place. So, Columbiana County and Portage are really having a big growth where the city in Youngstown is suffering. You watch what's happening.

F: Do you think that Youngstown will always remain the center of the Diocese, even if these other communities take off and just leave Youngstown behind?

L: Well, that's a city problem. I don't know. That's happening in Cleveland. Pittsburgh answered it. They revitalized their downtown. Cleveland is trying to do it. But, everything went to these malls. I don't know whether they can revitalize Youngstown or not. Although, this mayor, I think, has done a good job. They have a Federal Courthouse going in down there. The malls probably give us the most damage: Southern Park, Eastwood. They, McKelvy and Strouss, pulled out. That's common to all big cities where it's going out. But, greater Youngstown, up towards Portage and down in Columbiana and Mahoning County, you just watch what happens. It is just unbelievable. Poland, Boardman, those parishes are growing so fast. We don't have enough room at Holy Valley anymore. We'll have to build a church or a school, or both.

F: Is that what it was like in the 1940's for Youngstown parish?

L: Yes. I would say so.

F: And then, did it level off in the 1960's?

L: Then, the same thing that happened to the big cities. The inner city decayed, and people moved out. That's not peculiar to Youngstown. That's all over the country: Detroit, Cleveland. Pittsburgh, probably somebody ought to follow them. Pittsburgh did it. They solved it. If I were mayor of Youngstown, I would go up to Toronto, Canada for a blue-print of what to do in the big city, or any city. Have you ever been up there?

F: Toronto? No.

L: It's the most beautiful city in North America. Over two million people. Do you want to see how to run a city? It's beautiful. Two million, plus! I go up about every three months. I just go up and visit, you know?

F: Yes.

L: I think they have a lot of answers for how to save a decaying city, and I think, Pittsburgh does, too. But, that's not Diocesan.

F: Well, as far as growth, when do you think that Youngstown reached it's peak? Do you think it was in the 1960's, 1970's?

L: Yes.

F: It has stopped growing. There was a point where the Youngstown Diocese boomed, and then, reached it growth; and there has not been any growth since.

L: Oh, they [Youngstown] reached it before the Diocese. I might be wrong on this, but the peak of Youngstown's population was 180,000 in 1930, and then, it started down.

F: Okay, so the Diocese starts in 1943 and booms. Do you think it stopped growing, the Diocese?

L: Well, the Diocese grew. But, the city--now, I'm talking about the inner city of Youngstown--had started down in 1930 with the Depression. Okay, I could give you another figure. When I went to St. Edward's in 1965 as pastor, we had about thirteen hundred children in the school. That was the peak. Ursuline High School and Cardinal Mooney were built shortly after that, three or four or five years after that. That

would be in 1960. They had eighteen hundred students in each school. That was the peak!

F: [Was that in] 1960?

L: Around 1960. And then, it started down.

F: Right after Vatican II, in 1963? Did that [Vatican II] have anything to do with it?

L: I wouldn't say it was because of Vatican II.

F: I have heard--I don't know if this is true--the people I have talked to, do attribute Vatican II to the loss of the sisters and the fathers, which doesn't make sense to me. It gave you so much freedom. You would think life would be so much easier. You could make choices. Yet, people left.

L: Well, regarding Vatican II, I read all the documents of Vatican II. They were very conservative. But, some of our priests and nuns who were restless figured, "We can do anything now." They used the term in the spirit of Vatican II. And, in that spirit, they just tried many experiments. As I say, you can go back to the documents of Vatican II, and what was done in the name of Vatican II was very wrong.

F: So, what do you mean by people went wild? You're saying they interpreted Vatican II the wrong way?

L: Yes. And then--the one thing that was done--they went into the Vernacular. Well, that was alright. But they made, in my opinion, one disastrous mistake, and that was: they went from Latin to the Vernacular, [which was] fine, but they banned the Latin mass completely. People were not ready for that. Hundreds of thousands of Catholics left the church. If they had said, "In every parish church, we want you to keep at least one Latin mass." They would have done fine, but they just did it. Period. No more Latin mass. So many Catholics left the church. So, that was one thing of Vatican II. The rest of it, those who were restless of authority rebelled. Priests left the church. Nuns left the church. That's my opinion.

F: It doesn't make sense to me that they had such devotion, and then all of a sudden, they just left the church.

L: Well, I often wonder what kind of a commitment they have. Priests were ordained for life. Until this day, I still can't see why priests left. We were twenty-six years old when we were ordained and took the vow of celibacy. Yet, we were telling young people like you,

"You're getting married. You're getting married for life," which you were. We, who were priests, made a life commitment, too, and we couldn't keep it. They couldn't. They did the church a terrible disservice.

F: Like you said, how could people have faith in their clergy when this is what's going on?

L: Suppose you took instructions from a priest, and he convinces you to become a Catholic. Then, he runs off and gets married, or something like that. Well, that demoralizes. And, that's the damage they did. That was what happened, not because of the Council, but everyone figured, "Now we can do anything we please. The windows are open. Do as you please." And they did. The stuff that went on, I lived through it, and so did a lot of the other priests. It just made us sick.

