

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of the Youngstown Diocese

Personal Experience

O.H. 1574

DONALD J. REAGAN

Interviewed

by

Patrick H. Downey

on

October 13, 1992

MONSIGNOR DONALD J. REAGAN

Monsignor Reagan was born on July 21, 1923 in Youngstown, Ohio. He began taking piano lessons at the age of seven, later competed in the State of Ohio Annual Music Clubs Contest, and was awarded first prize in his age group on two occasions. Upon entering high school, Don expanded his study of music to include baritone horn and organ. He became a member of the brass section in the first Ursuline High School marching band, and mastered the organ well enough to play for liturgical services.

After graduating from high school in 1940, he wrote to every Catholic College in the country for a scholarship, since he was the oldest of four children and his parents could not afford the tuition. He attended Fordam University in New York City with a 2/3 scholarship 91940-19420. Then, [he] entered St. Mary's Seminary in Cleveland for the next five years and was ordained for the Diocese of Youngstown in 1947.

Monsignor Reagan's assignments were as follows: Assistant Pastor at St. Patrick's, Youngstown; Assistant Principal, and later, Principal at Ursuline High School, Youngstown; Interim Assistant Superintendent of Schools of the Youngstown Diocese; Pastor of St. William in Champion, St. Bernadette in Masury, and Blessed Sacrament in Warren. He has been a participant in or was appointed to the faculty of [the following]: The institute for Clergy Education at Notre Dame, School of Music at Catholic University, and a Sabbatical for Personal Renewal and Liturgical Music Composition.

He earned an M.A. in Education from Notre Dame, in 1954, an M.M. in Music Composition, in 1969, and a Ph.D. in Musicology, with a major in Theory, from Catholic University, in 1972. Monsignor Reagan has taught at the following institutions: St. Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing, Youngstown State University, The Catholic University of America School of Music, and the Rensselaer School of Church Music and Liturgy at St. Joseph College, Collegeville, Indiana. He directed Catholic University student groups in tours sponsored by USO shows, entertaining the military and their dependents in Goose Bay, Labrador, Greenland, Iceland, Puerto Rico, and the British Bahamas. He has been involved in USO shows in Panama, Puerto Rico, and the British Bahamas.

In 1983 he divided a Sabbatical year between personal, theological, pastor renewal, and composing music. He acquired the former at the Institute for Clergy Education at Notre Dame University and the latter at The Catholic University of America School of Music. He has published 18 musical selections and six recordings. The major work of his composing was "Mercy, Mercy: A Mass in Jazz Style." It was premiered at the National Shrine of Immaculate Conception for the Baccalaureate Service of Catholic University graduates in June, 1984. Subsequently, it was performed at the National convention of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians, and then published and recorded.

Monsignor Reagan has published nearly 100 pieces and three commercial recordings, with eight publishers of liturgical music. He served as a consultant for the United States Forces Book of Worship, was a member of the selection committee for the People's

Mass Book Hymnal Revision, wrote several articles, and presented workshops in Children's Liturgies in various cities through the United States. He has received the following distinctions: United States Armed Forces for Hymnal Revision, People's Mass Book revision, and the Father Lawrence Heiman Citation for Distinguished Contribution to the field of Liturgical Music, awarded to him in 1988. [Prior to the organization of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians, Monsignor Reagan was President of the National Catholic Music Educators Association.

Following his sabbatical in 1984, Monsignor Reagan joined the faculty of the Major Seminary Division of the Athenaeum of Ohio as Director of the Pastoral Internship Program in the Field Education Division. Prior to retirement in 1988, he served his last year in a diocesan assignment as Senior Associate Pastor at St. Charles, Boardman. He retired in 1988, but he has been performing priestly ministry on a regular basis at St. Michael's in Canfield and, on occasion, at St. Brendan's in Youngstown, where he presently resides.

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of the Youngstown Diocese

INTERVIEWEE: DONALD J. REAGAN

INTERVIEWER: Patrick H. Downey

SUBJECT: the Youngstown Catholic Diocese, growth and hindrances, Vatican II Council, laity, expansion, Catholic services, celibacy

DATE: October, 13, 1992

D: This is an interview with Monsignor Donald J. Reagan, for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the history of the Youngstown Diocese project, by Patrick Downey, on October 13, 1992.

What was your environment like growing up?

R: My parents, Edgar Reagan and Marie Mahoney, were married at St. Columba's Church, in 1922. They arranged for me to receive Baptism, Confirmation, First Penance and Eucharist at St. Columba's, the church which later became our Diocesan Cathedral and [the] site of my ordination to priesthood.

Mother and Dad were deeply committed Catholics. They enrolled me in St. Columba's School where the Ursuline Sisters were my teachers, and young priests from the parish often taught classes in religion. My parents provided an excellent model of what Catholic life ought to be by their encouragement and example. They reinforced what the teachers taught in school and often suggested the priesthood as a possible way of life for me. They participated in mass daily, for most of their lives, and observed the practice of family attendance during the time their children lived at home.

D: What do you feel were the major causes for you becoming a priest?

R: Well, I always had the thought in mind that God was calling me. As I mentioned, I had a thorough Catholic background with my family and my education. I thought it was something I would like very much. I came to know some priests; Father Sammon and Father Logue quickly come to mind. I admired them and the kind of work that they did.

After I graduated from high school, I was thinking about what I would do, either go to a preparatory seminary or to a normal Catholic college. I was only 16 when I graduated, but turned 17 the month after. I did not choose a preparatory seminary because I wanted more experience generally, especially in terms of a social life and music. Though I received a scholarship from Fordham University, which would only pay for 2/3 of the expense, the generosity of a local businessman enabled me to take care of the rest. I made my own spending money by waiting on tables--at 20 cents a meal--and also by a little bit of piano playing.

My scholarship required me to assist the Glee Club in various ways as [the] accompanist. An upper classman who had been the regular accompanist continued to play for the chorus. I sang in the first bass section for those pieces and played piano for vocal solos and double quartet numbers. In addition, I played the organ on occasions when it was required and available. A regular feature of our programs was a couple pieces, usually of a humorous nature, which the regular pianist and I played on two pianos. In preparation for that, we practiced regularly downtown at Steinway Hall.

For concerts, we wore a full dress suit, tails, winged collar, white tie, and a maroon tape across our chest--our Fordham school color and mark of distinction. In addition to performing in the New York City area, we traveled to upstate New York and Rhode Island. Usually, we would present a concert at a women's college. The concert would come first, then a dinner, followed by a dance. Guys were breaking their necks to be accepted for the Glee Club so they could make the trips, meet new girls, and be invited back for their school dances. I had to be there because it was part of what I did for my scholarship. My other scholarship duty was to provide music for services in the college chapel and in the graduate school prior to lectures.

My biggest musical honor and thrill was to be chosen as Fordham University's most talented undergraduate. Fred Allen was host to the most talented students from 40 colleges on his regular Texaco Star Theatre over CBS

Radio during the 1941-1942 season. The students who applied were individually auditioned by their University student council and a talent scout from CBS.

I auditioned and was among the three from my college who were to perform on a local radio station to determine the winner. In New York, there was no local radio station. It was all network, so a special concert was arranged in the evening at school. I was accompanist for one of the contestants and moved from class to class throughout the school day with the other. The student body voted the following day, and I was chosen. My selection was a portion of the Grieg A Minor Piano Concerto, with Al Goodman's Symphony Orchestra.

D: How did you feel when you looked down into the congregation in your first assignment at St. Patrick's?

R: I was in a parish, and I felt it was just what I wanted. At Fordham, I was taught mostly by Jesuit priests. I did not want to be a teacher. In fact, I had the papers to join the Jesuits and returned them unsigned, because I did not want to take the chance that I would have to spend my life as a teacher. However, by a strange turn of events, I ended up as a diocesan priest teaching four classes a week in the parochial school at St. Patrick's, two hours a week at the local Catholic High School, and another hour in a release time program in a local public school. After three years, I was assigned to Ursuline High School as an administrator, but did a fair amount of classroom teaching during the 13 years I was there. During those years, I also taught Medical Ethics at St. Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing, and Education courses at Youngstown State University, for our parochial school teachers. I was then assigned as pastor of St. William's in Champion, and two years later, accepted a full scholarship at The Catholic University of America School of Music. I did not have a single academic credit in music but had sufficient private instruction on keyboard to be able to feel at home taking subjects in the undergraduate program. Dr. John Paul, Dean of the School of Music, envisioned my future as a composer of Broadway musicals. With his encouragement, I began working toward a Master of Music in Composition, which ultimately would lead to a Doctorate in Theory. It was a challenging road to travel. One can acquire an academic knowledge of theory by reading books, but to develop the skill and facility in applying the principles of theory in composition, arranging or performance demands diligent pursuit and hours of practice.

After my first semester, one of the graduate assistants who was teaching basic theory courses was unable to continue. Because of my interest in theory and

previous experience in teaching, I was offered the position. This eventually led to my teaching a full faculty load in addition to working on my degree. Although I had been celebrating mass daily and assisting at parishes sometimes on weekends, after a while, my new duties placed some limitations on priestly ministry, which I regretted.

I love music and don't ever want to be out of it, but I love priesthood, too, and consider it a priority that I want to honor. After I completed my course work for the doctorate, I decided to return to the Diocese. Bishop Malone welcomed me and granted the request to be free during summers to complete the doctoral dissertation and examination. He also appointed me full time pastor of St. Bernadett's, Masury. Between the free summers, which I spent at Catholic University and many houses at the Rectory of Sacred Heart Parish in Sharon, through the courtesy of Father Donald Scully, I was able to complete the dissertation and obtain the Doctorate on February 3, 1972. Following two years at St. Bernadette's, I spent 11 years as pastor of Blessed Sacrament in Warren.

It was at Blessed Sacrament that I began to compose for publication. Summers were free, as previously agreed to. In addition to teaching, first at Catholic University, then at Rensselaer School of Church Music and Liturgy on the campus of St. Joseph's College in Collegeville, Indiana, I was able to spend time composing. My first song book and record, "Forever Will I Sing," was published at the invitation of Alba House Communications in Canfield. At an education convention, one of the brothers stopped me and said, "Hey, you're the best liturgical musician in the diocese. Why don't you do a recording?" Carey Landry learned of it and suggested to NALR that he might sing my music on a recording, which they would produce. The title of the group of songs is "You Are My Friends." Later, Pat Boone chose three pieces from that group to make an ecumenical recording with the same company, titled "The Time Has Come." My third complete album is the one previously mentioned, "Mercy, Mercy: A Mass In a Jazz Style," published by The National Pastoral Musicians. It is scored for cantor, choir, and keyboard with optional fugglehorn, trombone, clarinet, alto saxophone, flute, double bass, and percussion. It may be performed either in a liturgical or concert setting. My published music is written mostly for cantor, choir, and keyboard, but often with congregation and sometimes other instruments. In addition to [the] publishers mentioned above, my works may be found with J. S. Paluch Company, World Library Publications, Liturgical Press, Gregorian Institute of America, and Oregon Catholic Press.

Following a productive period composing and publishing during the years at Blessed Sacrament parish, I enjoyed an enriching year of sabbatical. This presented an opportunity for updating my priesthood in terms of Vatican II. It also provided leisure time to compose an extended, in depth work where I could experiment with various rhythmic and harmonic elements in the jazz idiom. My next assignment was a three year commitment to the Athenaeum Seminary faculty in Cincinnati where I directed the new year-long Pastoral Internship Program. During that time, I missed both parish ministry and music. I later returned to ministry and music as a Senior Associate Pastor at St. Charles Parish in Boardman. After one year, I retired, and continue doing priestly ministry in parishes and music activities in composition and piano performance.

In addition to composing and arranging I am fond of playing piano, especially improvising in the jazz idiom. I had been a serious student of classical music until going to college. As a child, I learned to play by ear without the benefit of a teacher. On Saturday afternoons each fall, my father tuned the radio to stations that carried football games. After touchdowns, time outs, and during half time ceremonies, I listened attentively and learned the football marches of the various schools, such as Notre Dame, Michigan, and Ohio State. Through experimenting, I learned basic chords which fit the melodies. Soon, I could play the march melodies by ear using chords. Later, I could transfer the chords I learned to other melodies.

I first received instructions in voicing chords from a composer/arranger I hired to conduct the Ursuline Band. I built upon that knowledge after enrolling at Catholic University School of Music. Without the knowledge of my professors, I took lessons clandestinely from Johnny Phillips, a jazz pianist who was performing at Blues Alley. There turned out to be a double advantage in my entry into the field of jazz. Hank Levi, a former arranger for Stan Kenton taught me how to incorporate much of what I learned into my composing and arranging. I began to play well enough at the piano to perform professionally in such situations as receptions and dinner clubs. My goal, however, is to do it occasionally for fun, rather than as a regularly scheduled event.

D: Over the years, when you first started at St. Patrick's and at Ursuline, what do you feel were aides to the diocese? What were some positive influences in the diocese at that time?

R: A significant thing was the appointment of Bishop Walsh to the Diocese. He was very well experienced. Though he came from the South, he was well acquainted with dioceses in the north eastern part of the country, where the church was well developed. Bishop Malone added immeasurably to our early growth, too. He was the first superintendent of schools and developed our school system. We had a large number of schools here, but they improved considerably as a result of Bishop Malone's becoming superintendent. He began an excellent program of training lay teachers. That had quite an impact for some time.

D: What do you see, if anything, as a hindrance to the diocese and its growth over the years that you may have noticed?

R: A hindrance to the growth? The obvious hindrance right now is manpower. I say "Manpower" only for this reason. Women aren't eligible for priesthood, although at some time, they may be. That's how it is today. I'm sure there are other things I might say, but this occurs to me right now.

Another liability was the fact that we started from scratch. When the diocese began in 1942, there were no offices for the Marriage Tribunal, Education, Propagation of the Faith, Catholic Charities, and Catholic Social Services. There are central offices to accommodate all of the needs now. Catholic Social Services has offices in every county of the diocese, to be available for the needs of all the people whom the diocese serves.

D: How did these organizations begin? Was it fairly spontaneous?

R: No. It began through the direction of the bishop. The bishop would assign a priest to organize and staff them. Now, we have lay people taking over those responsibilities. Current examples are the positions of superintendent of schools and director of Catholic charities. But traditionally, it was the practice to have priests and women religious in those positions. At that time, our diocesan priests did not have an advanced education, except for priesthood. When the diocese began to develop, it became necessary to educate some priests to acquire advanced degrees at the masters or doctoral level. Knowledge and status was necessary to establish offices, initiate programs and develop them.

D: What were some of the greatest changes in the diocese in your years of service that you have seen?

R: I think the development of the educational system is significant. It should be at all levels. I have already spoken about the contribution of Bishop Malone as superintendent and his raising the quality of teaching at the elementary level as a result of the Lay Teacher Training Program.

Significant improvement was made throughout the diocese in the area of high schools. In Youngstown, Ursuline was enlarged to triple its size, and Cardinal Mooney was built to hold an equal number of students. In the Canton/Massillon area, Central Catholic High School was built with [one] division for girls taught by the sisters of the Humility of Mary and one for boys staffed by Christian Brothers. St. Thomas High School was built to accommodate students in Louisville and the surrounding area. St. John's was begun to provide an opportunity for Catholic High School students in Ashtabula County. In Trumbull County, the new John F. Kennedy High School was built to accommodate students from Warren and Niles. This enabled the former St. Mary's High School in Warren to be converted into a Middle School for grades six through eight in the Warren area. A more broad and challenging curriculum could be offered for those students, and the schools they formerly attended could concentrate on students in the lower grades and preschool programs.

Another significant development was the Liturgy Commission. We were doing a little bit before the Second Vatican Council [Vatican II], but it really took off after that. The taking of liturgy courses by some of our members added a great deal to the strength of the commission.

D: At its best, could you describe the working [of] the diocese of Youngstown? Describe what you feel would be its most progressive era.

R: I think that the diocese started modestly and gradually progressed with the coming of Bishop Walsh and Bishop Malone. The Second Vatican Council was also significant in stimulating growth. The problem we have now in regard to continuing this growth is the person power. We've experienced this as priests. It's very difficult getting other things going if we don't bring more intensity and depth to our working with our people.

D: Why do you feel there is a lack of people joining the priesthood?

R: Well, in my personal opinion, I think that celibacy is the number one obstacle. Many men don't feel called to live without a family life. I know personally, as a result of my having been on the faculty of the seminary

for three years, why some don't come to begin with and why others decide not to stay. They struggle with the desire for priesthood, but just don't feel called to celibacy. I think that compulsory celibacy will change to become optional some day, but we're not supposed to even talk about it now. I believe that most men who become priests are not unhappy. However, I think that if there were an option, some probably would have married, and others still might marry today or in the future.

D: What do you think has been a hindrance to the diocese over the years, [or perhaps] even a particular period [or] a particular decade?

R: The cost of everything has gradually escalated through the years. Many people cannot afford a Catholic education for their children. What people sacrificed in former days is beyond their reach today.

D: Do you feel it is difficult to attract well-qualified teachers to the Catholic school system because of the pay scale?

R: That is the real problem for some. However, we do have many people who are willing to sacrifice and teach for less pay. I believe we do have good teachers. Many have their masters and doctoral degrees. This is a greater expense for the school system because of a commitment to pay scales. These teachers are entitled to more and should receive it.

D: What do you feel are some of your contributions to the diocese?

R: Liturgy and music. I was involved in liturgy with Bishop Walsh's approval before we ever had a commission. He preferred that we accomplish a few things before establishing a commission. Ultimately, the things that we had done early enabled us to get started with the larger commission. I am told that the fact that I am a published musician with eight companies brings a kind of vision beyond the diocese. Hymn books and Missalettes throughout the United States and in other English speaking countries carry my music.

D: How was the commission formed?

R: The commission was formed first by the Bishop appointing a priest to be the chairperson. From there, the organization and function of the commission was determined. The worst thing that could have happened would have been for the membership to be comprised entirely of priests. It was important that the commission be composed of a well rounded group of people.

