

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of the Youngstown Diocese

Personal Experience

O.H. 1568

FATHER THOMAS F. KELLY

Interviewed

by

Stephanie Fisher

on

November 5, 1992

FATHER KELLY

Father Kelly was born on September 11, 1921 in Ireland. He went to high school at St. Jarlath, 1935-1940, and entered the All Hallow's Seminary in Dublin, Ireland in 1940, after graduation. In Ireland, outside his home diocese, a priest could not be ordained unless he was adopted by a bishop from either the U.S., Australia, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, or Tasmania. The purpose of this was to follow the Irish to the English speaking world. Father Kelly was adopted by Bishop McFadden with the help of Father Kit and Father Higgins who had previously come to Cleveland on loan. In June 1947, Father Kelly came to the Youngstown Diocese and was ordained previously that same year by Bishop Marshall.

For his first few years in the Youngstown Diocese, Father Kelly worked under Monsignor Trainor at St. Columba Cathedral in Youngstown. Bishop McFadden felt that Father Kelly should remain at St. Columba for the weekend due to his brogue He also wanted Father Kelly to learn the ropes. For the next thirteen years, he was never officially given an assignment--still working with the brogue and the ropes.

Father Kelly's first official assignment was in Garrettsville, Ohio in Portage County. This was a very small parish of two hundred families. His duties included raising money, organizing festivals, visiting families, teaching religion, and organizing the Youth Club. This assignment lasted two and a half years. His other assignments were as follows: Mother of Sorrows in Ashtabula, Ohio; St. Brendan's in Youngstown, Ohio; and St. Christine's, which is also in Youngstown.

In 1990, Father Kelly retired. He is active in several organizations: AOH, Gaelic Society, Kiwanis, Mahoning Cancer Society, and St. Vincent DePaul Society. Father Kelly has been a Diocesan Consultor, Dean of Ashtabula County, and member of the Pastoral Council. In his spare time, he enjoys reading, bowling, golf, and helping others.

-Stephanie Fisher

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INTERVIEWEE: FATHER THOMAS F. KELLY
INTERVIEWER: Stephanie Fisher
SUBJECT: Seminary, Ordained, Mon. Trainer, Consultant
DATE: November 5, 1992

F: This is Stephanie Fisher interviewing Father Kelly for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the History of the Youngstown Diocese. The date is November 5, 1992.

Okay, Father Kelly, if you could, just tell me when you first were involved with the Youngstown Diocese, approximately when.

K: The Youngstown Diocese was created in 1943. I took advantage of that fact because it was very difficult to be adopted by a bishop or a diocese outside of Ireland. The war was on, and those who were ordained from 1938 or 1939 on were not able to get out to the particular diocese that they were ordained for. So, bishops were hesitant, not knowing if this was a thirty year or a hundred year war, to adopt students from seminaries which were established for the purpose of following the Irish people to the English speaking world. [The English speaking world was] America, Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, and Tasmania where some of the Irish were banished because of fighting against the English government.

Consequently, while in the seminary, it was partly our job and partly the job of the administration to seek out a diocese we could go to. We had a hard time,

but then, Father Kit and Father Higgins came out to Cleveland before the war for five years. They were ordained for Ireland, but there were too many priests in Ireland, so they came out for a few years on loan. It was during that time, 1943, that the Youngstown Diocese was established. I wrote to Father Kit, and Father Lyons wrote to Father Higgins--a cousin of his. They approached Bishop McFadden, and he adopted the two of us. So then, we were adopted for Youngstown Diocese and received the minor orders. Bishop McFadden was our bishop, even though we were in a seminary over in Ireland. I was ordained in June of 1947.

It wasn't easy to get out to America though the war was over almost two years. Troops and everything connected with the war received priority. By October 23, I was able to come. I spent a week in New York. I was told there that no one passes through New York without visiting. I had more relatives and friends in New York than I had in Ireland. One of the reasons why I came to Youngstown was because it was half way between Chicago and New York, where many members of my family and lots of young people that I went to school with were situated. For many years after I came here, I went to New York and Chicago visiting on occasion.

When I came to Youngstown, Bishop McFadden was wondering, "Where were you all this week? We were expecting you every day." When I got off the train in Youngstown, it was my desire to go to any Catholic Church except St. Columba Cathedral. I told the cab man that, and I got off the train down the hill from St. Columba. He meandered around town and charged me quite a bit for getting up over the hill to St. Columba. Still, he did drop me off at the cathedral. When I found that I was in the cathedral, I was a little bit scared. I had never spoken to a bishop before and not willingly, now.

F: Is that why you didn't want to go to the cathedral?

K: That's right. That is right. Until I could get the low-down on the bishop. . . . It was the most fortunate thing that ever happened to me. When I came to St. Columba, Bishop McFadden was the bishop. [He was] the finest, nicest gentleman I ever met. So was Monsignor Trainor. I think Bishop McFadden felt that with my brogue and everything that I wasn't ready to be assigned. He said, "Tom, I want you to stay here at St. Columba for the weekend and learn the ropes." The weekend lasted thirteen years and a month.

His first question to me was, "Tom, what does poig mo hoin mean?" I didn't translate then, and I won't now.

F: Really?

K: Yeah. I think I was probably the only priest in the diocese who was never assigned . . . given an assignment officially, except just for the weekend. It may be because I didn't answer his question.

F: So, What did you do then?

K: I was presumed to be assigned there.

F: [You were] presumed to be working right under the bishop?

K: Well, under Monsignor Trainor. At that time, there were four other priests at St. Columba: Father De-Crane, the present bishop, Bishop Malone, was an assistant there at the time, Father Roina of The Society of the Divine Word, and Father Schmith who spent most of his priesthood in Toledo or Detroit. I became the sixth priest at St. Columba. Father Roina and Father Smith were temporary. Father Roina went back to his order, and Father Smith was appointed to Mount Carmel. There were four of us and Monsignor Trainor.

F: Where did you live?

K: We lived in the rectory. There were four of us in little rooms in the top floor. Monsignor and another priest lived on the second floor. We were kind of crowded, but in those days it never mattered that much. I'm very, very happy that I was appointed to St. Columba, or such as the appointment was--for a weekend. The priests were very, very nice. They made me feel at home. Really, it did become my home. For thirteen years and for long afterwards, I regarded St. Columba as my home. The people were lovely. They were all from different nationalities. All over eastern Europe, Ireland, everywhere. They were all very nice to me. I used to love to go down to the Hollow and visit, because the people down there were mostly Italian. Their lifestyle reminded me of home. The university is down there now.

