

Finding Historical Meaning in a Lasallian Legacy

An interview with
Brother Charles Gresh, F. S. C.

Brother Charles Gresh was interviewed on February 25, 2006 at the La Salle University Administration Building and March 7, 2006 at St. Mutien Hall on the South Campus in Philadelphia, PA. Matthew Smalarz, a history graduate student, conducted the interview which was recorded on a digital audio recorder.

The digital audio recordings are lodged at the La Salle University Archives and the March 7, 2006 interview has been transcribed and edited for future historical research purposes. A copy of the transcription is available in the La Salle University Archives.

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Interview with Brother Charles Gresh, Interview 2
Date of Interview: 7 March 2006; Philadelphia, PA
Interviewer and Transcriber: Matthew Smalarz

Matt Smalarz: Today is March 7, 2006. I'm conducting the second part of my oral interview with Br. Charles Gresh. I'm just going to initiate the conversation by starting with a few follow up questions where we last off in the interview.

Matt Smalarz: In the mid-50s, what was the life like of a Christian Brother who was a student at La Salle?

Brother Gresh: The life was still very much along monastic lines. Rising for example, was at 5 o'clock am. (Laughter), 5:30 ^{ret} was morning prayer, followed by a period of meditation, followed by mass, and then breakfast. ^{built (?)} Whatever was the order of the day. In the afternoon, we gathered for spiritual reading at 5 o'clock and at 5:30 it was either meditation or benediction or some other religious ceremony. Finally, at about 8:30, I do believe, sometimes 9 o'clock, we had evening prayer. It was pretty monastic. Although we didn't recite all the hours of the official office of the church, we certainly we did our fair share of communal prayer.

Matt Smalarz: In what ways would you say the lay student's lifestyle was different from or similar in anyway to the Christian Brothers' students?

Brother Gresh: I don't think there was much similarity at all, because we were certainly not encouraged to fraternize with lay students at this time. We were asked to be recollected. We were asked to be salentious as much as possible and meditate on our way to school, for example, from Elkins Park to La Salle campus. We recited the rosary. So it was not the ordinary thing that the lay student would be doing, at least most lay students I would say. It was a very, very different kind of atmosphere for the lay student versus the brother scholasticate.

Matt Smalarz: How would you describe also the surrounding environment at La Salle? You had briefly mentioned it before in the last interview. Could you describe the specific surroundings at La Salle in the 1950s?

Brother Gresh: Do you mean the neighborhood?

Matt Smalarz: Yes.

Brother Gresh: The neighborhood was predominantly a white neighborhood. As I recall it was a rather young neighborhood in the sense that most of ^{those} the people, that as I can envision, as I look back, had young families, who had several kids, and that kind of thing, so it was very, very different atmosphere than it is today. Whereas today, I think we have just the opposite. I think we have mostly older people who are neighbors. I think that ^{whatever} there are young people or kids who are renting houses or who actually own a house and stay in that house. I think the atmosphere and the surroundings are very different from what it was in the 50s.

Matt Smalarz: As far as local involvement on the part of students, what was that like? Were La Salle students engaged in the local community activities or were they just more or less commuter students?

Brother Gresh: I think that there was not very much involvement, as I recall, but then again I was in this quasi monastic atmosphere. So, I did not really get to know a lot of lay students. You know, I remember Tom Gola being my lab partner in biology, for example. Things like that. I spoke to him on very few occasions, so there was a real difference. There was sort of a breakthrough in my college career when I had asked permission of the superiors to join the Collegian staff, which was something relatively new. We were getting credit for a journalism course. That was the only reason that, you know, I was able probably to do that. I enjoyed it very much.

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Matt Smalarz: How about the Peale farm? I've always been curious. What was it like being next to a farm on a College campus?

Brother Gresh: Well, it was all walled in, and so the only way you could even get a glimpse of what it was like was to go to the community room in the main brothers house, which we were not permitted to do. We were only allowed to have our lunch, which was then called the Priest dining room because the priests never ate with the brothers. The brothers again had a rather monastic routine, where there was reading all during the meals. People who were not brothers were not admitted to the dining room. The only occasion where that would be a little bit different might be for a Jubilee occasion, but ordinarily we did not have what we called, in those days, seculars come in nor priests. We had several priests that taught on campus and they always ate separately, but it was a very, very different mentality from what we have today.

Matt Smalarz: How frequently did you interact with lay students outside the classroom in terms of specific events? Did you ever go to sporting events, athletic events of any kinds, such as the 1954 collegiate basketball championship?

Brother Gresh: We did not (Pause) have interactions with the lay students and we were not permitted to go to games. There was a huge breakthrough in 54 when a television was brought into the dining room. We were allowed to watch the NCAA. Keep in mind we did not even have daily newspapers or magazines, so it was a very cloistered kind of existence. It's just hard to, you know, envision what was it really like in those days and only by your questioning does it bring back so many of those memories.

Matt Smalarz: When you came back to La Salle in the 1960s after your many travels and your teaching experience in high school, you took up a role as a residence director in a boys dormitory here at La Salle. What was life like as far as being a residence director in the 1960s? How did it differ from your previous experience at La Salle in the 1950s?

Brother Gresh: Well, earlier we had no dorms at La Salle. Anyone who came and did not have access to his own home, there were certain apartments or houses that would take a boarder in. You had just a handful of people, as I remember anyhow, who had that experience. So we didn't

have that kind of situation. (Pause) What was the other part of the question?

Matt Smalarz: What was your own personal experience as a residence director?

Brother Gresh: Oh, as residence director, in those days, younger brothers coming into college teaching were expected to take a dorm. Therefore, I took St. Albert's. I was asked to take St. Albert's, which I was happy to do. There were ten brothers in dormitories. There were ten dormitories at that time including one apartment house called La Salle Hall. Those brothers taught full time at the college and were responsible for the number of young men in the dormitory. We were assisted by two paid counselors, that is resident assistants and they reported to us. They would be on the second and third floor. The brothers would always be on the first floor and he had actually ^{three} tiny rooms. That was the set up. It was a very, very different kind of experience for me. I had never been really dealing with a boarding school, and that was pretty much what it was like. But it was a very good experience. I enjoyed it very much because what happened was students were very happy to come in and talk about their various problems or ask various questions, so you got to really know the students very, very well. The problem was that you had to get up ^{early} really in the morning and they didn't in most cases, and if they did, they didn't get up. When they came home in the afternoon, they used to go to bed. It was a very, very quiet atmosphere in the late afternoon. We then had the situation where they very often came to life pretty much around 11 when it was time for most of us to call it a day. You always had to have a system that whenever the doors open, your free to come in. If the doors closed, please come back another time.

Matt Smalarz: As a teacher as well at La Salle in the 1960s, had you noticed any significant differences in the curriculum as opposed to what you had been taught here as a student in the 1950s in terms of the kinds of subjects taught and in terms of English or anything else for that matter?

Brother Gresh: You know, ^{I really did not.} I can't say I really did. I think things were pretty much the same as I left them. In fact, the same courses numbers existed. Every once in a while there would be a course added for majors that we didn't have. It was rather minimal at least as I recall.

Matt Smalarz: Now were there any specific courses that you taught. I know you said you only taught one course, usually, a semester?

Brother Gresh: Well, No. I taught a full load the first year. And ^{then the} subsequent years, when I became dean of men and subsequently dean of students, then I only taught one course.

Matt Smalarz: Now when you took on ^{that} ^{as} the role of dean of men, you also coordinated important events such as commencement, convocation, and baccauquarete. What were some of your personal experiences in heading up those events as opposed to other people who may have played a role in those events? What was your specific role in coordinating those events?

Brother Gresh: Pause. Well, it was really to put them together. For example, the registrar, unlike what the registrar does today, (Pause) we had to, I had to, or somebody in my office had to, put

together the entire commencement program. We had to make sure that all the people who had honors and so on were listed and all that kind of thing. It was a little bit different, because we were a much smaller shop than what we are today. Baccalaureate was the same way. You had to arrange the liturgy. You had to get the officers of the mass. You had to make sure that there was a choir there and all the things that went with it. There was also the whole notion in those days, of having (Pause) one senior event (Pause) that used to take place, the faculty-senior reception. That was a big thing that had to be organized. (Pause) It could be lots of fun putting that together, but everything kind of piled up toward the end of the year, so (Pause) it could be challenging.

Matt Smalarz: Were there any specific experiences that stand out in your memory in conducting those events? Did anything memorable happen that stands out in your mind?

Brother Gresh: ^{(commission) - not very significant} (Long pause) One of the big changes that has been made in the years I was involved, each student did not receive his diploma personally. (Pause) The only ones who came to the stage were those who had received honors and they received them in the name of the class. Everyone who graduated cum laude, maxima, magna cum laude, that sort of thing, came up on the stage and received their diplomas for the class. Everyone else simply stood, and the applause was given and that was that. So the commencement ran actually one hour, the time you came in and the time in you went out. La Salle used to be considered one of the fastest commencements in the college industry. That's how it was set up. So it was very, very different.

Matt Smalarz: Was that deliberately done just to hasten the process or did they want to make it so that this was representative of the whole? You know, to put those students on stage?

Brother Gresh: Well, I think the idea was that it was a ceremony that everyone should enjoy, but they shouldn't feel in the least bit (Laughter) stretched out as a result of the length of the ceremony. Whereas in some of the other schools, where every single person received a diploma, it naturally takes a much longer time and that's how it was done. And that was accepted by faculty, staff, and students in those days. ^{of course}

Matt Smalarz: What would you say during the 1960s was the relationship to the Christian Brothers and the students on campus at that time period? Had it changed at all since the 1950s, in terms of the Christian Brothers who stayed at Elkins Park and came to La Salle? What was their relationship to the normal lay students at this point?

Brother Gresh: I think over the years of course things change naturally. The order itself made radical changes in the rule. Consequently, it was almost an old and new testament kind of concept here. I think that's pretty much what you would have to say about it.

Matt Smalarz: Was Vatican II at all a reason for that?

Brother Gresh: Oh sure, sure, absolutely.

Matt Smalarz: Was it less restricted in terms of how the Christian Brothers interacted with lay students on a more frequent basis?

Brother Gresh: I think that the concept of what I consider the monasticism started to move away as a result of Vatican II. Very much so. And so that opened up all kinds of other notions in terms of students working with lay students, study groups, and the number of lay students going to Elkins Park to the Scholasticate. In our day, it was almost unheard of. Eventually that was the kind of thing, you were simply entertained by going up to Elkins Park. Young people from here, our students, got to know the place very very well, made use of the pool, played basketball, went to tennis, and enjoyed dinner, that kind of thing, which never happened in my day.

Matt Smalarz: You had mentioned that you were also part of such activities like the J-Board or the initial conception of what would become the J-Board. What were some of the discipline issues that you dealt with as part of the conception of the J-Board at that time? Were disciplinary measures different from the 1960s as opposed to the 1950s?

Brother Gresh: Well discipline is discipline, the same offences that were in the 50s were in the 60s. With the advent of a coeducation, you had a whole new batch of problems. In the 50s, we talked about the problems of paternity cases. In the 60s, you talked about maternity and paternity cases. You also had the prevalence of abortion and things of this nature. You had suicides. That was another thing that had to be dealt with. We did have suicides all during this time, which are very, very difficult, of course, (Pause) so that we had that. We had the ordinary thing like drunkenness, for example, which is a perennial problem. I recall, for example, the difference of today's dean versus the dean way back when. I recall getting a phone call in the middle of the night, may be one or two o'clock in the morning from a judge in Atlantic City. And, uh, he simply told me that he had four young men who were students at La Salle and he could put them in jail overnight at least or he could release them, if I would take the responsibility of accepting them back. Of course, I naturally asked what had they done. The thing that they had done was that there was a burlesque house in Atlantic City and they had stolen the pictures of the strippers. They were caught. I think there were maybe four or maybe just three. I forget how many kids were involved. I took on the responsibility of accepting them and dealing with them the next morning. It was that kind of thing that you would never hear of tell of something like that today. Nobody would call you. I recall another incident when La Salle still had all male students. In the middle of the night, around one or two o'clock in the morning, we had a pretty heavy snowfall and the students outside of Albert's and Bernard's and Dennis, that crowd up there in the north complex, decided to have a snowball fight across the street. That is where the parking lot is now in front of the library. You had a huge contingent of students versus on the other side of the street another contingent of students ~~across from them~~. This was dangerous because buses and cars were going by. We had just read about someone who had took a heart attack in a car because of a snowball. It seemed to be reported it may have been the cause of this person's death. And so, therefore, the police station called me in the middle of the night and asked me if there was anyway that I could come out and make sure that these students' behave themselves. I got dressed, went out in the middle of the street, told the students to go back to their dormitories immediately. They did, put the snow down and went back to their dormitories. The police officer told me later that several of them had been hit by snowballs and that they just did not want this to continue to happen. I don't know that I would ever do that today, but I got completely dressed in the long robe that we wore in those days and the overcoat and so on and went out in the middle of the street. It's the kind of courage that you had in those days, you know. For students, that was

you had

inspired by that music

the authority figure and that's exactly what they did.

Matt Smalarz: Now, how did Christian Brothers react to the ways students handled themselves in the 1950s and the way that you just conveyed those stories to me now? Was there any feeling that there was a breakdown in morals in terms of how students looked at themselves in the 1960s?

Brother Gresh: Now, I think all these episodes, this last episode that I'm talking about, were just kind, you know, of boys being boys, kind of thing. I don't know that they thought anything further of it. Drinking, of course, was always one of those things. (Pause) Having a girl in your room was the last word. I recall going to a room, uh, one time. I knew there was a girl in there. And, uh, knocking on the door, you could hear all the shuffling behind, and I knew the girl either was under the bed or in the closet, because, you know, how small those rooms are. She was not under the bed when I knocked on the door. I said come out my dear and, of course, she had to come. That was the kind of thing that you ran into in those days, but that was sort of a big offense, because we did not allow women to visit men's rooms.

Matt Smalarz: In the change that had taken place since the 1950s from La Salle just being a commuter school and it becoming a dorm school, what affect did you see that having on kids who resided here and those who didn't? Was there a contrast in the way they behaved themselves?

Brother Gresh: I don't know if there was or not, because the kids who were just day hops came in, took their courses and went home. Very often, they were working and they didn't have time to get involved in any activities beyond taking their classes. Therefore, I don't know the answer to that.

Matt Smalarz: Becoming a commuter school, what affect did that have on the Christian Brothers relationship with the students, would you say?

Brother Gresh: Between being, uh, a commuter school versus a boarding?

Matt Smalarz: Uh, hum.

Brother Gresh: You have to remember now, back in my day, I told you the atmosphere which I came from. So, I don't know if I can answer the question. I just don't know.

Matt Smalarz: Was there a difference in the bureaucracy that you noticed in the late 1960s? Were there more offices that were opening up at La Salle as opposed to when you were a student in the 1950s?

Brother Gresh: I'm not sure I knew how many offices there were in the 1950s. We just came and we went home. I didn't see any tremendous number of offices opening when I came back as an administrator later on.

Matt Smalarz: So it was.

Brother Gresh: It was a tiny college, you know. It was certainly tuition driven and so therefore we had to be careful that we didn't have any tremendous expenses.

Matt Smalarz: Getting back to 1969 at the ROTC sit-in, besides Daniel Burke, who would you say were principal actors in ^{de}diffusing the 1969 ROTC sit-in and its surrounding events?

Brother Gresh: (Pause) I think it was pretty much just the President and the Dean. I don't recall other people being involved in it. I mean the Director of the Counseling Center, I think, was called in. We had a consulting psychiatrist. They may have been tapped for some advice. I can't recall quite that well.

Matt Smalarz: What were their feelings about the entire episode? Do you recall their particular ideas about what should take place?

Brother Gresh: The general idea was, you know, that this too shall pass. (Laughter) Of course, I can say that and smile now. I don't think I would have felt that exactly the same way in those days.

Matt Smalarz: What were some of the feelings of ROTC faculty members about the sit-in and the lead up to the sit-in that you recall?

Brother Gresh: Wow, (Pause), that is a difficult question. (Pause) I don't ever recall them making any kind of representation, amazing as that might seem to you. If they did maybe they made it to the president, I don't know. I don't recall it myself.

Matt Smalarz: How did you perceive military instruction at La Salle in 1969 with all the surrounding events? Did anything transform you after having seen the events take place there? After the sit-in itself?

Brother Gresh: Well, no. I think that I was pretty much aware of what was going on at other colleges, from what I read and from what I talked to with other people in the city here. (Pause) I think we had a chance to try and look at both sides of it. I think what we wanted to preserve most important was to keep the academic process going, not to stop, not to allow that to stop, not to cancel examinations. These are some of the things that they wanted and that we did not buckle into.

Matt Smalarz: What role did Brother Bernian play before the sit-in and after the sit-in? What was his feeling about the entire situation himself, since he was of course leaving office in 1968, or 69 and then Brother Daniel Burke would be coming in the Fall?

Brother Gresh: Well, I think that Brother Daniel Bernian, (Pause) I guess his philosophy would have been pretty much on the side of the country. If the country said this is what should be done, I think Brother Daniel Bernian was going right along with whatever was being said at that time. So, I don't that think he would have been too amenable to the so-called peaceniks at that time. That's my feeling anyhow.

Matt Smalarz: Did he still feel as though they were entitled to conduct the sit-in, even if that went against his own personal feelings?

Brother Gresh: Oh, I don't think he had any problem with that. I don't think, from what I remember, this is a long time ago, you have to understand. That's my perception.

Matt Smalarz: What role did the faculty and the administration play in trying to incorporate as much of the student body into the bureaucracy at La Salle after the sit-in? How did they try to meet their demands after the sit-in took place?

Brother Gresh: There were several faculty people who would meet with them privately, sit down and talk to them. I recall that very specifically. (Pause) Of course, there were others who just naturally thought ~~the whole thing was ridiculous~~. You had all kinds of camps involved there. But I do recall several people who went out of their way (Pause) to chat with the kids, and to try to give some of them what they considered the correct concept of what was going on in America (LAUGHTER) at that time.

Matt Smalarz: Getting onto another issue at the time, what kind of demands did African-American students make of the administration with the Civil Rights movement coming into its fore at that time? Were there any specific requirements they were asking from the top brass at La Salle?

Brother Gresh: As I recall the main thing they wanted was something very separate, that they would have their own group that would have a voice. I think they really fought for that.

Matt Smalarz: Do you find that the administration was very willing to meet them on most xxx? ✓

Brother Gresh: Oh, I do, both on the academic side as well as the dean of student side. There were all kinds of meetings.

Matt Smalarz: Since the Christian Brothers have always have had a fairly active social justice role to play in the community, were there any programs or initiatives that the Brothers interacted with or engaged in, during this time period, that revealed that side of or that dimension of the Christian Brother philosophy, that you can recall?

Brother Gresh: (Laughter) I'm sure there may have, I'm sure there probably was, but I really don't recall. I don't recall specifically.

Matt Smalarz: Given that white flight was taking place in certain areas of the city, what was the surrounding neighborhood like in terms of the composition of the people who still lived here as opposed to the 1950s? What were the surrounding demographics like?

Brother Gresh: ^{Long} (Pause) We had some evidence of gangs, as I recall. I can't recall the names. There was a time when I could be able to tell you what the names of some of the neighborhood

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gangs were, ^{Long} (Pause) but those names elude me right now.

Matt Smalarz: Were there a fairly consistent number of nuclear families or was there a prevalence of crime in the area? Would you say there was a balancing act between the one and the other?

Brother Gresh: I don't know if there was a prevalence of violence, but there was some evidence of that, I recall. (Pause) ^{long} Because at that time, we started probably to have the very first security guards. If I recall correctly, the first group we ever had was called the Globe security force, which eventually replaced part of our people. But it got to the point where we needed some security, and they came on the scene.

Matt Smalarz: Were there any times that the campus was riddled with crime issues in the area? Was there ever a concern, with the uptake in certain areas of the city, such as North Philadelphia, that crime would become a major issue for the campus itself?

Brother Gresh: I never recall that, no. I mean it became increasingly evident that the neighborhood was changing and some of those elements were coming in there. But I don't think it was anything like a tremendous fear, that (Pause) we would be quaking in our boots here, you know, that type of thing.

Matt Smalarz: Would you say there were more African-Americans living here at this point than at any other previous time in the 1950s in the surrounding neighborhood?

Brother Gresh: Oh, I'm sure that there was more then.

Matt Smalarz: Did students engage in any social activities in terms of the surrounding neighborhood, such as social justice issues, things like that?

Brother Gresh: Well, you know, I recall vividly that (Pause) the concept of social justice and so on was carried out by several people including a couple of Brothers who were involved with taking students out to Saint Gabriel's Hall, which was then known as the Philadelphia protectory. They did tutoring and counseling out there with what we called, in those days, juvenile delinquents.

Matt Smalarz: Was there any activity on the part of the Christian Brothers along with students as far as like Vietnam, Earth Day, any of the other big social movements taking place at the time, in terms of larger national issues?

Brother Gresh: Oh yeah, we definitely had some of that.

Matt Smalarz: Anything, vivid in your memory?

Brother Gresh: No, no not really. I know it went on, but I can't give any episodes.

Matt Smalarz: We were also talking about coeducation in the last interview. What were some of your Christian Brothers' feelings about the introduction of women onto the campus? Were there any specific reactions or hesitations?

Brother Gresh: Yes, I think some people were opposed to it. Some brothers were opposed to it. (Pause) They felt that, you know, we had gotten along with a hundred plus years without coeducation and there was no reason why we couldn't get on without it. However, on the other side of the coin, it was a must point of view from admissions, growth, and programs. All over the nation, of course, things were changing. You have to keep in mind that by rule we weren't allowed to teach women up to a certain point. We could only teach boys or men, as a lot of orders had that set up that way. Those things came about just like religious name changes. I mean we all had religious names, but very often you lived in a community house and you had no idea what the family name of the brother who lived next door to you was, because we didn't use them. When the license came in, we saw all these strange names and started to find out who was Sweeney, and who was Black, and who was Brown, and who was Bangs, and who was Gresh. And all that sort of thing. So it was a very, very different atmosphere.

Matt: That's interesting.

Matt Smalarz: Now when women were introduced, how did facilities change or didn't they change around campus?

Brother Gresh: I'm sure they had to. One thing you had to have bathrooms. That was the big thing when we started coeducation. The first dorm that, uh, admitted women, as I remember, was St. Francis. We had taken about a year out to prepare for that. There was a committee set up, and then there was a big push to have women faculty members because our faculty was all male. The only women on the campus were the secretaries and the nurse and a couple of people in the bookstore and in the cafeteria. But, you know, it was pretty much a man's world, so you had to make all these adjustments.

Matt Smalarz: When women came onto campus, did they actively take part in student activities as soon as they came in? Did student activities need to be rearranged in any way, extracurricular activities, such as athletic sports and what not? Did you recognize any significant or dramatic changes after they came in?

Brother Gresh: Well, the whole idea of the athletic picture had to change. Actually we had no such thing as a sorority, and all these things had to be added, which they were. It was amazing though at how easily, I thought, the program, the coeducation idea, came about once they came in. There were little preparations as you probably know. We had nuns in the summer school for years, and we had some women coming in, I think, around 1970, if I recall correctly, was the first real influx of women.

Matt Smalarz: (Pause) When 1970 did roll around, do you recall some of the reactions of women to entering a predominantly male campus? Did you ever talk with or meet women students who first came here? Did you gauge their reactions at all? What was it like?

Brother Gresh: I don't recall any instance that way. (Pause) It was the first time I taught women in the classroom was at that point because prior to that I taught girls in high schools, in several schools, where I taught choral music. I would teach them separately and then we would integrate with the men as the period toward the concerts would go on or the shows, whatever it was. But in the classroom, this was my first experience.

Matt Smalarz: When you left La Salle, you obviously went to St. John's for about a nine-year time span as president down there. You then came back to La Salle and obviously took on the roll as director of the Annual Fund here at La Salle in 1981. Did you have many phonathons at La Salle in terms of garnering extra revenue for the university? What was that whole entire dynamic like in terms of raising extra funds for the Annual Fund since there hadn't been really an operation in place when you started here?

Brother Gresh: Well, we did have the annual Fund, but the distinction when I came here was that we never had a full time director of Annual Fund, so I was the first full time director of the annual fund. We had a part time annual fund person, a brother who also ran the dramatics here and ran the summer theater. I had a consultant of a brother who worked with me for a while, but I was the first full time annual fund person. We did have phonathons prior to my coming here but they would amount to maybe eight a year, maybe four each semester. I knew that if we had to build this up, we had to do it in an such a way that we had many more phonathons. By the time I left the Annual Fund, we were doing probably around fifty a year. We started out with alumni volunteers and then I was able to bring in student volunteers, although I really must take that back. We had some student volunteers, and we had alumni volunteers. After that we had all these phonathons going. We got to the point where we had paid students. Volunteers were very, very difficult because we would get the nod that so many were coming that night and we would order dinners and things of the nature, but the numbers, of course, never matched with what you expected to have. We decided to devote at this time student phonathons across the country, so we had paid student phonathers. That worked much better because we could get students to come in on Sunday. For example, we could get students to call the coast, which is always a three hour difference, so there was a lot of things we were able to do by having paid student phonathoners. The program built tremendously because in the early days we were slightly over 200, 000 dollars. We built that up to almost a million dollars, and now, of course, its well over that.

Matt Smalarz: In terms of other catholic colleges in the region, St. Joe's and Villanova, was this more or less a reaction to their growth or was there also a need just internally to change the dynamic at La Salle in terms of how funds were raised?

Brother Gresh: I think it was the idea that we simply had to contact more people. The lowest rung of the ladder in fundraising is a letter and the second rung on the ladder is, of course, the phone call. But the real test is seeing people face to face, and there's no school in the country that can afford to have enough people to see everybody, but that's how you start to figure out who really will be potentially big donors. That's the sequence that one can bring. Therefore, by having many more phonathons, increasing that tremendously and having your own kids talk to these people, that's a good movement.

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Matt Smalarz: At this time you also had other new structures coming onto the campus, such as the incorporation of the Peale House and the former Peale farm and also the construction of the library. What was your impression of the expansion of La Salle during this time period?

Brother Gresh: Well, it was tremendous and I still think that the library is probably the showcase of the campus buildings anyway. The expansion was fabulous and we simply had to get, I thought, Belfield. That was a must.

Matt Smalarz: Had that been a major priority for the administration?

Brother Gresh: No, it really wasn't. I think there wasn't a real hard push on that for a long period of time. I think a lot of people just felt it was unattainable and through a whole variety of circumstances it did become attainable and thank god we were able to buy it.

Matt Smalarz: With the building of the library after attaining the Peale property, was that priority number one for a lot of people, the construction of a new facility of that magnitude?

Brother Gresh: I think that the number one priority was to build a state of the art library. When I was a student here, we just had one part of what I called the first floor of College Hall, just a couple classrooms, and that was the very beginning. We built what is now the administration building, which became the library. That was almost a miracle, you know, to see that place. That, of course, was inadequate, and so we incorporated, as you remember, the Wister Annex. It became part of the library, and then, eventually we had the real thing.

Matt Smalarz: Did you also see the growth in terms of the curriculum that had taken place since you had taught here in the late 60s?

Brother Gresh: Oh, a tremendous xxx.

Matt Smalarz: What stands out in your mind in terms of the change overall academically from that time period to the 1980s and into the 1990s?

Brother Gresh: Well, I think what happened was that we really had the great gift of Brother Daniel Burke. I attribute so much of the revamping of the curriculum today and the real emphasis on the academic to him. I think he did a tremendous job. The caliber of person that he was able to bring in on the lecture series. Well, we had the concert and lecture series. It was absolutely tremendous. If you ever read in the archives the number of just first class people, you know, who came to this campus, we've never had it before and we've never had it since. The same can be said about him and his honorary degree candidates. No one has come anywhere near him. And he was able to, you know, really get art and music, which was never integrated into the curriculum. We did it and we finally got to the point where, in order to get a degree, you had to either have a course in art or music. That was just unheard of in the early days. There was a whole new kind of, umph, that was put into the academic nature of the place. And then his battling for Phi Beta Kappa, which, of course, has still never come to pass and maybe someday will, but he certainly did heroic work on that. So, when anybody stands out in my mind, when

you talk about curriculum and when you talk about exposing really our students to some of the best minds and talents in the country, I think he's the one you can take your hat off to.

Matt Smalarz: For such a long period time La Salle emphasized undergraduate education. With the introduction of so many new graduate program degrees, did certain Christian Brothers see that as a move away from the core tradition here at La Salle or was it just an idea that this is a natural movement to the future?

Brother Gresh: I'm kind of inclined toward the latter part. I think people, most people, most brothers figured that, you know, it was time that we grow in the situation. I think that's what convinced the state that we should become a university rather than a college. We had to prove that we were going to go in that direction, and we did just that. Because all during the 50s, and so on, we had only one graduate program. Every brother, I think, just about everybody Brother, back in the 50s, took an M. A. before they could go out teaching, and it was gonna be in religion. That was the program. There were so many nuns in existence in those days. I mean the place was packed all summer long with graduate students in religion. Father started it. Brother Edward Davis ran a fabulous program for M. A., summer courses. The people that he brought it and the lecture series, the whole thing, was extremely well done.

Matt Smalarz: Was there a specific reason why they wanted certain programs, such as the M. B. A., um, and other programs, like communication? Did they feel they had to have those programs over perhaps others offered by local colleges and universities?

Brother Gresh: Well, oddly, I think it was the sign of the times, you know. I think you had Brother Gerry Molyneaux with his newly minted Ph. D. in communications from the Midwest, and he established the program. It went so well that the next step was, of course, to have a Master's program. Anybody who has a business school simply has to have a M. B. A. You know, just logical things followed. Some of the other M. A.'s, such as Ukrainian studies and some of these different things are a different story. I'm not quite sure how they came about, but the ones who draw the big students, that's what gets it.

Matt Smalarz: What would you say has been your experience since the 1980s with the surrounding environment of La Salle, in terms of community involvement, community engagement as opposed to the 1960s, where there were a lot of social justice issues taking place and where students participating in such events, as the ROTC sit-in? Have you noticed that taken place over time?

Brother Gresh: (Pause) I think we've become (Pause) much more attuned (Pause) to (Pause), working with less fortunate people, and to integrating ourselves with the community. There's probably not another college in the city that does as much for the neighbors as we do. (Laughter) I doubt that there is, including Temple and Penn, and so on. That's why I think that it was such a bitter pill, when this skirmish over the 20th street closure took place. I understand that so many of those people had really nothing to do with La Salle, but it's still a bitter pill in the sense, that we have extended ourselves. We had a very good cause for closing that street, and at the same time, we had this opposition. But I think we really reached out to the community very,

very well.

Matt Smalarz: Are there any programs specifically that you know of that are going on right now that extend the hand from the university to the community in terms of community outreach programs and things of the like?

Brother Gresh: Well, I'm just thinking in terms of the library, tennis courts, track, graduations, local groups in our theater, and use of the ballroom. I mean this just doesn't happen at these other colleges.

Matt Smalarz: What do you attribute that to directly?

Brother Gresh: I think it's attributable to the fact, that, you know, we honestly try to reach out and we try to help other people, especially our neighbors. I think we've done a darn good job better.

Matt Smalarz: Do you think the Christian Brother philosophy plays an enormous part?

Brother Gresh: Oh, yeah, I do. (Pause) Yes, I think the whole concept of the worth of the individual comes in here.

Matt Smalarz: Well, that was the last question I had for you.

Brother Gresh: Well good for you.

Matt Smalarz: And I want to thank you very much for your time. It's been extremely helpful.

Brother Gresh: Thank you.

Matt Smalarz: That's the end of this part of the interview.

Brother Gresh: Very good, wonderful.