F: Did it hurt the Diocese, itself? It stopped growing by 1960. It had reached it's peak. You've built everything you needed. All the schools were there. You really can't. . . .

L: And then, it started down.

F: Was it because of that?

L: Oh, I think so, yes.

F: What else do you think has hindered the Diocese?

L: Well, the location is the reason I gave. I can't over dramatize the recession, which is, like I said, big in Youngstown. It doesn't look like they're hurting that bad. I don't mean the poor people.

F: Okay.

L: The 7 percent, or less than that. But, I mean the 93 percent, they're not hurting.

F: But, they're not giving to the church.

L: They're not giving as they are able to.

F: What happened to their faith?

L: I don't know.

F: So, Youngstown is not in the predicament they say. Yet, if you talk to some mothers, that's the first thing they're going to say--that's what is happening to the Catholic schools.

L: The schools, that's a different thing altogether.

F: Okay.

L: The other thing regarding the schools: we're not having children.

F: The 1.2 kids?

L: Yes. We had big families, and all of a sudden we had small families.

F: That's another cause hurting the Diocese.

L: Oh, yes.

F: Or, any Diocese.

L: Any Diocese, yes. See, that particular problem is peculiar in the United States. But, the pill . . . a woman takes the pill--not to mention I teach all this, and I warn women--aside from the morality and whether they're doing it or not, to just think of the side effects. But, the other thing about the pill: it really unleashed promiscuity. Some parents, today, put their girls on the pill, which is openly saying, "We know you're going to do it, so take the pill." The other thing, which I think is devastating, is AIDS. They all say, "AIDS is not a punishment of God." I don't know what you want to call it, but--what percentage? [Is it] 80,90 percent result from homosexuality and promiscuity.

F: That's right.

L: I was arguing with them downtown. They said, "The Catholic schools won't go on Red Cross with this education on AIDS." In other words, give the kids condoms. I said, "Don't give me that." In the first place, they don't work completely. In the second place, they're immoral. Well, "What does the church have to offer?" I said, "The church has to offer chastity. What's wrong with that?" If we violate the ten commandments in serious matters, we pay. It [going into an order] has something to do with the morality of our young people. I mean, I feel very bad for the young people today. Somebody's getting married today, and they're going to marry this guy or this girl. They have to say, "Look, have you been having sex with somebody else?" Right? But, that's something else, again.

F: Right.

L: We got far afield, haven't we? (laughter)

F: I've got a new mood side.

L: Yes.

F: But, it's true. You can tie everything into it, what's happening.

L: Yes. The church says what they've said for two thousand years: chastity before marriage and fidelity in marriage. [Then,] you don't worry. Condoms . . . that makes me so angry! When we were growing up, condoms . . . a guy in high school would be playing with his girl with a condom, and that means: "I'm going to score tonight." It was wrong! And then, some cities are giving them out to school kids, meaning, "We know you're going to do it." The bottom line is that they're not that effective, either. But, [it's] absolutely immoral. That makes me sick, that whole thing.

F: That goes against the religion.

L: Yes. It's wrong, and that's defeatism! I think it's so sad when parents have teenage girls. They figure, "Well, she's going to make out. So, here, make sure you take this with you." Isn't that awful?

F: See, kids in the 1980's and, now 1990's, are so different.

L: Also, a lot of the young people think, "It's not going to happen to me," so they're making love.

F: That's right. It is sad. Do you think if we had a stronger Catholic education, we wouldn't have all of this going on?

L: I wouldn't be surprised.

F: We didn't have this problem before.

L: It happened--that's another thing--why it happened just like that. Catholic schools have always taught chastity. Some listened, and some didn't. And now, they're paying an awful price. Maybe you can't say it's a punishment; but [if] you play around like that, you might as well face it. If you're a homosexual, or if you sleep with all these different guys and girls, you face the consequences. It's inevitable.

F: That's right. You're done.

L: Whether you think it's right or wrong, you're going to pay the price.

F: I'm always telling you it's wrong, like you said. Well

obviously, I know you agree that, economically, that is not an issue. That's what I think you're telling me.

L: Yes.

F: So, that can't even be an issue.

L: No.

F: It's basically, the lack of vocations, the lack of priests, and lack of nuns; or maybe, that the sisters are going into social work, counseling, different things, [and] not teaching?

L: Well, they've gone out of teaching. But, like some of the young girls, they told me two things. They said, "Nuns, for the most part, don't wear habits anymore." They said, "I can be a social worker, a nurse, or whatever, without becoming a nun." That makes sense. "I don't have to join the community and wear a habit." When they taught in school, that's where the vocations came from. The nuns that taught the children in school, the girls would follow them. But, since they're not teaching in school anymore, they're into social work and counseling and all this.

Well, fine, but you've killed the vocations. At least, as far as where the priests are concerned, we are still where we are. We're with the people.