F: The parking lot's there.

K: Right, but in those days, different ethnic people were there. They had nice gardens with everything planted in them. I used to come home with vegetables, some Italian wine, and all that. Even though I didn't drink at all at the time, I supplied others a little bit at dinner time. It reminded me of home. When I left St. Columba thirteen years later, I really felt I was leaving home again.

F: When did it burn down?

K: It burned down in 1954. I can't be blamed for it because I was on vacation in Ireland.

F: Oh, where you?

K: Yeah. It happened on the Thursday before the first Friday in September. The priests were hearing confession, and there was a tremendous flash of lightning with the thunder following immediately. That's the sign that it's very close. They thought the church was demolished or something. Everyone in Youngstown knew that something had happened.

F: Are you saying that lightning was the cause?

K: Oh, yeah. The other priests were in the confessionals. They left there about nine or nine-thirty. This thing happened about a half an hour before, and the fire was already on. No one noticed it. It was around the belfry area--the tower. [The priests] were over at their house. Some people passing by saw the smoke coming out.

Really, the cathedral was a false Gothic building. It was a rectangular structure that got it's Gothic appointments by just two-by-fours being used around the pillars and going out towards the roof. All kinds of plaster was attached to the woodwork. We walked around the catwalk a few times and said, "If this place ever goes on fire, it'll be finished." It was a forest of wood.

F: You did say that?

K: Yes. It would be finished. In fact, I was on the pulpit one Sunday. This wood and plaster had become so dry after all these years. I just got off the pulpit when about a half a ton of this plaster fell into the pulpit. My weekend appointment almost ended there.

F: So, you think the building was in bad shape to begin with?

K: Well, it wasn't really in bad shape, but it had dried out and was very, very prone to a fire. When the fire came, they couldn't control it. Even the space formed by the two-by-fours around the pillars--we could see inside--acted like chimneys. So, the interior structure served the fire like different fireplaces with fuels available to make the fire happen quickly.

F: Did they call you in Ireland? How did you find out?

K: No. I came back and. . . .

F: You came back, and it was gone.

K: I came back, and Father Kolp tried to play a trick on me. He tried to get me to bed without seeing the church destroyed, then to get up for mass the next day, go over, and find nothing there.

F: That's what happened.

K: No, I heard about it from a family in New York.

F: There was nothing? Was there a foundation left?

K: Oh yes. The walls were very well constructed. It was cut stone and mortar, or cement--two great big towers. All of that was left. . . . Some of the roof was there too, but it could never be rebuilt. There was too much destruction. It would be a lot cheaper to tear it down.

F: So, what was the new church . . . the new cathedral? What's it's name?

K: St. Columba, too.

F: Oh, it's the same?

K: Yeah. St. Columba [Cathedral], the same name.

F: The same place?

K: Almost the same place. They had to take the rectory out in order to make room for the present bell tower. Monsignor Trainor felt that everything he had come to was now gone except the rectory. He kind of . . . I won't say fought . . . but he didn't want Bishop Walsh to take the rectory.

However, when they were pulling down the tower--I don't know if it was an act of God or what--but they were pulling it down, and all of a sudden a gust of wind came, relaxed the rope that was pulling this part of the tower, and down it went through the rectory. Whenever they were making a pull near the rectory, we had to get out. We were all in the street looking at it when this part of the tower aided by the wind, Holy Spirit, went through the rectory. Poor Monsignor. The tears came into his eyes because that was the last thing. The school was gone. The old church was gone. Now, this church was gone, and the rectory was gone. Bishop Walsh had a little smile on his face. Some of the people around about knew that Monsignor wanted the rectory up and Bishop wanted it down. I think Bishop felt that God was favoring him, so he had a smile on

his face. Some of the people didn't like that, because they loved Monsignor Trainor. They pitied him [for] the last that he came to in 1923, thirty-two years.

F: Monsignor Trainor, you said, worked under Bishop McFadden?

K: Oh, yes.

F: When did Bishop McFadden retire? When was he replaced by Bishop Walsh?

K: What's that?

F: Bishop McFadden. What year was he replaced by Bishop Walsh?

K: I don't know really, exactly, but [it was] somewhere around 1950 or 1951, round about that time.

F: Was he really that ill from diabetes?

K: Yes, he was.

F: He really was?

K: Yes, he really was. Like, for instance, when he said Mass, immediately after Holy Communion, he'd take orange juice because it was difficult on him. Of course, it was very difficult on all of us in those days, because we had to fast. So, if you were working for hours before your mass, you couldn't even take a drink of water before mass. It was very difficult for Bishop McFadden. His diabetes, apparently was fairly severe, because he was taking insulin.

F: That's the reason he was replaced--his health?

K: Bishop McFadden was rather old at the time. He was over seventy. Bishop Walsh came in and was appointed Administrator of the Diocese. Actually, Bishop McFadden was still the Ordinary, but Bishop Walsh was in full charge of administration.

F: You always hear about church politics. I don't know what role that plays.

K: Church politics?

F: Yeah. Church politics. That's what I've been told.

K: I don't think I believed in church politics. Bishop McFadden needed help with decisions and administration. I believe his health wasn't good enough for his obligations. There were things that had to be done

like building new high schools, et cetera--a lot of things that the bishop alone would have to organize. That, I think, was one of the reasons that Bishop Walsh came in. Why they went all of the way to the Carolinas . . . I don't know whether it was politics or not. That's not likely. Bishop Walsh was a good friend of Cardinal Mooney of Detroit. It was said that it was Cardinal Mooney who recommended him. Cardinal Mooney was a very good friend of Monsignor Trainor, too. Cardinal Mooney was a native of Youngstown. He and Monsignor wanted the best for the Diocese. I know that they used to talk about those things. Bishop Walsh went all around America collecting for his own diocese and the missions in the South. He was also secretary of the National Council of the Bishops in Washington. He was well known by the bishops, so that might be the reason. Coming from the Carolinas to the Youngstown Diocese was not a tremendous advancement, but it was certainly good for Youngstown.

F: Bishop Walsh was from the Carolinas?

K: Yes, he was.

F: Isn't that unusual? I was under the assumption that you would have to be part of the Youngstown or the Cleveland Diocese to be recommended to be the bishop of the Youngstown area.

K: No. On the contrary. The bishop, more often was from another diocese. Rome very seldom appointed a local priest. Seldom did an auxiliary bishop become the ordinary of his own diocese. Bishop Malone might be one of the first. Then, it became more and more a kind of a habit or something to be expected. In the early days of the Youngstown Diocese, you could just assume that it would be someone from the outside who would be coming in. A local would be made an auxiliary; then after some years, he would be appointed to some other diocese, not his own.

F: Were you already a priest in Ireland before you came?

K: Yes, I was ordained, but I had not served as a priest except to say Mass and to help out. I was ordained for the Youngstown Diocese. I was adopted for the Diocese in 1944 and ordained in 1947.

F: I didn't realize this.

K: You have to belong to a diocese and have a bishop before you can even begin to get any of the orders leading up to the priesthood.

F: Where did you receive your religious education?

K: In Hallow's College and Seminary in Dublin.

F: Oh, okay. So, you didn't have more education once you got to the United States?

K: No, I was ordained before I came to the United States. I was ordained by Bishop Marshall who was a former student, himself ordained at All Hallow's. He was the Bishop of Suddoc in England.

F: Did you go on to receive a masters or anything?

K: No. In those days, most of the priests of my time didn't have a degree. While in the seminary, you studied philosophy, theology, Canon law, scripture and even a little Hebrew, and things like that. Few people from all of those seminaries ever got a degree. You went through the same thing as if you sought a degree. A priest didn't need a degree in those days, because he wasn't going to be a teacher, except to teach religion--which we did.

F: I'm just surprised that . . . I know you didn't have to, but I'm just surprised that later, before you retired, that they didn't have you go on.

K: No, neither was I anxious. They never did with the priests who were active parish priests unless maybe you requested it yourself. Not too many did. I don't think the priests ordained in America in my era obtained a degree. If you went to the seminary, you went for one purpose--to be a priest.

F: That's right. I think that's true. The only exceptions that I'm thinking of are Bishop Malone, Bishop Hughes, and a few others.

K: Well, yes. They went into Education, Canon Law, Scripture, et cetera.

F: Right.

K: Many priests [went back] later on because they didn't have the degree from the seminary. With certain required courses they then would get the degree.

F: So in other words, if you do something else besides parish work, you would need it?

K: Yes. All the young priests today have all kinds of degrees.

F: Psychology . . . that's a big one. Even Ph.D.'s in psychology.

- K: Yes. We had all these subjects in the Seminary, but to a lesser degree indeed. A lot of the young priests have that advantage where they can attend a university, but the seminary I attended could not grant university degrees. Maynouth Seminary in Ireland was and is a university. They give all kinds of degrees, master's and the doctorate mostly in religious subjects, but we didn't get any.
- F: Are there a lot of priests that study Canon Law?
- K: Well, we all studied Canon Law. I remember the 414 canons in the old Canon Law book and all the different sections pertaining to--you name it. We all studied that. We studied it pretty much in depth, but we never got a degree out of it. Then, those who were working on the Tribunal here got their Canon Law degree from Catholic University. The first one was Father O'Dea, followed by Fathers Susko, O'Connel, Corliglio, and Sister Mary Conroy. I don't think anyone in Youngstown got a doctorate in Canon Law.
- F: I think Sister Mary Conroy is who I talked to. She's very proud that she's a woman and has Canon Law.
- K: She's a good one, too.
- F: Yes, I spoke with her. Yes, very nice. When you came here in . . . 1946. . . ?
- K: [It was] 1947.
- F: [In] 1947. Okay. What were your feelings about the Youngstown Diocese? Did you wish you were a part of the Cleveland Diocese because it was larger?
- K: Oh, no. I liked Youngstown very much. Youngstown had the great name reputation for priests and the bishop with everyone being very friendly and solicitous of each other. Like the forty hours of devotion, church and school dedications, et cetera. They invite each other to share the occasion. We got together an awful lot. I thought that was lovely for me because, I got to meet all of the priests. Youngstown was very well known in other dioceses for the fact that the priests, Bishop, and Religious got along very well together. It was a friendly diocese.
- F: Had you heard of any of the priests that chose to go to the Cleveland Diocese? I was told that some decided they did not want to be with the Youngstown Diocese.
- K: Well, I think that was true before the diocese was formed. It was expected more or less. Some of the

priests wanted to go back to Cleveland because that was their home territory. Their family and friends were there. It wasn't because they didn't like Youngstown. It's nice to be near your family. The priests whose families were in Youngstown and many of the priests who were from Cleveland, requested and wanted to stay in Youngstown. For one thing, you became a pastor sooner.

F: Really? Because it was smaller?

K: Oh, yes. It was smaller. You became a pastor in Youngstown when you were twelve or thirteen years a priest. But, you were twenty-two or twenty-three years a priest in Cleveland. That makes a little difference. It's nice to have your own place. Also, when you have your own place, you can do some of the things that you would like to do in a parish.

F: Do you wish you were . . . had ever received the title of monsignor?

K: Be a monsignor? The last ones who were made were in 1961 by Bishop Walsh. Now I'm retired, so there's no possibility of becoming a monsignor. I do think that it was a mistake to quit things like that . . . some recognition . . . but Bishop Malone was very stingy in this area.

Also, they change priests every six years or twelve years. That's the longest you can be in a parish. I think, too, that's a mistake. Limited tenure and a lack of accolade reduced the desire and ambition to take the challenge of a bigger parish or this, that, or other greater responsibility. The honor of monsignor is usually thrown in with the higher responsibility. Before tenure, when [priests] got into a parish suitable to them, they liked to take ownership and feel, "Now this is my home as long as I'm a priest." The present policy, pertaining to the length of time a pastor can be in a parish and/or not handing out ribbons of some kind, took away a little bit from the spirit. Let me put it this way: when big parishes are open today, very few apply for them. When I resigned from St. Christine's, I heard that no one applied, but if a little parish is open, an awful lot do apply. So, if you. . . .

F: Why is that?

K: I suppose responsibility should have a sense of security and recognition. How you take on all that responsibility and, I suppose, if you love your work, you can do the same thing in a small parish, in a more intimate and more intensive way. A big parish is hard to get ownership of. You have to do everything. Of course,

you have associates.

F: Are they in charge of the financial side . . .

K: That's another thing that may threaten a pastor.

F: . . . of a big parish?

K: Yes. Maybe a priest might say, "I wasn't ordained for that. I prefer to do things spiritually with people." I kind of always liked the challenge of it all. Being a parish priest is wonderful, because you have a whole gamut of responsibilities and opportunities. I don't know if there is any position in the world where you have more to do with people. You get more into their lives as a priest. There are times of sickness, joy, funerals, weddings, occasions when something nice happens to people, and occasions when something tragic happens. I like that. People often ask, "How can you change your face from a smile to a cry?" I never found it too hard, because once you meet people and know what they're involved in--and you like to be involved with people--you quickly change your tune, because they help you to do that. I like that.

F: So, for the thirteen years that you mentioned you were at St. Columba, correct?

K: Yes.

F: Were you under Bishop McFadden the whole thirteen years?

F: No, Bishop Walsh had come in. Bishop Walsh was still bishop when I left there and went to Garrettsville. But, the person I was mostly under was Monsignor Trainor. Later, when he [Monsignor Trainor] died in 1956, [it was] Monsignor Holbrook. Prior to that, the latter [Monsignor Holbrook] was the principal at Ursuline. He was a real gentleman, too. So I was fortunate in my two pastors.

F: So, what did you do within those thirteen years?

K: Those were the days when we even had to wash the linens before you'd give them to a laundress. They [the garments] touched the blessed sacrament, so consequently, they [the priests] figured that they had to be rinsed out a few times by a priest . . . even a little menial job like that. We taught religion in the grade school, and we taught religion in high school. Every Monday morning, we went over and checked to see that all the kids went to Mass on Sunday. I had the care of Southside Hospital. I was the Chaplain of Southside Hospital while being an assistant at St.

Christine's, teaching at Ursuline. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday I'd go over there to collect the lists of those going to Holy Communion . . . hear their confession. It would take all afternoon. There were about sixty or seventy Catholics in Southside Hospital. I'd visit every one of them on the three days. Then in the morning, I'd get up maybe by five-thirty, and go over and bring them Holy Communion. They had to receive Holy Communion before they could receive a drop of water, medicine, or breakfast.

So, you had to have all of that done, then come back and say Mass, or if you had a funeral or a wedding, or something like that. By the time you had said the funeral Mass and gone out to the cemetery, it was time to go up to Ursuline at one or two o'clock to teach religion. You'd come out of religion class without even a drop of water up 'til that time, not a drop of water. That was tough on people like Bishop McFadden who had diabetes and older priests. It was tough.

F: When did that change?

K: I don't know when it changed, but I had a bleeding ulcer before it did.

F: I mean, it wasn't due to Vatican II was it?

K: I suppose after Vatican II.

F: After Vatican II . . . because of it, do you believe?

K: Oh, yes.

F: They realized it.

K: A lot of things were changed by Vatican II. I think a lot of things for the good.

F: You do?

K: Yeah.

F: I hear conflicting opinions.

K: Well, I think you'd have to, because everyone has conflicting opinions. There were certain things, such as when you said Mass with your back to the people, and said it in Latin . . . Latin is not the native language of the priests here, so consequently, you had prayers off by heart. Oftentimes, if you have something off by heart, you'd say it quickly and without the attention to translate.

F: Well, nobody knows what you're saying. . . .

K: That's right. Although people loved the Latin Mass, many of them, because it was solemn or something. It was adorational. I met a person three or four months ago they said that there was a Latin mass, and they loved it. It was great. I said, "What church did you go to?" They said, "St. Mathias." I said, "That wasn't a Latin mass, that was a Slovak mass." As long as they didn't understand it, I think they thought it was in Latin. But, I like the changes in the Mass.

F: You liked it?

K: Yeah. The English and facing the people. Particularly at weddings and funerals when you have members of other churches. They can understand what you're saying. Also, in giving homilies during weddings and funerals, you can make them a little personal and make people feel more significant, and enjoy it. The same way with baptism. Baptisms are in English. When they were in Latin, the people didn't know anything. Now, they hear those beautiful prayers. They hear the commitments, the petitions, and the readings. Baptism is a meaningful time--which it should be.

There are a lot of other things. Even people taking the Holy Communion in the hand or on the tongue. I think that's very, very nice. After all, the hand is a part of the body as well as the tongue. The fact that the Mass can be said more freely at different places brought the people close to Christ. That's all right.

What may not be too good is, I think that the liturgy, the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist, which is so essential to our religion, may have lost some of their sacredness. I do believe that our Lord wants to walk the alleys, be brought into the streets, and be brought into the inner city, and wherever Jesus wants to be there. But, then I think it's our obligation to have the blessed sacrament very prominent in church, people able to go in and pray, adore Christ--the risen Christ, be able to thank him, praise him, and adore him as God. There's a place for both. I think we have lost too much of the adorational part of the Eucharist and the liturgy. Even today, the Eucharist is brought to the people weekly by lay distributors. That is great, but I do think though, when they're carrying the blessed Eucharist, they should be conscious of that--not just standing around talking to people, forgetting that they are carrying our Divine Lord. That's why when a priest or even a lay person talks about the new and the old, it depends on what they zero in on. Some times they say, "I don't like that," and other times, "I do like [that]."

F: Have you talked to other priests and realized that maybe some would like Latin to be said. . . ?

K: Maybe they were brighter than I was and they knew their Latin better.

F: I mean, have you come across that?

K: Oh, yes.

F: But, you don't argue over it.

K: No, I think the beauty of the Catholic Church is that there is the conscience. We try to inform people's consciences according to what we believe is the teaching of Christ. Then, when it comes to a person's decision of what they do, I think we should presume that they're doing it out of their own conscience and, consequently, that they feel right. Some people and some priests who stand by the old, are not less serious. I'm sure the same maintains for the priest and the people who find it comfortable to go along with the new.

F: So, where did you go after St. Columba?

K: After St. Columba, I went up to Garrettsville.

F: Was that part of the diocese?

K: Oh, yes. I asked that question too, because I had to look at a map to find it. Even with the map, I went astray. It's up in Portage County.

F: You were assigned there?

K: Yes, I was assigned to St. Ambrose, Garrettsville. When Bishop Walsh called me, I was not ecstatic. It seems that every priest wanted to be a pastor. But, I came from Ireland, and I was a little afraid of ghosts. I wasn't too certain. The idea of going out to a little parish and living all by myself in a big house, which had a scary history. . . . I thought the house might be haunted.

F: Well, what is in Garrettsville?

K: Catholic community of about two hundred families.

F: Very small. Country?

K: Yes, mostly country. In fact, most of the people either work in Cleveland, or they're farmers. That's out close to the Amish country, too.

F: Was it a poor parish? Not in proportion. They had no school. They supported the parish. We had a few things like a festival and bingo. In those days, when a young priest got a parish, he usually got a very small one for two or three years. Things went a little bit on seniority in those days. You'd go out to one of those small parishes like Garrettsville. You didn't have enough to support your programs, so what you'd do is have a festival each year. Send two dollars worth of tickets to everyone back at St. Columba where you came from, and they'd return them promptly with the two dollars. They'd be happy to. They came to the festival. I remember my first festival there. Hundreds of people came from St. Columba. In two days, we served 2,700 dinners. The population of Garrettsville is only about 1,500. That's the way people supported their priests who went out into a little mission parish in the country.

F: So, you stayed there your allotted twelve years?

K: No, not the twelve years. It was unknown at that time, thank God, that the term of being in a parish would not depend on anything except maybe the bishop and the individual priest. If the bishop felt that he needed you some other place, he'd call you--which was nice. It was an honor.

F: Because of your experience?

K: Well, experience, and maybe he thought you were the right person for this particular parish. He'd call you, talk, and make you feel wanted. It was usually more responsibility [like] going from a smaller to a bigger parish, when you kind of felt that this was going to be your home for the rest of your life. So, I was only two years and a half in Garrettsville.

F: Did you have a lot of time on your hands since. . . ?

K: Yes, if you were to spend too long. I visited all of the families in the parish. That was a big thing in the early days. Census is what we called going around and visiting all of the homes in the parish. We did it at St. Columba, too.

F: They enjoyed that?

K: Oh, yes. Of course, in those days, usually the mother was home, not too many mothers had to work. The one salary seemed to be able to rear the family. If the mother was home, the children usually were too. Very often there were even grandparents living in the house. Today, if you go around to ten homes and knock on doors, there's no one home. That was a common

thing--visiting homes, so for two and a half years in Garrettsville I visited homes. Then of course, you had to do everything yourself. You had to teach CCD [Confraternity Christian Doctrine classes]. There was no Catholic School, so you had to teach religion to the young adults to get people to do the work with you. In Garettsville, we had about forty-five kids in high school, and everyone of them would attend the session on Sunday evening. Didn't have many marriages or funerals, but you had plenty to do. When I was in Garettsville, I was the chaplain at Hiram College. I was there two and a half years, then I went to Mother of Sorrows, in Ashtabula.

F: Ashtabula? Was that larger?

K: That was about eight hundred families.

F: That's a medium size?

K: Yes, that's the medium. Mother of Sorrows. There were eight hundred families. I remember, shortly after going there, inviting all the people in the parish--the adults--to two dinners. We had two dinners over the two nights that President Kennedy was laid out. We still got nine hundred people to attend. It was a way of doing something for the parishioners. Then on the other hand, the parishioners were available to solicit their good will and cooperation. I remember that especially, because I was there when President Kennedy was assassinated. I remember exactly where I was. Father Lynch ran down from his room and said, "The announcement was made that President Kennedy has been shot. They don't know how serious it is."

F: That's when you had your dinner? Probably people needed to pull together at that moment.

K: Oh, yes. It has been said, and I think it's true that everyone in the country remembers where they were when they heard that news. I think everyone in this country was affected. It was a tragic moment. Everyone was upset.

After eight nice years up in Ashtabula, I was assigned to St. Brendan's, Youngstown.

F: That's short, though. It seems like you've had short assignments.

K: No, not too short.

F: Just those two?

K: The long one at St. Columba for thirteen years; Ashtabu-

la, eight years; and St. Christine's, seventeen years--a few quite long.

F: Two in Garettsville.

K: No. Two and a half in Garettsville, and then eight years at Mother of Sorrows.

F: Oh, okay.

K: My shortest appointment was a St. Brendan's.

F: Was that right after Ashtabula?

K: Yes.

F: St. Brendan's.

K: Yeah, that's right.

F: So, you're back in Youngstown?

K: Yes, back in Youngstown. That was the big reason. . . . I kind of wanted to come back.

F: Did you ask for the assignment?

K: No, I don't think I did. But, I was happy--not to leave Ashtabula. If only I could move the church in Ashtabula and the people thirty miles nearer to Youngstown or so, I'd be happy. Remember, on account of those thirteen years, I had a lot of friends and my home was Youngstown. Really, it was a home away from home. Because of that, I was always anxious to come back to Youngstown. So, when I got the chance, I opted for St. Brendan's. Then after two years, I went to St. Christine's.

F: Really, just two years at St. Brendan's? What did you do there? Was it a medium or large parish?

K: It is a large parish. About sixteen hundred families.

F: How did you adjust yourself time-wise?

K: You have an associate at St. Brendan's.

F: Oh, do you?

K: Yes, so there are two of you for sixteen hundred [families]. Well, I had an associate at Mother of Sorrows, too. Priests were plentiful at that time. Then, St. Christine's opened up, and Monsignor Gutman came up and said, "Why don't you apply for St. Christine's?" I did. Monsignor was the retiring pastor.

F: Monsignor Gutman was before you, that's right.

K: He was before me. In fact, he was the charter pastor, Easter Sunday, 1953.

F: He asked you from St. Brendan's to take over?

K: He asked me to apply for it. He was going to stay on in the rectory. Maybe he figured that it would be nice that way.

F: Was he retired?

K: Yes. He knew me. When he retired, he stayed on at the rectory for five or six years. So, I did as he requested. I applied. One of the reasons why I applied for St. Christine's was that when I was at St. Columba, the parish was going down and down like the neighborhood. There was quite a bit of inner city there. The university was taking over. Very few parishioners lived within the parish. They were leaving every year. It's what you might call a dying parish. Garrettsville was small. Mother of Sorrows, too, had reached it's peak after the war. Some of the plants were having trouble. Even the lakes were not as busy as they used to be. I felt I always liked a parish where there were young people, where it was a growing parish rather than going back. My history was in regressing into parishes. I thought maybe I was the reason why, because they were all regressing. (laughter) A little like the disease in poor children where they regress. Then, St. Christine's was a new parish that would grow, or at least maintain in spite of me.

F: When was it established?

K: It was organized in 1953. The first Mass was Easter Sunday of 1953. I was at St. Columba when this happened. A lot of the people I knew around Youngstown had moved out into that section right after World War II. They were mostly veterans. I knew a great number of them. I always followed the progress of the parish. It was an unbelievable, phenomenal accomplishment.

In the sixties, St. Christine's had fifteen hundred students. There were eleven hundred children when I became pastor in 1973.

F: The school was already there?

K: Yes.

F: What year was the school built?

K: I think it started in September of 1954. It started quickly. Monsignor and the parishioners did a great job. It only took eleven years to build that whole complex including the church. The foundation stone of the temporary church dates 1954. The foundation of the new church dates 1964. In the first eleven years, 1954-1964, the people had built 33 classrooms, doubled the convent, doubled the rectory, and built a new church. It might be a record that no other parish has accomplished. Monsignor Gutman was the pastor during all of that. Then, I came in after twenty years. I was there for seventeen years.

F: What year did you start?

K: [In] 1973. [I was there from] 1973 to 1990. I enjoyed every minute of it. It was a fantastic and exciting experience.

F: Did you like the festivals? That must have been a challenge.

K: Ester Hamilton called me the King of Festivals. I got that name down at St. Columba. I've had a festival every year since 1955. After the cathedral burned down, we tried to raise funds in every way, shape, and form for the new cathedral. So, that was one thing that we started was the festival. I started the festival at St. Columba. There was one in Garrettsville. There was none at Mother of Sorrows. I revived the one at Mother of Sorrows. The people asked for it. They said . . . the pastor before said, "If everyone gives their fair share, we won't have any of those extras." The people were delighted. But, after three or four years when I got there, they said, "Let's have our festival back, because we don't have anything big to bring the people together." The same at St. Christine's--you'd probably have five, six or eight hundred people work through that festival. It's a wonderful thing to have all those people come into the yard.

F: Did you still have that, though in the late eighties?

K: Yes, it's still going.

F: As strong?

K: Yes. It's going just as strongly today. They quit it for a few years. The year before I went there, Monsignor Gutman started it up again, because all aid to Catholic education was cut out. The Supreme Court said it was unconstitutional. We were getting about half salary for the teachers up until 1973. In 1972, the Supreme Court ax fell. Monsignor started the festival in July of 1972, and I came there at the end of July,

just in time for the 1973 festival

F: Did you have any outside help? Any businessmen help you?

K: No we didn't. One of the beautiful things is that, at St. Christine's, there's a nucleus of about eight or ten people. They take a weeks vacation at festival time, and they work that festival morning, noon, and night.

F: Were these lay people?

K: Yes. Lay people. Jack Hanlon has been the chairman since I went there and before I went there. He's a man who goes around in a golf cart because he's a cripple. He was in a serious auto accident, but he refuses to quit. He refuses to die. He shouldn't be involved in those things. He works every day out at Taylor Olds. He'll do anything for St. Christine's parish, so will the group of other people. If I start to name them, I might leave out someone.

F: So, what was a typical day at St. Christine's?

K: I don't know if there was a typical day or not. The day that you got up thinking that you had nothing to do and you could go play golf would turn out to be the real cyclone. Everything would happen. St. Christine's is a very busy place. You don't have to look for work, because you have about seven or eight thousand people in the parish. That's a small city. When you think of the number of things that were going on there. . . . The school still has about seven hundred children to this day.

The only one sad sequence at St. Christine's was when I went there, there were eleven Sisters of Charity. Then they began to dwindle down. Two years before I left, the last of them left the parish. Forever a tremendous and felt loss.

F: They retired? Is that why they left?

K: They didn't have enough sisters, and they felt that two sisters was not a community. It wasn't fair to have two sisters on their own.

F: And all of those lay people?

K: Not so much all the lay people--religious community life. The Sisters of Charity live very much a community life. They still have their time for prayers and Mass and religious things all together. They missed that. The order feels that that's very important. So,

these two sisters, then went and joined houses that had more sisters.

F: Where are they from?

K: They're from Evansville, Indiana.

F: So, they went back to Indiana?

K: No. Various convents. A lot of them work in the inner city. I know that among those who left our place last, most of them are working in inner cities, in schools that depend for their support almost entirely from outside. The Sisters of Charity are committed to the poor and are dedicated servants of Christ to the needy. They made a priority of the inner city rather than to the Westside of Youngstown.

F: Well, the Westside can't be considered the inner city.

K: No. That's their priority in the community. They have to live by it. When they were blessed with more vocations, they took care of those who had spiritual needs. This embraces all of us, including the Westside.

F: Now, who . . . there's still their house there. The place where the nuns lived.

K: We changed . . . we are using that for a preschool, for Youth Ministry, and also for the Renewals. The Renewal Program is something we started years ago at St. Christine's. In the Youngstown area, not in the diocese, we were the first to start it with St. Joseph's. What that is . . . you have a group of lay people and one priest who is Spiritual Director. They put on a weekend retreat, kind of, called Renewal--Christ Renews His Parish. We formed the first at Sacred Heart retreat house. Four or five of those people give a witness of their life--the ups and downs of their spiritual life. Then others would be responsible for things like the liturgy, accommodating the meals, and all of that. You'd have about twenty working the team with twenty or twenty-five participants. Then, the participants became the team for the next time.

We must have had twelve hundred St. Christine's parishioners participate. It has made an awesome difference in the parish. They, themselves will tell you that the Renewal did more for their lives than any experience they ever had. I think that is true. It certainly did an awful lot for me in regard to being a part of the parish. Those people who go through the Renewal, you feel as if you know them just as well as if they went to school with you, they lived on the same street, or they were cousins or something. It was marvelous.

They'd get to know each other, too. Then the different groups, the Renewal people, would say, "When did you make the Renewal? I made it in . . ." such and such a year. It was an automatic topic of conversation when people met. Yet they were not exclusive. In fact, they reach out to others. They embrace.

F: On the property, you have a rectory? You still do?

K: We have a rectory that could accommodate five priests.

F: Is it filled to capacity now?

K: No. There are three priests.

F: Are they retired?

K: Oh, no. Oh, gosh. They'd better not be. They have a lot of work to do.

F: So, there's three for that church?

K: There are three for that church. Father Rhodes is pastor. He's a very fine person. He has plenty to do, and then some.

F: I think that they would use the other two spaces for somebody retired.

K: Well, Monsignor was there for a good while. There are places now in almost every rectory. They're not looking too much for a place for a retired priest. A retired priest has an option with the pastor's consent of staying at a parish, not the one he left. I suppose there's a reason for that. If a priest is in a parish for a long time and a new pastor comes in, it's fairer for him that the former pastor is not there.

F: Now, that I've got a background, the diocese did give me five questions that they wanted me to ask.

K: Okay.

F: You already told me the assignments in the diocese. Is there anything else that you feel that you need to add to the assignments you named?

K: I was a consultant for a number of years until I retired. I was chaplain to the nurses up in Ashtabula County until I left there. I was in the priests council for several years.

F: As far as the diocese of Youngstown . . . what do you feel aided it in it's growth and development? Besides--this is one answer I'm always getting--besides

the steel industry? You know, economic-wise. Do you think there is anything else?

K: That's helped Youngstown?

F: Yes. That's helped the diocese grow and develop.

K: Well, I think most of the growth and development was caused by how many people came into the diocese. I suppose Lordstown was a big factor.

F: The size of the area? Is that what you're saying?

K: Yes. The population. Then, where it's situated helps Youngstown. Unfortunately, the mills damaged Youngstown severely; but even today, I think people are coming back into Youngstown or round about the vicinity, because we're so close to Pittsburgh and Cleveland, and even New York and Chicago. We're midway. Then, our highways. . . . We are supposed to have a very good transportation system. Was that the question?

F: That's the question. This is just strictly your opinion. What do you feel has helped this growth?

K: Well, since Black Monday, we have been struggling. It would seem now that things are beginning to happen again. People like a small community. Like Canfield, Boardman, and Poland. My God, you just wonder who is living in some of those houses. [It's a] millionaire strip.

F: From the looks of it, I'm sure it's out of town people.

K: It probably is.

F: From Pittsburgh. That's what I'm hearing, because the Pittsburgh airport expanded.

K: Yes. They say that the cost of living, the housing, et cetera that you can get in Youngstown is much more reasonable than in Pittsburgh or Cleveland. There's no comparison. Land is cheaper in Youngstown, too. Up in Cleveland, they can only have a small lot for the same money.

F: Have you looked at the houses on Shields Road across from the Mother House?

K: Oh, yes. If you go up Route 46 up there in Canfield, there are streets and streets.

F: Yes. I lived on Blueberry Hill until five years

ago, and that's right. . . .

K: Now, around that area, I went up there one day . . . I couldn't believe it. I think there's more building going on in the south west part of Youngstown than there has for years.

F: This is the first time. I lived there thirteen years. It just started all of a sudden.

K: That's right. Canfield . . . even Canfield parish is growing by leaps and bounds. So is Boardman, and so is Poland. They're all growing.

F: Outside money. It has to be.

K: It has to be. Unless, of course the medical field, and the university. They shouldn't exclude the university. The university has grown so much. When I came to Youngstown, the university had only that building on Rayen Avenue, or maybe Rayen School or something like that. Just a small place. I'm sure Youngstown State University is bigger now than Ohio State was twenty-five years ago with buildings.

F: Well, look, they just keep knocking down all of the decrepit buildings all around the site, and they're just taking over.

K: So, that's a big thing in Youngstown. A big employer. Then I think the medical . . . the hospitals, the nursing homes, the outpatient places . . . that must be a fantastic field and industry. All of these people have to live somewhere. In each of those nursing homes, you have to have a lot of professionals, such as administrators and all those kinds of people. Forty years ago, all we had was a few private nursing homes.

F: What do you think has hurt the diocese as far as development, besides Black Monday?

K: Black Monday? I would think that probably is the only thing. What's very discouraging and alarming is the lack of vocations.

F: What's more alarming to you--the lack of priests or nuns?

K: Which one?

F: Yes. If you said you could do without one or the other. . . .

K: Certainly you can't do without the ordained because, it's my conviction that we cannot do without the Mass

and the Holy Eucharist. I don't care whether there are ten or fifteen people. It's sad that they have to do without the Eucharist.

So, you have all these little places all over the diocese, and there's no resident priest now. I firmly believe that for these people to be able to go to Mass in the morning, even weekday morning, that they should have a priest. The Eucharist is everything in the Catholic faith. Whether that person is a married person, male or female, it would be lovely if that person could be ordained in those communities. Retired people, even if they do nothing more than say Mass every morning, I think that would be great. I really believe that is necessary and essential from what I believe about the Eucharist, that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ. The Eucharist is Christ. No one should be without the Eucharist or without a Mass. Sure, you can preserve the Eucharist in the Tabernacle and have any person give out the Eucharist each morning, but that's not the same as Mass. I say all this not to minimize the Religious Order, because who has done more for the Catholic Church in America than the sisters? All sisters have made tremendous sacrifice. Over the years by teaching day after day, getting no recognition, and getting little compensation. By the way, sisters are included, number one, in my remarks above; and many of them are already prepared educationally and all spiritually.

F: The vow of poverty.

K: Some of the older sisters are not getting proper care in many places, because the Church had no retirement plan.

F: Really?

K: Because they're top heavy with the older sisters. These sisters are in infirmaries, and they have to pay nursing and medical expenses.

F: Do they have to pay. . . .

K: Yes.

F: . . . or does the community pay for it?

K: Well, the community. When I say they, I am referring to the community, the Blue Sisters down at Villa Maria, the Ursuline Sisters, or whoever they may be. The [number of] people bringing in income is not comparable to the number of people who are ill.

F: I was told by Sister Mary Conroy that more than 50

percent are sixty-five or older. Unbelievable!

K: That is right. If Sister Mary Conroy said it, it is right.

F: What are the rest . . . fifteen and up?

K: You have very few younger sisters. They're sacrificing plenty to help out with the aging problem. The church has been kind of coming to the rescue. It's like the country. It's hard to care when the economy of the people involved is low. When the economy is low, the whole medical problem and everything suffers. There isn't enough income coming in through taxes. There isn't enough income coming in to the sisters or even the priests for care of the older people. It takes a massive amount of money to take care of a person who is in a nursing home. Communities can't afford that. I don't know what they are going to do.

F: No, they can't. That's a shame. What were some of the biggest changes that you've seen over your years of service?

K: It has to be the decrease in vocations.

F: Does this sadden you?

K: Oh, yes.

F: Did you ever think forty years ago, that this would happen?

K: No. I never thought it. But, you know, I have been places too, and changes have happened there. I go back and find out that things are renewed. I would not be one bit surprised that one of those days, the vocations would begin to increase again. Because, if you take your own life, whatever you intend to do in your life, you don't have the same security. You don't have . . . you probably have to prepare harder to get something that you desire. Ten or fifteen years ago, the country was very prosperous, and people could get jobs, change jobs, live the good life, and all of that. I think there is a sense in people now that nothing is quite secure. They're looking for security. A lot of things are not as satisfying as they thought they were. Commitment in life is becoming more appealing and worthwhile.

F: Money.

K: Money is not everything. A big house. . . . I think a lot of young people today are looking for something that will satisfy them in their lives. That they are

doing something that they are really getting a satisfaction out of. I believe as people change like that, then vocations . . . every life is a vocation--a doctor's life, a nurse's life, a teacher's life--they're all vocations. I think that the church will get its own share of vocations of men and women who want to serve the church.

F: This is a really silly question. I don't think it's phrased correctly--at it's best, describe the Youngstown Diocese; and at it's worst, describe working in the diocese. If there was ever a best time or best year to be working in the diocese. . . . This seems crazy when you ask people because. . . .

K: I would say that when priests in parishes decided more on their own, that these years were very, very gratifying. If you look at when all of the schools and churches were built around the Youngstown Diocese, of course, it was a more prosperous time . . . but a pastor and his people decided, "We need a new church, and we need more classrooms." They got together. They did have to get permission from the bishop, but that permission was pretty forthcoming as long as the bishop saw they could meet this demand. A lot of that is not present in the diocese today. Things are more centrally controlled almost like our government. I think that lessens the ambition and the go of the priests and parishioners. I would like to see the bishop, whoever it may be, give more encouragement, more affirmation, more credit, and more trust to people doing things on their own in the parishes. I think, when I was up in Garrettsville and Ashtabula, and even when I came to St. Brendan's, I felt much more responsibility and a lot more full of initiative than I did in later years. In later years, pastors and parishioners shared less in responsibility and more implemented the instructions handed down. You were only allowed to be there a certain number of years. Retirement came in, and the feeling of security and ownership went out.

F: What age were you forced to retire? Were you forced to retire?

K: Well. . . .

F: Monsignor Lettau was forced to retire.

K: The age was seventy. [It's] optional at sixty-five, but mandatory at seventy. One of the big reasons I retired at sixty-nine was that I didn't want anyone to tell me to retire at seventy. I didn't want to go through that year with people saying, "This is your last Christmas, and this is your last. . . ." That's the terminal feeling. It gives you the feeling

that you have cancer--terminal cancer. No one can talk about next Christmas, because they're afraid you won't be alive next Christmas.

F: Well, you have control of yourself then . . . it sounds like what you're saying. It's nicer. Especially when I talked to Monsignor Lettau . . . that is what angered him. He said Bishop Malone told him, "I'm sorry. You have to leave, and you have to find your own place to live."

K: If that is the case, that is bad. You can make your own judgment about me whether I could be a pastor in a parish today. When you talk to Monsignor Lettau you. . . .

F: Because he works for St. Elizabeth's, now.

K: Yes. He works full time at St. Elizabeth's. I think the people make their own judgment. He is perfectly capable and a great priest. President Bush is sixty-eight or something, and he is running the country. Reagan was seventy-four or seventy-six. The bishop himself is seventy-three and can stay until he is seventy-five and run a diocese. Perhaps he has an easier job than a pastor. Yet, you mention to him--like Father McNally. He was in a small parish, and he really, from what I hear, wanted to stay there. You know when you're in a small parish like that, you have a lot of accommodations that are wonderful to have when you're seventy years of age: maybe a part-time secretary, a part-time housekeeper, and things like that. Gosh, you're retired, but doing the job well.

F: You have to find a place to live.

K: Yeah. If you want an option, paddle your own canoe.

F: At least the sisters know that they can go back to their order to be taken care of.

K: That's right. I don't think there is a retirement age among the sisters whatsoever.

F: No.

K: [They] work as long as [they're] able, and when [they] say, "I am no longer able for the classroom, but I would like to work in the library or something like that," they're encouraged and appreciated.

F: Right. That's what they do. None of them are retiring. It's remarkable.

K: That's what you're ordained for. We haven't retired

either. We say Mass every weekend practically, and we go to the hospital. I call up people who are sick and visit people who are sick and things like that. I feel as able and capable as ever. Perhaps, many would say I never was.

F: Then what are you supposed to do . . . sit for the rest of your life?

K: Really, I don't feel any differently than I did twenty years ago. As a matter of fact, I would say that I have better health now than I had during my middle age years.

F: Why do you think? Stress?

K: I don't know why. I had a bad stomach. I had a few bleeding ulcers.

F: Stress? Do you think that's it?

K: Well, I suppose. Maybe that and fasting. Not even having a drop of water until mid-afternoon at times.

F: That's not good. You know the medical profession will tell you. . . .

K: Forced retirement based on age alone should not exist. Secondly, tenure in a parish is a big question mark. I never liked either.

F: That's still in effect now?

K: Yes and no. Last year, they extended it a little bit, and I'm not too sure why they did. I have intimations but I will not verbalize them here.

F: To be in any one place for over ten years . . . that's home.

K: Especially when you get older.

F: Right. To make somebody leave . . . it just doesn't make sense.

K: In no way can a person of seventy years come into St. Christine's parish and expect to feel at home in that parish; because, naturally, you don't have that many years when you can possibly be active. You can't do as much as a person of forty or fifty, maybe. The people, furthermore, figure, "Who's the old man who is coming in to be our pastor?" But, if you have been there for ten or fifteen years before, you know the people; and you have the cooperation of the people. Then, I think, a person of seventy can work just as well as anybody in

regard to serving people.

F: Especially with this Walking Together program. It's absurd.

K: That's right. It's not compatible with retirement but is indeed a more urgent and necessary consequence.

F: Is there anything you think you need to mention?

K: No. Unless you bring it up.

F: I think we covered it. Thank you.

K: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW