

Summer 2018

## Interview of Michael J. McGinniss, F.S.C, Ph.D.

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HIS 650 Oral History

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Field Notes

I first spoke with the subject Michael McGinniss, over the phone on April 23 2018 about the possibility of interviewing him. McGinniss agreed to be interviewed for the project and also agreed to meet for an introductory meeting which was held on June 18 2018 in his office located in College Hall at 3:00 pm. McGinniss and I met for over two hours and discussed the subject of the interview, this was an informal interview which was not recorded. Throughout my conversation McGinniss stated that he had difficulty speaking about himself, I believe this is caused by his very humble personality. The subject was much more comfortable speaking about the world or times that he lived in as opposed to himself. The informal meeting served as a practice interview to better help craft the questions for the formal interview. During the practice session McGinniss and I built a rapport so the formal interview would be more comfortable.

In regard to crafting the questions I followed a general life history approach, starting with where the subject was born and grew up. Since this subject grew up in the Philadelphia area and has lived in it for the majority of his life (with some exceptions due to his career) I chose to focus on questions that showed what the area was like during his early life. Then toward the end of the interview I circled back to the subject of the area to ask him how much it has changed throughout his life. Furthermore I asked the subject about historic events that occurred throughout his life because I noticed throughout my many online and in person exchanges the subject was not comfortable speaking about himself. For example I asked the subject about his memory of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and his brother Robert Kennedy in 1968. I

used this strategy again when asking the subject about his decision to join the Christian Brothers during the tumultuous era of the 1960's. Throughout the portion of the interview where he spoke about joining the Christian Brothers at a time of change in the United States he spoke about how the world was changing dramatically. As a result of this change the Christian Brothers' numbers were reduced dramatically. When the subject matter shifted to his career we briefly focused on the early part, this was intentional since I wanted to focus more on McGinniss' time at La Salle and his tenure as president at the university. During the career portion of his interview I asked the interviewee about his reaction to the terrorist attacks on September 11 2001. In the portion of the interview that focused on the attack and its aftermath the interviewee spoke of its impact on the community of the university and how over time the attacks on that day have become history to the students at La Salle today. The rest of the interviewed consisted of him exploring his career and what he looks forward to accomplishing in the future.

The entire formal interview process was carried out on June 26 2018 from 6:00 pm until 9:30 pm. Prior to the interview from 6:00pm to 7:00pm McGinniss and I had dinner in the Christian Brothers Residence, located at La Salle University with a majority of the Christian Brothers at La Salle University. I feel that having dinner with the subject and most of his professional peers made the subject much more comfortable with the formal interview as many of his peers have been interviewed by other students for the class. The interview was then carried out in the Christian Brothers Residence from 7:00 pm until 9:30 pm. The interview was divided into three parts, the first part was 22 minutes and 53 seconds long because we were interrupted by a group of individuals one of which was a former student of McGinniss. Although the interruption made the first portion short it serves as an unintended aid in showing Brother Mike's popularity on campus. The second part was 1 hour and 14 fourteen minutes long and ended when McGinniss requested a

break, and finally the third part was 44 minutes and 35 seconds long and that served as the conclusion to the interview. I feel that including the first and impromptu interruption caused by the former student and their family highlights McGinniss' role and impact at La Sale university. Throughout the interview McGinniss was very comfortable and went in depth about his career and tenure as president. Although there were some subjects that McGinniss was uncomfortable discussing. For example the first list of questions proposed for the interview included what he thought on the art sale conducted by La Salle University in the early part of 2018, which McGinniss was open to discussing. Unfortunately, the day of the interview McGinniss asked to not have any questions about the art sale included on the recorded interview.

Overall I am pleased with the interview with the subject, he really opened up about joining the Christian Brothers during the turbulent era of the 1960's and how he felt about his tenure as president during La Salle University. I am happy that I was able to get the subject to open up about his life since he indicated throughout the process that he is generally reluctant to speak about himself. Although the subject did not wish to name any colleagues, I feel that he provided an insight into his role as president of La Salle University.