F: Yes, at the church.

L: As I say, it's a question of commitment, and they don't want it. Well, getting married and all that, that's a part, but I'm not going to have large salaries if I become a priest. And then, the parents discourage them, which is even worse. Until they get behind us . . . maybe when they see they have no priests, we tell them, "Alright. You're complaining that there's no priests when "so and so" is dying. Have you given any priests to the church?" Even now, if somebody is dying, there's no priests here. But, where do you think the priests are coming from?

F: They don't think of that, though.

L: Yes. The priests are going to be here at your service. Well, sorry!

F: What, could you say, has been a biggest change that stands out in your mind through all these years with the Diocese?

L: Of course, the biggest change, I think, has been the programs that came out of Vatican II. Some [were]

good, and some [were] bad, in my opinion. In regard to first communion, confirmation, baptism, where we involve the parents now. Say, you have a child who is making a first communion. The child takes instructions in school or whatever. But now, we ask the parents to come in, and [we] tell you, "This is what we're teaching your child." Or, first confession, or baptism.

F: So, is this better?

L: Oh, yes! Very definitely!

F: Because, you're learning now that you have to get the parents more involved with every step if you want to.

L: Yes. That's right. Some parents, before, would say, "Well, our kids are in Catholic school. It's your problem," and they would just forget about it. But, it's got to be in the home. Now, when you have baptism, first communion, confirmation and confession, the parents come in, and we teach the parents what we're teaching the children. Then, you reinforce it at home. That's been a big plus.

F: Was that Vatican II's idea?

L: That's Vatican II, yes. And, the liturgy in the Vernacular, I think they missed the boat on that. People want that Latin mass, and they'll get it back.

F: It wasn't even made optional. That's it. It's out.

L: Yes, which was a mistake. Hundreds of thousands of Catholics left the church over that. Some of the other things are very good. The liturgy in English is fine, but what about those older people. All of a sudden, you took away from them what they have had since they were children, or the church has had for four or five hundred years.

F: It's tradition.

L: One of the things, I think, which some pastors hate, was past Parish Councils. You had to have a Parish Council. Everything you did, you had to run by the Parish Council. Well that, to me, was a disaster, because if you didn't carefully choose your Parish Council, they take over the running of the parish. They just made life miserable for us. Who's going to get involved in that? The people in a parish who are the big mouths are the trouble makers. The vast majority of your parish, they're satisfied. They like the way the pastor runs it, or the priest. These other trouble makers get into the Parish Council, and they make life miserable for us. I had it for fifteen

years; and finally, I couldn't take it any longer. I just didn't call them anymore. It was just a pain in the neck.

Finance Committee, that's something else. The thing that's coming out now, if we can afford it is you'd have a business manager of every parish to take care of the money. The Jews and the Protestants are way ahead of us. Their ministers and rabbis don't have to worry about money. They just conduct services. They are religious. We have to worry about money. That takes up half of the priests problem, worrying about the money. That's coming. But, of course, can we afford to pay a business man?

F: It would have to be on a volunteer basis, I would imagine.

L: Yes, people who are retired.

F: But, how can you trust them?

L: Well, you can trust them, volunteers, older Catholics, who are retired, and they have years of experience. That's another possibility. Parish Councils, to my way of thinking, are a disaster.

F: That's a big change.

L: Yes. Too much turned over to the people. The priest ends up in trouble. People are telling you what to do. You're responsible to the Bishop. But, they tell you what to do. Now, that's my own opinion.

F: What has been the most positive aspect of being in the Diocese, for you?

L: Well, I think it was, probably, I enjoyed being a parish priest. I was at St. Edward's for forty-two years. We had an anniversary. Last Sunday we had 680 people at the dinner. I knew practically all of them.

F: And their children and their grandchildren.

L: And their grandchildren. Before I left, I had weddings where the bride would show me a picture of her next to me when she made her first communion, a little girl. I've seen them grow up, and [I've] seen them go into different fields or successes. One fellow we had, he was Captain of the Iowa--remember that ship?

F: Yes.

L: [He was] from the Northside. He was a Captain in the Navy. You know, [I knew] people who have made it in

all fields--doctors, nurses, lawyers, business world.

F: What has been a negative aspect?

L: Well, the negatives are some of those who have left the church.

F: Is this forced retirement. . . .

L: That was back in. . . .

F: Has that been the only negative experience?

L: I would say so, yes. I certainly never considered leaving.

F: Right.

L: But, I like this even better, here.

F: Is there anything else you think we need we need to add?

L: How are we doing on time? [It's] nine o'clock, [we've talked for an] hour and a half.

F: Is there anything else that you think would make this project even better, and could tell me, that I don't know?

L: No. I said too much already. (laughter) Was that interesting to you, this stuff?

F: Very interesting. I just want to make sure, because I might not know something that you know. I haven't triggered it off in your mind?

L: No. That's about all that tempts my mind tonight. (laughter)

F: Thank you.

L: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW