

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

St. Ann's Church Project

Church Experiences

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FATHER JOHN LYONS

Interviewed

by

Jerry Mullen

on

October 20, 1975

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INTERVIEWEE: FATHER JOHN LYONS

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SUBJECT: Church experience, Church membership, Ethnicity

DATE: October 20, 1975

M: This is an interview with John Lyons for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program concerning St. Ann's Church by Jerry Mullen, October 20, 1975, at St. Joseph's Parish, Austintown, Ohio, at 10:00 a.m.

Just to get a general background I would like to ask you a few general questions. Can you tell me what you remember of your parents and family?

L: This was in Ireland, of course, and I was the sixth of the family. There were five others. There were two other boys and three girls. My mother died when I was five and a half. My father died when I was going into my junior year in high school. I was born in Ireland, of course, and raised on a farm, so I can sling a lot of mud. I went to the local school, and then to St. Jarlath's High School and College in Tuan County, Galway. From there I went to St. Patrick's Seminary in Carlow, Ireland.

M: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

L: I had five. There were two other brothers and three sisters, and myself; that made six.

M: Are they in Ireland or in America?

L: One of them is in the United States, and there is one in England. There are two in Ireland, and one deceased.

- M: Are any of them in religious vocation such as yours?
- L: No, none of them are in religious vocation. Cousins of mine are, but not the immediate family.
- M: Can you describe your school days from grade school on through high school and then if you went to college?
- L: School days were rather hectic; it was like going to the old schoolhouses long ago. In the summer months, when the weather got warm . . . it always gets warmer in Ireland earlier than it does here because we're affected very much by the Gulf Stream. We thought it was a heroic thing to walk to school barefooted for a mile. In the earlier stages of my schooling, there was a great character who was the principal of the school by the name of P. A. Waldhorn. I learned Shakespeare in the fifth grade, believe it or not, from this character. He wasn't sober too often, but when he's sobered up we had better know our MacBeth or Julius Caesar, or whatever play we were doing at the time. Gaelic became an obligatory subject; it didn't help us too much but it was of obligation to know the Irish language. I still say it didn't do us any good. You can imagine in high school doing structured geography through Gaelic. It certainly didn't enhance the subject or make it very interesting. We got through all right. In order to graduate from high school you had to pass what they called the Leaving Certificate. It was a federal exam, supervised very strictly. An outsider would come in from the education department in Dublin and supervise the test. They lasted about a week; you take a subject a day, sometimes two. You went by a number, you didn't go by a name. When these papers were corrected the person correcting them did not know whose paper he was correcting so there was no favoritism. It might be a person a hundred miles away who was correcting your papers who did not know you. Anyhow, you just had a number. To graduate from high school, in order to enter college, you had to pass this federal or state exam, whichever you want to call it. We got through that okay, and got into college. From there I went to the seminary, which was heaven compared to high school and college days because during the college days the war was on and in the seminary days the war was also on.
- M: That's the Second World War?
- L: The Second World War. Things were pretty tight, especially sugar. The consumption product in Ireland, or the main product in Ireland, is tea, and tea was very scarce. Naturally, we were dying for extra tea. Cigarettes, of course, were very scarce. I, of course, like any other

youngster, smoked. The scarcer they got the more I smoked. Anyhow, I went to the seminary and came across boys from all over the country who were studying for mostly the priesthood for dioceses in other countries. The boys in my class, there are some of them in Mobile, Alabama, some of them in Natchez, Mississippi; others of them were in Tuscon, Arizona, Perth, Australia, Adelaide, Australia, some of them in England, like the Nottingham dioceses in England, some of them in Glasgow. They were all over the world. There were thirty-two other boys ordained with me. I've only met one of them since.

M: Was this a plan on the group's part, to be missionaries rather than . . .

L: No, it wasn't a plan. You either went for the home missions or you went for what they called over there the foreign missions. America would be described as a foreign missions, so would England or Australia, or any other country. They have an abundance of vocations for Ireland itself, so just to do something, I suppose, you decided you would go somewhere else. In order to be ordained, you had to have a diocese adopt you; that is one of the canon laws, a bishop has to adopt you. In 1943 the Diocese of Youngstown was established, and I was in the seminary. Many of the boys in my year were adopted by bishops throughout the world, and I had a cousin, a priest in Cleveland at the time by the name of Father Higgins, who knew Bishop McFadden well at that time. He was the auxiliary bishop of Cleveland. He told him about me and Bishop McFadden wrote after he was made bishop of Youngstown and said he would welcome me in to the Youngstown diocese. That's how I got to Youngstown; I became, as they say, adopted by Bishop McFadden, or adopted by the Youngstown diocese. I was ordained for the Youngstown diocese and arrived in Youngstown on the 27th of June, 1947. My first assignment, of course, was at St. Ann's in Briar Hill.

M: If we got back a few years can you tell me what was the motivating power or decision that brought you to the priesthood?

L: Ireland, of course, in those days, was a very holy country. It doesn't seem to be too holy now with the war up north, but it was. There seemed to be, one might call it, a tradition there. Families would have someone in the priesthood or sisterhood. In my family alone, right now there were two first cousins priests and three second cousins priests. Of course, that was not the motivating factor at all. As a youth you're full of

ambition and full of great ideals and my ambition was to help people and to try and bring the love of God to people.

Of course, I had the wild idea in those days that Youngstown was not very Catholic and that it was a real missionary territory. In those days too, of course, we didn't know much about the States compared to what the kids know today because communications weren't as great as they are today. You would read something in the paper now and then that was worthwhile, like who won the elections and things like that, but as regards to the United States it was either Catholic like Boston, or it was Protestant like anywhere else. I was motivated to go and help the Catholic church in the Youngstown area and whether I've helped or not is another question. That was the reason for coming to Youngstown. Of course, there are many of my classmates down south, like down in Mobile, Alabama, where the Catholic population is about one percent of the entire population. Perhaps they were more motivated than I. I recall when I went to the rector of the seminary saying that the bishop of Youngstown was interested in me. He said, "Where is Youngstown?" I said, "It's in the state of Ohio." "Oh," he said. I said, "It is a division that was made of the Cleveland diocese." He said, "We have never had anyone yet go to Cleveland or Youngstown. I'm glad there's a new field opening up." As I say, I came to Youngstown thinking that perhaps it wasn't very Catholic, and I was pleasantly surprised when I came to Youngstown to find out that it was about fifty percent Catholic, the city of Youngstown. Of course, I was very thrilled with that. Of course, I came here in fear and trepidation.

M: How old were you when you came?

L: I was twenty-six when I came. Even at the age of twenty-six, coming to a country where you don't know a soul, and you don't know what the church is like, or what the church expects from you . . . I was scared, I must say I was scared. That fear left me very early and quickly because of the type of people to whom I was assigned. They made life rather easy for me in the sense of brushing away fears and giving me a lot of encouragement.

M: What year was that?

L: 1947 at St. Ann's. I was ordained in 1946 and I had to wait a year to get my visa to come here because it was after the war. There was such an influx of people that I just had to wait my turn to get a visa. Ordinarily, I should have been in Youngstown in the year 1946 around August or September, but it took us battling the time to get a visa to get to the States.

M: Do you recall the particular training you went through? What was a typical day like at the seminary?

L: A typical day in the seminary, that goes way back. I do recall, and not very happily, that the rising bell was at 6:00 in the morning. We had morning prayer and meditation and then we had mass at 7:00. The mass was concluded at about 7:30, 7:45, or 7:40. Then we had more silent prayer in church and we went to have breakfast around 7:45. After breakfast would be over, at around 8:15 or 8:10, we had about fifteen minutes recreation or relaxation, mostly consisting of walking outside around the grounds with your buddies. There was a walk around the perimeter of the property and you would walk around with three or four guys and shoot the breeze. The bell would ring for class at 8:25, the first class. It was either a class in dogmatic theology, or it could have been a class in moral theology, canon law, or sacred scripture. It could be church history; it could be what they called over there hermeneutics, which was another form of studying the scriptures. It could be a class on anything. Classes went from 8:30 in the morning until 12:00, and then from 1:00 to 3:00. We had lunch at 12:00. We would have five subjects a day, not necessarily the same five subjects each day. You would have the important subjects four to five days a week, the less important which we looked upon, liturgy and church history and so on, you would have them maybe twice a week. We also had class on Saturdays, the same as any other day of the week. Wednesday was our half day; we got off at noon. We had our lunch, and it must have been traditional in that particular school that you went for a walk or a hike. It was nothing for us to walk ten, twelve, or fourteen miles as a form of recreation exercise.

M: Did you play baseball?

L: Oh yes, we played Gaelic football, but on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. Wednesday it was compulsory to go on this walk, unless you were sick, then you were excused.

M: What is Gaelic football?

L: Gaelic football is a combination of basketball and soccer. Boys who came in from the north of Ireland where soccer was predominant, played soccer also and taught us how to play soccer.

M: Ireland has a strong tradition of soccer?

- L: Yes. It has a strong tradition of sports as a matter of fact. People go wild in sports; they go absolutely wild.
- M: If you had to pick out one or two events during your seminary life and college life, particularly during your seminary life, what would they be?
- L: Something outstanding?
- M: Something that made an impression in your life.
- L: I would say things that have made an impression on me were professors first of all. They were very learned men, seemingly at least from the external, very pious men. Of course, you can't tell that always, but to me they seemed to be pious. They were rather rigid and strict at times, and sometimes they were lax, but that wasn't too often. It was a tradition there in those days of strictness, and almost keeping you under thumb.
- M: Were all the instructors a member of a priestly order?
- L: No, they were diocesan priests attached to the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin, which embraced Carlow, where I was. They were then local diocesan priests who had gone back to school after ordination for their degrees, like their doctorate in philosophy, or theology, or whatever it might be.
- M: You said your first assignment was at St. Ann's. How successful do you think you were during your stay there?
- L: At St. Ann's?
- M: At St. Ann's, as far as carrying out what you believed to be your duties?
- L: I would hope the good Lord will be the final judge on that, but I, myself, was very satisfied with my work. Of course, if you're satisfied with your work, you must be reaching some success. I had a great time at St. Ann's, especially with the kids. I thoroughly enjoyed them. They were unspoiled in those days. We would come down to the basement of the church to play Ping-Pong. In those days Father Feicht was the first assistant, and we used to have minstrel shows and so on. The kids were very active and they were very close to the church, St. Ann's. I would look upon my stay at

St. Ann's for seven years, I would look upon it as successful, but above all, happy. Of course, they say your first assignment is your first love. Of course, St. Ann's is and always will be my first love because like the gospel, "I was a stranger and you took me in." St. Ann's took me in, and of course there was a great pastor there at the time. He was then Father Dunn, now of course known as Monsignor Dunn. He was very kind and very helpful and just an easygoing man who loved people. I suppose training under him gave you that easygoing manner with people. I think I learned a lot from him and I learned a lot from Father Feicht. I learned a lot from the people.

M: In what ways?

L: Well, the people were so great that you had to keep up with them. They were so kind, they were so outgoing, so clannish; even though they were of different backgrounds and different ethnic groups they just blended together. They were like the keys on the piano where you play them and you get beautiful music. It was great. Even though you had some Italians and Germans, Croats and Irish, they just rallied around St. Ann's. I don't know whether there was something of a magnetism about St. Ann's, but they just rallied around it. At one time, of course, it was called the Irish church. Then the years brought changes and a lot of Italians joined St. Ann's, then some of the local Germans joined it, and even some of the Croats. We had a few Poles too. Briar Hill, of course, is an area where practically every nationality in the world is represented because of the mills. They blended very, very well together, at least in my time. I certainly can't tell you what it was like twenty years before that, but I know in my time that they just mixed beautifully; they socialized and they had a great time. They were just innocent people. The church was the center of their lives. Television was just coming into prominence so it was very easy for them to come down to church for a meeting, or to a social, or to a card party, or to dinner. They worked hard, they played hard, and they had a great time. I just enjoyed it thoroughly.

M: Can you recall any of the details of your first sermon at St. Ann's?

L: I recall my first mass. I don't recall the first sermon I preached at St. Ann's, but I do recall my first mass. It was on the 29th of June, 1947. It was the feast of

St. Peter and Paul. Of course, I was very nervous. I recall, above all, one of the altar boys because he was a long, lanky guy. I, being short of stature, wondered what the people would look upon me as, as just a grade school kid going out on the altar. I was rather embarrassed and I'm sure I went out to the altar red-faced when this long guy--I hope he'll come across this tape some time--by the name of Larry Prosick, who lived up on Lafayette Street at the time, he served my first mass. I think it was one of the smallest boys that served with him. It was a traumatic experience because you felt that all eyes in the church were on you and you were being X-rayed. As far as I recall, Father Feicht introduced me to the people, told them who I was and so on.

M: How do you think your sermons differ today as from the beginning?

L: I think for most priests sermons are different. In those days we dwelt on the salvation of the soul, which is still important. The sermons were more geared to doctrine and morals, and hell fire and all that. Today we're kind of toned down, and I think they deal with everyday living and everyday life. There is quite a difference in the preaching technique today than there was in that of 1947. Of course, you get a lot of aids to preaching, there are a lot of books out to help you to preach. We have seminars and so on also which we didn't have in those days. It's easier today and it's more difficult today because any topic today could be timely and you better be versed in it before you get up there to talk on it. It means more work and preparation. Long ago you could prepare your sermon in a matter of an hour because it was mostly doctrine or dealt with morality. Of course, you had all that in the seminary. It was just a matter of going up there and expounding. Today you have to do your homework before you get up there. I think that the sermons today possibly are more interesting because they deal with social justice and social problems of today; they deal with life in general. I think that, hopefully, they're more interesting to people.

M: Can you recall any outstanding, or odd, strange parishioners from St. Ann's when you first began, any that really stuck in your mind?

L: Outstanding people? From St. Ann's there were many of them. There was old J. B. McNicholas, Steve Sferra, Johnny Mullen, your own dad, Rocko Ripoly, everyone who belonged to the men's club were just great guys; they

were just great people. I just can't remember them all right now, but the more prominent ones are the ones I mentioned. They were just beautiful people; they were simple, honest-to-God people.

M: Did they have any particular duties in the parish?

L: The Catholic game of bingo was played there and these men helped out with bingo. This is how you got to know them pretty well. They would help at festivals and they would help with any repair work around the church or school; they did a lot of repair work, donated their time and so on. They were just beautiful people. The church was their livelihood in a sense; it certainly was their love.

M: You mentioned Monsignor Dunn, can you describe him more fully?

L: Father Dunn was a man for all people, that's the best way I can describe him, a kind person, very kind. He was outside the door of the church every Sunday whether it was snowing, raining, or sunshine, with a proverbial "cigar" in his mouth greeting people, laughing, talking. People just felt so welcome going to St. Ann's. He was a very, very kind man. His health wasn't so great. He was in and out of the hospital; he had prostrate trouble, sugar diabetes. He weathered the storm and he is still alive. He is in a nursing home up in Cleveland I understand, and I hope one of these days to go up and see him.

Father Feicht was of German extraction and it kind of showed through his character because he was stern. He was strong, stern, yet kind, very helpful to people, but he took no nonsense. He had the German trait in him of almost dictatorship in a sense, not that he was a dictator, but he was just a man that you would fear unless you knew him well. Of course, I knew him well; there was no need for fearing him, but for the outsider who met him for the first time, you almost might be afraid of him. Once you got to know him you found out that he was a real, real priest, a very holy man. I'm sorry to say that I didn't measure up to his sanctity. He spent a lot of time in church. He was just an exemplary person for me as a young priest, showing me what a priest should be. Father Feicht did a lot of work; he was very interested in the athletics of the parish, and St. Ann's in those days won the parochial school championship two or

three years in a row. It was through his efforts and the efforts of the men who helped in the coaching that they were so successful.

M: Can you tell me in what ways parish life and participation in the parish today differs from the period when you were at St. Ann's?

L: It's difficult because the times are difficult. The church is different. In those days, I think people went to Mass because they had to go number one. They went to Mass because they were ashamed of their neighbors if they didn't go. I think today there is more freedom. The liturgy is more intelligible to them. If you recall of the days in which we were speaking, the Mass was in Latin, the priest wore the biretta and he wore the cassock. He had his back turned to the people. The liturgy in those days seemed to be for the priest himself, whereas today, thankfully, the liturgy is for the people. Of course, it was always for the people, but it didn't seem that way. Today it is more intelligible to the people, and there is a much greater participation. I don't think that during Mass in my time at St. Ann's there was hardly a hymn ever sung. It was just that you attended Mass. You could follow the Mass with the missal, but the priest was up there saying the entire Mass in Latin. You could participate quietly. Today you participate, and we would hope, loudly. There was the singing and so on. Everything is more intelligible to the people, and I think the people are beginning to understand the Mass for what it is, the great act of worship of God. I'm sure that the children and the next generation will benefit from what we're trying to instill into their minds today. Maybe twenty years from now they'll say let's get back to Latin, I don't know, but I hope not.

M: Do you think that the church today is as important today as it was when you were at St. Ann's? Does it play as big a part in their lives?

L: It doesn't seem to, really. People, some of them, have become too independent I think. With wealth, of course, there is always a decay in morals. I'm afraid we are experiencing that decay again because people are much better off today than they were in 1947, more benefits. Maybe they work harder, I don't know. They have more entertainment through the television in their homes. They have more distractions. I would say it's much more difficult today to be good than it was in 1947. I don't think the people are as close to the church. To me they don't seem to be. Many of them are, but speaking as a

parish as a whole or a community as a whole, they do not seem to be as involved in the church as were the people in 1947. The strange thing about it is that those who seem to show an interest or who fail to show an interest in the parish are the very ones when anything will happen that will run to the parish for help immediately. They have to revert back to the church whether they like it or not, just like they're carried in to be baptized and they're carried out for the burial. They have to come in between somewhere and say hello to us. I think, myself, that despite the changes, and for people who are brought up in the old-fashioned way, despite the changes that have occurred in the church I think people have adjusted to them and reacted to them really well. Long ago, as Catholics, we were almost on the defensive for some reason or another. Today we are no longer on the defensive. We are recognized and respected, and I think that Catholics are finally being looked upon as citizens. They were always citizens, but sometimes people questioned their loyalty for some reason or other. Today, Catholic is predominantly the religion in the United States. There are almost fifty million Catholics, which is twenty-five percent of the population. I think great credit is due to our ancestors, who not only brought the faith here, but their successes, let's say your own grandfather and your father, who worked hard to promote the Catholic faith and to live it and to instill it to the people, and their children high ideals and good morals; they certainly gave them good examples. Today, it seems that many of the young, married people just do not have the same sense of responsibility towards the religious upbringing and the religious training of the children. They seem to leave it to their church rather than realizing that the greatest church is the home. What happens in a home is what happens to a child. The church will never change a child in that sense. Actually, today, I think that some of the younger ones feel that the religious upbringing of the child depends on the church, which it certainly does not; it depends on the home. We are hoping that through our so-called modern day sermons and so on that we'll be able to make them realize that the obligation is their's and not that of the church. The church is there to help people, and the church, of course, will help any home and will help any parents in the upbringing of their children.

M: Could you describe St. Ann's School and some of the teachers that taught there and, say, a typical student in 1947?

L: I was there from 1947 to 1954. The school was small. Some of the rooms were double rooms where you would have the third and the fourth grade together. I think in all we had just six classrooms for eight grades. It was staffed by the Ursuline Sisters and in those days we just had one lay teacher so that there was no problem to the pastor in maintaining the school.

M: Do you recall the lay teacher?

L: The lay teacher in my time was Mary Vargo. There were others there probably since then; of course, I don't remember. I remember distinctly Mary Vargo; she came from Campbell. She was a very nice girl, and a very talented person, and a capable teacher.

The principal, there were two principals in my time; there was Sister Agnes Marie and then there was Sister Charlotte. Of course, in those days you feared the principal; I'm speaking now as a student. Students did fear the principal more than they fear principals today. I do not recall at any time any child ever being punished in school, although sometimes you heard that they were. Maybe they were, but I never experienced it. I'm speaking now of physical punishment. The only punishment that might be kneaded out to a child was maybe detention or something like that. Maybe you were not let out in the school yard for recess or something, that was the punishment. Kids somehow were afraid in school to a certain degree. They certainly didn't want to misbehave too much because they knew very well that the father and mother would be called in. In those days woe be tide you if your dad was called in to the school; you really got flaked when you got home. Whereas today, somehow, it seems that parents too often stick up for their children; their children are always right and the teacher is wrong. In those days the teacher was always right. I'm not saying that that is proper, but the child had the idea that the teacher was always right and therefore, the teachers didn't have too many discipline problems with the child in the classroom or even on the playground. St. Ann's was a typical, small school where every kid knew every kid, where the teachers knew every child, where the priests knew every child, and not only every child, but the parents of the children. It was just a beautiful setup because it was just like one, great family trying to work in unison. We just had a beautiful time.

M: Do you think discipline as you knew it during your stay

at St. Ann's had a positive or negative effect on kids as they grew up?

L: I would say because of the fear that was instilled into kids, I don't think that you're ever going to make too much progress through fear. I would say that today the results would be very negative. For my part in listening to people who went to school in those days and listening to them talk about it, they're very upset to think that they were under so much fear. I don't think that fear is a good thing; I don't think that any child should be living surrounded with fear.

M: Do you think that it has changed as . . .

L: Today children are not afraid, and that's beautiful. They are not afraid today, but they know they can be disciplined. There is no real fear there. Don't say anything to the nun, listen to the nun, listen to the priest or they'll turn you into a ghost, this was ridiculous. It was like telling a child you've got to go to confession to tell that. When the priest gets you in confession this is all fear. This was making a child live in fear, whereas today this is completely gone, obliterated, thank God. I think that the children are growing up today knowing that the priest is a human being, that he is going to treat them fairly, that he loves them, that he is interested in them. They come and they talk to you as openly as you would ever want them to. I think progress has been made, there's no question about it.

M: Did you teach at the school?

L: Oh yes. I taught at the school. While Father Feicht was there I had the third, fourth, and fifth grades and he had the sixth, seventh, and eighth. Then when Father Feicht left and Father Slipsky came I--whether you call it promoted or not--had the sixth, seventh, and eighth. Father Slipsky took over the third, fourth, and fifth.

M: One particular class or was it general curriculum?

L: It varied. You would always tell the sister what day you were going to be over. It would vary each week because a funeral might turn up or someone might want to see you or there might be a sick call. You would tell the sister in the morning after Mass, or tell sister so-and-so that I'll be in the room in five minutes, or you make an appointment the day before and maybe take two classes.

M: Which subject did you teach?

L: We would teach mostly from the Baltimore Catechism. It was nothing like today, in a sense. It was just strictly and rigidly Catholic, like question and answer form and you better know it and so on. It's much broader today and much better; that's my idea.

M: Can you describe the sports for a minute?

L: This was especially in football and basketball, there were some men keenly interested in football and basketball. There was Tom McNicholas, Tom is still living, Jiggs Ryan, Jiggs just died, God rest him, a short time ago, Steve Sferra, Steve has gone to God too, God rest him. There were quite a few other guys and they would coach the team. They would outfit the team by having raffles and card parties. They also had their cheerleaders. The team would go out to Volney Rodgers to play and would have the parents and some volunteers with cars bring the team out and the cheerleaders and so on. If they won, of course, they always had a great celebration; they were treated to ice cream and things like that, or maybe if the Dairy Queen wasn't open you might make them some hot dogs and things like that.

The big event of the year was the sports banquet. They had a sports banquet for the kids. They would always get a speaker in for the banquet. I remember Tom Carey-- who is now the principal of Ursuline High, he coached the Ursuline High team in those days--would come down, or someone from some other Catholic school, some coach, whoever it would be, would always come in and talk to the kids. They would have a great meal and they would get their rewards, and the monograms, and maybe get a little basketball, or football, or whatever it was. Sometimes, depending on how the finances were, we would be able to give them jackets. They were treated like big time players in a sense. I must say that for a small area and for a small parish that the people really went all out for those kids. They had as much as the kids would have in a big parish. This is due to the cooperation of the lay people.

M: How about if we shift to the church now. Can you describe the physical appearance of the church, and the inside too?

L: St. Ann's was the third church in Youngstown to be constructed. It was a Gothic design. I suppose the seating accommodation would be 750 people. To build

it today would probably cost three million dollars. The windows in it were imported stained glass; I do not know what happened to them when the church was torn down. It certainly was a sin if someone didn't salvage them because they were priceless.

M: Do you know how long it took to construct the building?

L: I really have no idea. I'm sure it would probably take two years at least, easily. The woodwork in it was something to be desired. They tell me around the altar and that big, big baldachino attached to the altar--handcarved wood--that there was not one nail in the whole baldachino, not one. The altar in those days, of course, was attached to the wall, the back wall. I would say the altar was about four and a half feet high; it was very long. I would say it would be about twelve feet long, and in those days that would be a long altar. Then from the altar came this back of beautiful, beautiful wood, carved in various designs that went up, surmounted with the cross. It probably went up, I would say thirty feet inside the church. It was the focal point, of course, when you went to the door. Everything was centered towards the main altar. This woodwork is just not being produced today. Of course, I wasn't in the area when the church was torn down, but anyone who didn't salvage this stuff was really crazy. Everything is priceless today; even a window would sell for a few thousand dollars today.

M: The architecture from that era and before has probably changed drastically, hasn't it?

L: Oh yes, they do not build churches like that today because the price is prohibitive. They couldn't possibly reproduce a church like St. Ann's or Immaculate Conception because the money isn't there. I suppose the closest thing to St. Ann's Church today would be Immaculate Conception Church on the east side; the inside of Immaculate is similar to that of St. Ann's, except the windows. The windows in St. Ann's were much more beautiful.

M: Do you think that the absence of that kind of church is a loss?

L: I say the absence of a church like that is a loss. It certainly is a loss for history. It's a loss for an area. I understand that when St. Ann's was torn down that the whole area was in mourning. The people were

crying for weeks. It was a landmark. If you were going up West Federal Street they would tell you go past St. Ann's Church and you're five blocks . . . It was a mark; it was a way of directing people who were going from downtown Youngstown out towards Girard on the old 422. Many people, of course, found their destination routes through St. Ann's. Of course, this is happening all over the United States, and possibly all over the world today. The churches are making ways for freeways and urban renewal and so on. I just saw in today's paper from Cleveland that there are two churches being torn down in Cleveland, St. Thomas and St. Agnes; they were landmarks themselves in Cleveland. It said in the paper to replace one of them today would cost five million dollars. You cannot keep them standing because the upkeep would be tremendous, and if you don't upkeep it it's going to fall and someone is going to get killed. They just don't have to be torn down. It's a sad, sad, sad thing that maybe some historical society and so on doesn't do something for at least one or two churches in the area that have a distinct type of architecture, beautiful architecture, and beautiful interiors. Perhaps maybe the historical societies of Ohio or Youngstown or adjoining counties could do something about these beautiful structures of the past.

M: Do you think the absence of these types of churches has a negative effect . . . Do you think this type of church had a positive effect on a person who attended?

L: I would say, of course, that a building is a building is a building, but I would say that going into structures such as this was very devotional. When you entered the building you might have been awestricken; there was just something about it that made you feel good. You felt, of course, you were in the presence of God, no question about it. It kind of put you in a mood to pray, it just helped you to pray. You were there and you were in a prayerful mood almost immediately. Of course, I don't know if that's the purpose of the church, to put you in a prayerful mood, but certainly churches of different architectural styles certainly do. Churches today do also, but they're much more plain than the ones of old. Personally, I think that the older type of church, like the Gothic church of St. Ann's, helped you to pray. You felt the presence of God around you. I would prefer those churches to the ones we have today, absolutely.

M: Why has the church phased out?

L: Buildings weren't phased out. The church would love to have these Gothic structures today except for one reason: They can't afford them.

M: Can you describe your feelings when you learned that it was to be demolished?

L: When I heard that St. Ann's was going to be demolished I was stricken with grief, really. Something just happened to me that I felt an emptiness in my stomach. The first years of my priesthood were spent there; they were very, very happy years. I felt like there went the early part of my priesthood. It just felt that early part of my priestly life was down the drain. I felt such a closeness to that place, such a closeness to the people that really I felt more sorry for the people than I did for myself because, after all, it was the people who were in that area that were being affected. I knew that they would be very, very upset, which I learned afterwards that they were very upset and grief stricken because of what was happening to the church in Briar Hill. My reaction was one of just sadness, and I suppose we all can become emotional when we deal with our first love, and that was my first love in the priesthood, St. Ann's Church.

M: Things change as time goes by.

L: Oh yes, we have to make way for progress.

M: I think I can recall that the use of ceremonial vestments and trappings of that sort were used quite a bit at times. Would you comment about that?

L: The ceremony and the trappings and the different colored things that the altar boys used to wear and so on, they would go into red for Christmas. There was a lot of pomp and ceremony; I don't think we have enough of this today, I really don't. Things are too drab today. I think where God is concerned we should go all out. We should do anything possible to lift people up towards God. I think that the more we have, the more that God enjoys it. I don't mean that we should go to unnecessary expense, but I think that if the president or someone is coming to town we go all out for him. We have bands; we have everything. People who never show up downtown, are downtown. I think that when it comes to the worship of God, that nothing is good enough.

M: Can you describe the neighborhood in the immediate vicinity of St. Ann's?

- L: Oh yes. I can picture it in my mind, 422 running thirty feet out from the rectory, forty feet. Directly across from us would be the mills. Directly across from the church I remember Lou Masterick's store, and the Fox Theatre, and there was also a little barber shop there, Joe the barber. Down from St. Ann's there was the gasoline that I haven't heard of in a long time, but I know that it was run by the Cassanta brothers; they ran a gasoline station just down east from the school. I remember very well the smoke when the wind would be coming from the south, how it would really get to us. In the summer time sometimes you would even have to close your window to stop the sulfur and the graphite and everything else from coming into your room. In those days, of course, air conditioning wasn't heard of. You just had to suffer along and do the best you could. Of course, without the mills, there was no upkeep of the church with no support. You were happy when you saw the mills full of smoke because you knew the people were working. The area itself wasn't conducive to healthy living because of the mills, and naturally where you have mills the places look bleak and drab. It didn't upset or dampen the spirits of the people even though the area was bleak and drab. The people were just the most beautiful people in the world. They worked hard and they loved their God. They kept their homes beautiful even though they were practically right beside the mills. Their homes were kept really nice, nice yards, nice gardens, beautiful grass and flowers. They did a lot of painting. They were happy to be in the neighborhood. They were happy that they were working. Today, of course, the trend is to get away from all that.
- M: The Irish community, you mentioned when you had gone you knew . . .
- L: When I arrived there, St. Ann's was no long an Irish parish.
- M: Can you describe the nationality groups that replaced them?
- L: I would say mostly Italians replaced them. Italians for the most part and some Polish because you had St. Casimir's Church up the hill from us, that was a Polish church. Then some Croations, you had St. Peter and Paul Church just east of us on Covington Street. Of course, west of us, northwest of us would be St. Anthony's,

and that was Italian. Not the present St. Anthony's, this was St. Anthony's on old 422, which was just a small, little, wooden structure. I would say that the majority of people at St. Ann's by the time I got there were mostly Italians, although it was fairly well divided among the groups. I would say that the predominant group would be Italian.

M: Did you find it more difficult to communicate?

L: No, because the ones who belonged to St. Ann's, I would say ninety to ninety-five percent of them were born in the States. You just had a few old-timers who came over from the old country, and they were able to get along with a little broken English; you could understand them. You could understand them pretty well. They were darling people. They were just full of simplicity and faith that you would give your right tooth for them. They were just grand, wholesome, good, honest-to-God people. As I say, I thoroughly enjoyed them. Perhaps some of them are there yet, I really don't know. I doubt it very much; certainly the old-timers aren't, but those who I described as first or second generation, maybe some of them are still in Briar Hill; I really can't say. I haven't seen them in a long time or been in the area in a long time. It just doesn't seem like West Federal Street without St. Ann's Church as far as I'm concerned. Of course, the whole area now, you have the urban renewal and you have a lot of new storage rooms in the Monkey's Nest. They brought a little beauty to the neighborhood, but there is nothing more beautiful than a person. Even though they can build beautiful buildings they'll never replace the people.

M: Why were you transferred?

L: I was there almost seven years, and I was due really. Ordinarily you were in a place from three to five years. I suppose I outlasted myself. I was sent, of all places, down to East Liverpool, Ohio. Of course, I knew where East Liverpool was, but I wasn't in love with it because I was giving up my first love to go down there. It was out of obedience that I went. You take a vow of obedience to your bishop and if he transfers you, you're transferred. There is nothing you can do about it. It was with a heavy heart that I went to East Liverpool, but there again, although you give up your first love and your mind and your thoughts are with those people, and were with them for months and months when I was in East Liverpool, you begin to learn that people are pretty darn nice no matter where you go.

M: Looking back, if you could, what changes would you institute in the diocese, and in your own church?

L: Changes?

M: Changes or improvements.

L: There are so many changes that have taken place I don't think we could stand anymore. If it were possible, and of course this wouldn't come from me, it would have to come from the people themselves, I would like to see people, and this of course is the younger generation especially, the young married people who are now raising a family, I would like to see them become closer to the church, rally around the church, make the church the center of their lives and realize that they're only passing through here once. If the church in your area fails, it's not the church that fails, it's you who failed the church. The church is for all men and for all people. I think that people should rally around it and make their lives center around the church, socialize with the parishioners. I think there could be many, many parish activities whereby people could get together; we have them here in what we call the beer blasts and things like that, whereby the people can spend a Saturday evening very cheaply and have a great time. To me, I think that the people are just too aloof from the church today compared to what they were ten or fifteen, twenty years ago. This is one thing that I would like to see happen, that the people be as their parents and grandparents were, closer to the church, not just in the practice of their faith, but even in their social life.

M: I've run out of questions, so is there anything else you would like to add?

L: No. I enjoyed doing this. If this can be of help to Youngstown then that's fine with me if I contributed something.

END OF INTERVIEW