Interview of Father Thomas Donaghy

Narrator: Fr. Thomas Donaghy

Interviewer: Craig Robinson

Date: April 18, 2007; 2:30 P.M.

Location: An office in the rectory of St. Gabriel's Church, 233 Mohawk Avenue, Norwood, PA 19074

Topic: An oral history of Fr. Thomas Donaghy, an ordain catholic priest, St. Gabriel’s Parish, Norwood, PA. The purpose of this interview is to gather information regarding the life experiences of Fr. Donaghy, centering on the time he spent at LaSalle University. As part of an oral history project for Dr. Allen’s History 650 Oral History course at LaSalle University, this interview focuses on Fr. Donaghy’s formative years in Sharon Hill, PA; his education at West Catholic High School located in Philadelphia; studies and lifestyles as an undergraduate at Catholic University; graduated studies at Pittsburg University, relationships with his professors and his dissertation topic, struggles of working as a high school teacher while preparing research; an explanation of the Christian Brothers, their requirements, Fr. Donaghy’s initial contact with the Brothers, the decision to join the order and his family’s reactions; career and philosophy as an educator; the thoughts behind the mission of LaSalle University; the establishment of the Donaghy Fund; the publication of Conceived in Crisis, the centennial history of LaSalle University written by Fr. Donaghy; the practice of oral history; the highs and lows throughout the history of LaSalle University; the significance of co-education; Fr. Donaghy’s transition from Christian Brother to ordain priest; description of first mass said as an ordain priest; the importance of Charles Wilson Peale’s house located on LaSalle University; Fr. Donaghy’s overall perception of LaSalle University.

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This interview was conducted in one meeting which took place on April 18, 2007 at 2:30 P.M.

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Discusses formative years, place of birth, Sharon Hill, PA, October 20, 1928; father: Henry Joseph Donaghy, worked for Philadelphia Electric; mother: Ann Housten Donaghy, housewife; four siblings; social status of family; childhood friends
0:13:00
Discusses education; grade school, Holy Spirits, Sharon Hill, PA, reasons for choosing catholic schooling, teachers at Holy Spirits, Sister Mary, Sister Mary Timothy, Mother Mary Daniel, Mother Mary Joe, Mother Mary Lorenzo; high school, West Catholic High, 49th and Chestnut Street, West Philadelphia, PA, 1942-1946, teachers at West Catholic, Brother Damian Connelly, Brother Francis Belnild, Br. Gerald Burkeman, Br. Gregory, Br. Thomas Connelly, Br. Gordian, Br. Edward Michael, Br. Fladian; participation in student organizations; work experiences as high school student

0:20:38
Discusses the Christian Brothers, initial contact, purpose, requirements and agreements, influences of Br. Damon Connelly, date of commitment to the Christian Brothers (June of 1946), vows taking, family's reactions, the process of being given a Christian Brother name (Brother Flavius Lewis), reaction to name; education and lifestyle at Catholic University (B.A. History, 1949-1952)

0:32:23
Discusses career after Catholic University, St. Francis Vocational School (Eddington, PA), teaching at Pittsburgh Central Catholic, LaSalle Preparatory School (LaSalle College campus), back to Pittsburgh Central Catholic, running of intramurals while at LaSalle High; graduate school at Pittsburgh University, topic of dissertation (operation of the Manchester Railway), dissertation advisor (Robert Eugene Carlson, PhD), preparation and defenses of dissertation, struggles of teaching while going through graduate school; philosophy towards the teaching profession (both collegiate and secondary levels), developments of technology within education

0:36:19
Discusses the events of April 16, 2007 at Virginia Tech University and the connection to Vietnam Veterans returning to LaSalle College, discussions with doctors at the Navy Hospital, conversations with veterans

0:49:00
Discusses the initial contact with LaSalle on a colligate level, teaching western civilization during the summer program, class sizes, regular teaching schedule, assigned by the President of the University (Br. Daniel Bernian) as director of summer school, lay members of the LaSalle faculty, request to the Vice President of Financials (Joseph Splitzer) for air conditioners in Wistar Hall to increase the enrollment of summer program; initial day on LaSalle campus as a high school teacher; reaction to pass students attributing success to former teachers (Obey O'Brian); reaching full professorship at LaSalle, description of the History Department at LaSalle (Dr. Stow, Dr. Lubonka, Dr. McCarthy, Dr. John Lucat,) friction between faculty and programs at LaSalle (Dr. Penny)

0:52:29
Discusses the lifestyle of the Christian Brothers at LaSalle, communal life, life in the dormitories, spiritual meetings, eating arrangements, recreation, insurance purposes for of having brothers stationed throughout the campus
Discussion of how the people of LaSalle make the university, LaSallian sense of education, pedagogic, and spirituality, built on the spirit of self sacrifice; meetings of the college council over issues of hiring and firing, promotions and salaries and tuition.

Discussion of the Donaghy Fund, established by Fr. Donaghy in honor of his parents’ names, the beneficiaries, requirements (B average students), funding, growth of Fund, present worries and future of the Donaghy Fund, present controllers, process of determining who is in need.

Describes feelings of how the University has developed.

Discussion of Fr. Donaghy’s publication of LaSalle’s centennial history, *Conceived in Crisis*; LaSallian historians (Br. Joseph Grabenstein), manuscript of LaSalle history written by Francis X. Donohoe (Br. Francis Emery), Fr. Donaghy rewrite of the manuscript, checking of sources, conducting interviews.

Discussion of oral histories conducted by Fr. Donaghy in LaSalle University’s achieves; controversies over a book written by Fr. Donaghy entitled, *Keystone Democrat: David Lawrence Remembered*, link between David Leo Lawrence and the election of Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, movers and shakers of the 1960 Presidential election, protecting the interviewees who are still alive; Fr. Donaghy initial practice of oral history and the usefulness of oral history (Norman Thomas, Mayor Daily of Chicago), future of the archival material in at LaSalle; Fr. Donaghy’s preparation of a lecture and visitation to LaSalle for the 125th anniversary.

Discussion of the low and high points throughout the history of LaSalle University, LaSalle lack of dormitories during World War II to house the ROTC students, Province of Baltimore supported the University until the G.I. Bill was in effect, the establishment of the Art Museum by Daniel Burke, the public relation leadership by Br. Patrick Ellis, the 12 million dollar contribution by the Connelly Foundation to build Connelly Library, the founding of the school of nursing, the building of graduate programs, the establishment of the undergraduate honors program (Br. Daniel Bernian, Br. Patrick Ellis, Daniel Burke); underlining spirit of Br. Edward Anselm to make LaSalle the Notre Dame of the East.

Discussion of the overall significance of the University going co-educational, questions from the Christian Brothers, Fr. Donaghy’s participation in the transition, nuns on
campus, Br. Michael’s participation in establishing connection between the nuns and brothers

01:35:24 Discussion of the origin of the title *Conceived in Crisis*, other possible titles, linkage to the Civil War, the author’s thoughts on the title; receiving the commission to construct the book (Br. Daniel Bernian), other possible authors (Br. Henry Mollenhauer), the effects on the book due to being a member of the LaSalle community; the rush to get the book finished for the centennial, difficulties faced in constructing *Conceived in Crisis*, the positive effects of being the summer school director on the book (Dr. O Grady); historical reviews and faculty’s reaction to *Conceived in Crisis*; the success of the book; if Fr. Donaghy was to write a history of LaSalle how it would differ from *Conceived in Crisis*, a comparative history compared to a straightforward history; the location of sources, the LaSalle archives, newspapers, Philadelphia libraries, how helpful were the brothers at LaSalle (Br. Anselm), oral histories of the brothers (Br. Austin)

01:40:11 Discussion of Fr. Donaghy’s transition from Christian Brother to ordain priest (age 48), perception of Fr. Donaghy within the LaSalle community (Br. Owens), pondered over the decision for over ten years, difficulties to leave both the brotherhood and LaSalle; the differences between the two orders; teaching at the seminary, age of the seminary students; feelings of the Christian Brothers at LaSalle towards the decision to leave the brotherhood, letters from the provost of LaSalle

01:41:47 Discussion of publications while at the University (5 Books, reviews, articles), the expectations of the university; balancing being a historian and an ordain priest

01:49:36 Description of the first mass said as an ordain priest, presence of mother and father, presences of Christian Brothers from LaSalle, emotional feelings on that day; worked as an ordain priest in the Parishes of St. Thomas Moore, St. Philip James, St. Mary (dean of seminary), Cathedral of St. Mary our Queen (Baltimore), Frostburg (Campus Ministry), Elkin City, Wallingford, St. Joseph’s, St. Gabriel; comparison and differences between the lifestyles of a Christian Brother and an ordained priest

01:53:19 Discussion of other publications related to LaSalle University, the importance of Charles Wilson Peale’s house located on LaSalle University main campus, the University’s ability to protect a part of historical Germantown, the growth of the neighborhood around the campus

01:56:15 Discussion of Fr. Donaghy’s overall perception of LaSalle University, the difficulty of leaving: how life may have been different if Fr. Donaghy never became part of LaSalle University