Professional musicians and people schooled in liturgy were important because of their skills. Clergy, religious, and teachers needed to be represented to become acquainted with the liturgical books and other publications dealing with prayer and worship. Their mission was then to communicate this information to their parishes, religious communities, and schools. Representative lay people from a cross section of parishes needed an opportunity to present their views and inform the commission of their problems.

In the course of the time, committees were formed for specialties such as music, art, and architecture. A diocesan certification program was designed for musicians, annual workshops were presented for any who might be interested, and a diocesan liturgical directory was compiled summarizing the liturgical guidelines of the diocese. A rotation plan for membership on the committee was introduced to provide for a wider exposure of talent and opportunities for more people to contribute their services and skills.

D: What was a typical day like at St. Patrick's?

R: When I was there?

D: Yes.

R: Masses were scheduled every week day at 6:30, 7:00, 7:30 and 8:00 a.m. I always rise an hour before mass to allow leisure time for prayer. Twelve novena services were scheduled every Monday beginning at 9:00 and 11:00 in the morning, and continuing every 45 minutes from 2:15 in the afternoon until 9:00 in the evening. When I was there, 1947 to 1950, religious instructions were given on an individual basis. I instructed 50 converts during that time, each one taking a period of three months. Each month, I brought Holy Communion to 50 people who were confined to home.

There were many weddings, each requiring a set of individual instructions for the couple. St. Patrick's was a large parish with many funerals. I remember one week when I presided at five of the seven burial services. I taught religion to two, third grade [classes] and two, sixth grade [classes] in parochial school each week, two hours to a class at Ursuline, and one in a release time program at Woodrow Wilson High School. This was the teaching pattern for assistant pastors in the area.

D: So between 1947 and 1950, you were also teaching at Ursuline, too?

R: Two hours a week. Also, another hour at Woodrow Public High.

D: You were quite busy.

R: Yes. Then, I practiced the piano whenever I could. That was entirely on my own. I wasn't studying with a teacher, but I wanted to keep myself in shape. I really wanted to be involved in music and tried several ways to do it. Among them were lessons at Youngstown State University with a cellist from the Cleveland Symphony, lessons on the guitar with a teacher from the local Music Center, playing the valve trombone for a short while in a Youngstown Civic Orchestra, and studying jazz piano with a friend I had recently met. I was very much involved on my own time. I enjoyed each effort, but the time constraints of parish ministry made it impossible for me to make any progress with music.

D: During 1950, you were assigned to Ursuline. Could you elaborate on that a bit?

R: At Ursuline, there was a priest principal and a faculty consisting mainly of Ursuline Sisters, with a few lay teachers. I was the second priest and assigned as assistant principal. Each school day, I would get in my car in the morning and drive to celebrate mass in a parish where I was needed. It might be as distant as Struthers or Campbell. School was in session from 8:30 until 3:30. There were about 600 students when I arrived. We ended with 1,920 when I left in 1963. How's that for growth? In the meantime, the school had been enlarged, and I had been appointed principal.

I tried to do some teaching on a regular basis. It's important, particularly when you are just starting out in administration, to know what teachers have to go through. One cannot supervise classes and assist teachers without having taken some appropriate education courses and acquired some practical experience in classroom teaching.

One of my responsibilities, probably because of my extensive background in music, was the band. I hired the instructor and arranged for fulfilling the needs in regard to instruments, uniforms, and such things as transportation and meals when traveling.

I also represented the high school at meetings with diocesan personnel, public school administrators, and civic officials. At first, there was more of a demand for my service in this capacity when there were fewer faculty available to render assistance in these matters. In the early years, priests in education were

more frequently called upon to participate in civic events because they were better known throughout the community.

D: Did you enjoy public relations?

R: Yes, I enjoyed it very much. What I really enjoyed most, however, was my association with parishioners when I returned to parish work. In a parish setting the priest is intimately involved with people at important times of life. Some examples would be visiting with them when they were sick, helping them to find meaning in their illness, preparing them for death, counseling the troubled and the doubtful, instructing couples before marriage, and bringing encouragement and strength to families with problems.

Early in life, I recognized my talents in academics and music. It was evident from grades, awards, and public performances. Only after becoming mature did I realize I have qualities such as concern, kindness, and compassion that enabled me to assist people, especially through my priestly ministry.

I humbly acknowledge with deepest gratitude the gifts God has given me. They are neither earned nor deserved. I pray for the grace to use them well, with glory to God and benefit to others.

D: Can you think of anything we may have missed on the diocese that you might like to add?

R: I think you've led me pretty much to the things of concern.

D: Thank you, Monsignor.

R: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW