Fr. Clement Collins, OP Interview

0:00:00 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

I guess the first question. What would you feel the highlights of the four years when you were provincial would be?

0:00:18 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

The highlights? Well, yeah. Well, I think the first major event is trying to... convinced the province that what we were doing in the province to implement Vatican II wasn't really a threat to the province. And it was certainly trying to overcome at least reluctance, if not in some cases, real opposition to some of the things that we had proposed to do.

I think another highlight was an effort to use the facilities that we had to the best advantage. So the moving people out of Winona, which was not easy to do.

Painful. Very painful, yes. And then trying to sell it or to lease it, which has been exasperating, the whole process. Then eventually of trying to use River Forest to the best advantage. The proposal of, since Fenwick could not be sold to Oak Park School District, we thought we would have to renovate Fenwick or maybe even build a Fenwick High School on the property at River Forest.

So, we honestly tried to sell the priory there at River Forest.

And that, I think, probably put a strain on the province that maybe we should have avoided, because it really split, I think, the province more than they had been at the beginning.

Certainly one of the things that I, and I'd like to say that Internally, I was fighting these same battles. I couldn't buy everything that we were doing. I couldn't feel comfortable with many of the things, especially the travel that was being done by the students and the novices and all of that.

Some of the expenses of Dubuque and then the converting Dubuque almost entirely into some kind of an ecumenical effort. I wasn't always at ease with all of those things. But I know that I was far more at ease than many people my age in the province were.

The thing that has always encouraged me was the support I got from many, many people in the province. Tremendous support.

And that would be especially true of the staff, particularly of Ed Conley and Tony Nadeau and all of the people who work with us. I was particularly pleased about the effort we made to get the three provinces to work together. And I think that was, perhaps if anything, the most constructive effort that succeeded as far as the four years that I was provincial. And I'm pleased about that, because I think that the three provinces really have kind of dissipated the suspicion of one another. have kind of forgotten some of the old hurts.

0:04:02 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Do you think the self-study was beneficial in the province?

0:04:14 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

I think the self-study was beneficial for people like myself who, just because of circumstances, found themselves in a position where they had to do something about Province and I was very active in that self-study, so I had a lot of information.

I don't think the self-study really helped us, perhaps as a province, to move ahead like we had hoped. And I think one reason, and this may be a very minor reason, but it was a reason that I think still haunts us. That we were unwilling to make some priorities in that self-study, and we were unwilling to do that in the chapter in which I was elected provincial in 1969.

We have been reluctant to do it right up until the present. And I think until we do that, we really can't accomplish what we could with the limited numbers we have now.

But I was chairman of the Apostolic Works Committee, which was the committee that should have made some priorities. And we could not get our own committee to agree So we made kind of a compromise.

0:05:29 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

It's amazing you should say that. Just a year ago, the council sat down and said, we will have three priorities.

0:05:38 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

And to date, they're still waiting a year later to do something concrete about those priorities.

0:05:44 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

That's right. Because once we're to the point where we have to make a decision, that's where we start stalling. Nobody wants to fight the fight.

0:05:51 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

No, you can gather information forever.

0:05:53 -Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Right. Yeah. And after we gather the information, we want to gather more information.

0:05:59 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

Yes.

0:06:00 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

I think in a sense it's a fear that, well, we're going to make a mistake. And then if we make that mistake, something's going to happen that we won't be able to control. And I think that's too bad, because mistakes are built into human efficiency. And somehow we've got to be able to. I'm hoping that we'll do so, especially about reaching. I am very concerned personally that there is something we didn't reach. I think we've got the goods and I think we've got the manpower and the people who are involved in it.

But once you say that, as I've said in the East, they've got 27 parishes. Well, there must be equally that many out here.

0:06:37 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

Sure, right.

0:06:38 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

And when we say X number into this apostolate, or at least the way is open, if that's where they want to go, we will give that a priority. Ten parishes are going to have to go by the boys. I don't see them as being willy-nilly there.

0:06:56 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

No, I don't either. And you see, it would have been easier to have done that in the self-study or in 69 than it is today, because each year bishops are under greater duress. And they're going to make it very difficult for a provincial to go and say, I'm going to close this parish, as far as our men are concerned. So it's going to be an extraordinary effort that will be required to do it.

0:07:27 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

How many years are you in the province?

0:07:29 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

Well, I came in, let me see, I always got to count back, I think in 19, I came out of the service in 45, went to Catholic University, finished my degree, which was what, 46, 47, 47, 48. I came in in 48 as a novice in September.

0:07:50 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Professed in 49, ordained in 55.

0:07:52 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

Yeah, right.

0:07:55 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Right in the middle of that.

0:07:57 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

Yes, right. And right in the middle, then when I became fairly active in the province, the Vatican II explosion.

0:08:10 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Of all the people in the province, can you think of one person who might have been the most influential in your life?

0:08:23 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

Boy, that's pretty hard to say.

I can give you maybe two or three people that I would say I don't know if I could really, and they're in different ways.

I had the greatest respect for Father Walker. He was my student master and I could look at him with a jaundiced eye like a lot of people. But I really had great respect for him. I had great respect for Father Marr, and I suppose maybe if any one person who he certainly appointed me as pastor and made it possible that I became, you know, prior, I don't think he ever wanted me to be provincial, but I had great respect for Father Marr too. And in a far different way, on a more personal and friendship level, would be Father Ed Condon, I had the greatest feeling of warmth for him.

And I had a great love for Father Nadeau. And see, there's just so many priests. Yeah, they touch you in different ways. Yeah. And I had really, to this day, I have the greatest respect for all of the priests who were in the House of Studies when I was going through the House of Studies. Many of them were not great professors. You know, they weren't great pedagogues. But I never saw people more dedicated. They worked hard. Sometimes they had three jobs.

0:10:05 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

They were good religious too.

0:10:06 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

Right, yes. They were good people. And I feel that they contributed a great deal to my own, you know, spiritual life.

0:10:16 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Who brought you to the Order?

0:10:18 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

Phil Mulhern.

0:10:19 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Really?

0:10:20 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

He preached at my first Mass.

0:10:21 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

From the service?

0:10:23 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

No, from being at Catholic University. Oh. I used to see him and Ferris Smith an awful lot. when I was there. And I was there at the same time that Johnny Arnold was there. He was in the Latin class with me. Oh, my. And he's still in Pakistan, isn't he?

0:10:40 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Yeah.

0:10:40 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

Yeah. Right. So, yes.

0:10:43 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

And you were ordained the same year.

0:10:44 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

Yeah. And Phil suggested that I join the Midwestern provinces closer to your home, and you'll be always working in a place closer to home. And yeah.

0:10:58 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

That's amazing. He's a good friend of mine.

0:11:02 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

Is he? Oh, Phil's a fine guy. Last time I saw him was in Rome. That's three or four years ago now.

0:11:07 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

I saw him last August up at the college, just before he went back.

0:11:10 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

He goes back and forth like a fiddler's elbow.

0:11:12 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Well, he had taken a year at the college, and then went up to the provincial and said, it wasn't what I thought it was going to be, I'll go back to Rome again. Phil's going to be 69, I guess, 69 or 70.

He had sent me a note, opened it saying, ***stimatissimo***.

0:11:37 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

The first Dominican I ever met in my life was Buddy Stratemeyer, with his Homburg and everything.

0:11:45 -Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

And it was his uncle.

0:11:47 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

Yeah. And at that time he was a chaplain for the university. And I was registering, and I had two years of school before that. My registration was all kind of mixed up. Well, he came walking up, and one of the things they had mixed up, which I didn't recognize, was that they had me listed as a Protestant. And this enraged him. And we went through that line like a whirlwind and got things straightened out right then and there. This man is not a Protestant.

Walter Farrell was teaching there then. I didn't know him really well at all. And so, of course, was Viggy Smith. I think Mariner was there, too. Mariner Smith was there. But that was my first contact with the Dominicans.

0:12:35 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

The House of Studies.

0:12:36 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

Yeah.

0:12:38 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Where would you like to see the province go? What are your hopes for the future?

0:12:43 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

Well, my hopes for the future really is that the province will fulfill an important role in building up faith communities in the, you know, in wherever they go. Preaching as preaching teams or preaching in our parishes or preaching, you know, like for instance at the Newman Center, we are sure not brilliant preachers by any means. But people come there all the time because they get the best sermons. And so I'd like to see it go in that direction. I agree that I think there should be a greater stress on preaching today because the thing that people really are lacking is really knowledge of what went on at Vatican II and what it proposed for the church. And so I think that can only be done from the pulpit.

Because pastors aren't doing it any other way. There are a thousand ways they can do it. But I'd like to see it go in that direction. And I would like to see the province decide itself what priorities it wants. And then whatever they are, to really put all our energies in them. in those directions. It may not be. Maybe a lot of the province won't want to go as strong in preaching. But I hope that we can get revived a little bit too.

0:14:06 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Good. Thank you very much.

0:14:08 - Fr. Clement Collins, OP

Fine.

0:14:09 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

This is going to be edited. And the final...