Fr. Edward W. Conley, OP Interview

0:00:01 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)

You were in the province at the very beginning. You were ordained in 42?

0:00:05 - Fr. Edward W. Conley, OP

43.

0:00:05 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)

43. But you had to make the transition.

0:00:08 - Fr. Edward W. Conley, OP

Yeah, we were all in. We made the choice when we were in the seminary.

0:00:12 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)

Were you in Washington at the time or something?

0:00:15 - Fr. Edward W. Conley, OP

No, in River Forest. We were in philosophy. Philosophy. In those days, you had three years of philosophy. River Forest? Yeah. And my first year there, they took the first year of theology there also. Then they decided to put it in Somerset and moved them. So in my time there, what they did was to split the province when we were still in philosophy.

0:00:52 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)

What was it like?

0:00:56 - Fr. Edward W. Conley, OP

Well, things were much different in that sense because everybody did the same thing. It was a very uniform existence. And yet at the same time, there was a real sense of community. I remember making my novitiate at St. Rose and coming up to River Forest, and the classes ahead of us had really developed a sense of community. And when the winter came and the winter sports, everybody went ice skating, you know? Everybody in the whole house went ice skating, and it was just an accepted tradition.

There was a tremendous sense of community and identity at that time. A sense of belonging, a sense of togetherness.

It was a typical four hours of class in the morning, your study in the afternoon and in the evening.

That sort of thing, very regimented. But that was the way things were done. That was what people thought was best in that time. And I don't feel any scars or anything as a result of that.

0:02:14 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)

When we came into the 60s and the council had finished and we went through some very difficult times, you were one of the pickers of the provincial order.

0:02:25 - Fr. Edward W. Conley, OP

69 to 73. That was later.

0:02:32 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)

Right. What are your reactions?

What were some of the good things that happened? What were some of the painful things that happened?

And how do you see that flowing into a good for the whole?

0:02:47 - Fr. Edward W. Conley, OP

I think the 69th chapter was really the climax and the frustration. In our 69 chapter, the votes were something like 24 to 23. There was a real sense of division, a real rejection of authority, and it was just a real consolidation, if you will, of however you want to phrase it, liberal-conservative.

0:03:18 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)

A very painful time.

0:03:19 - Fr. Edward W. Conley, OP

Yeah.

0:03:19 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)

Do you think that that was the result of the 65 change?

0:03:19 -Fr. Edward W. Conley, OP

No, I don't think that this, I think it was just the the whole of society and the whole of the church, and and the whole emphasis upon the human personality and in the behavioral sciences, people beginning to understand what it means to be a human. And to try to integrate that into, uh, to theology and religious life was was a very difficult thing in in my mind. And as a result of of this, the. There was a lot of clashes because people came into a situation and here in the midst of the game, they changed the rules.

And I guess what I see in Clem's term was a realization that this is no time to try to clamp down.

Because people were really rejecting authority. And Clem played a very low key approach and healed and began the healing of the wounds. And I think it was a tremendous contribution, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Even the vote itself for provincial, it was between Clem and Fando. And the way the vote came out, both of them voted for each other, which is fantastic. fantastic people that do things like that, but that's how close it was.

With that tension and those viewpoints, you could not expect for great advances. I think it required the low-key, easygoing approach of Clem that did a lot of healing and a lot of listening and a lot of understanding. and putting up with the people who are just experiencing going through their adolescence, if you will, in religious life in a very tumultuous way.

0:05:33 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)

What do you see as the... If you were able to ask one thing for the future, what would you most like to see for the future of the province?

0:05:46 - Fr. Edward W. Conley, OP
I hadn't thought about that. I guess I'm inclined to... be a little more pragmatic and concerned about the local and the needs.

There are many, many needs, but there's so much good in the province too. that I guess what I would like to see is the realization and the understanding by all of the members of the province of the good that other people are doing.

You know, a guy that really has a talent and a facility for bringing the good news of what other people do is Jerry O'Leary. Anytime you talk to Jerry O'Leary you'll find out that this person or that person is really doing something good and that's a great talent and I think we need more of that. I have my own little pet theory that as a result of Thomistic training in the past where we were taught to pick out the flaws in arguments and to be critical of theological things that it carried over into our judgments of people.

And we tend to be critical when we talk about electing a prior instead of putting more emphasis upon the good In the past, the tendency was to point out the well.

He wouldn't be a good prior because he would do that and that. And there, there has been a great improvement in that area in the province. In my mind, and in a real understanding that that, you know, everybody has their faults and we might as well live with them. But I do think that that that's one thing that I would would hope for now. How do you classify that? How do you? I don't know.

0:08:14 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)
It's well said. I don't. Very well said. You've already mentioned a name. What I've been trying to do is get people in a roundabout way to mention somebody else that strikes them, and you've just mentioned Jerry O'Leary. But if you could name somebody who, in the order, who has really had a great impression on you, like even from the novitiate, a person who really drew you to the order, who would you...

0:08:30 - Fr. Edward W. Conley, OP
Well, Tony Foley from your province was, or whatever it is, where you're standing now. Tony Foley was a great influence on me, and really the one who said, you know, hey, get with it. If you want to be a Dominican, I'd been thinking about it, but he kind of pushed me.

0:09:04 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)

Are you from Minneapolis?

0:09:05 - Fr. Edward W. Conley, OP

Yeah, sure, Holy Rosary. And, of course, George Kinsella. In the course of my... not novitiate, but as a student, it was in the war, and I had thoughts about, well, maybe I ought to go and be a war hero, you know, and save the country and all that.

And I talked to George Kinsella, and George says, you make up your own mind. I'm not going to tell you what to do. George Kinsella was a tremendous example. But I've learned a lot from a lot of people.

Tony Nadeau, Clem Collins, I must confess, maybe I should go into executive session or something.

It was a great living situation there in the community life. I experienced a tremendous community life in the provincial house there on Bennett. That was a great experience for me. A guy that really has done a lot for me, and I've told him that, is Chief McDonough. When Chief was at Hammond, and I was at Hammond, Chief was at the Newman Center, and he'd come over for lunch, and we had some fascinating discussions. And I think Chief really taught me a lot about behavioral sciences, not so much academic knowledge, but practical things, and opened up the... the way for me to understand a lot.

I think he was a great influence. Bossy Gillis was a great influence in my life. When Clem asked me if I, that he told me he was considering me to be his vicar in the course of the chapter. Somebody else he was also considering. The person I went to was Bossy Gillis because I knew Bossy would give it to me straight. He was a good friend of mine, but bossy would tell you straight out. I knew the answer that I would get from him would be a good answer and it would be an honest answer. He's a tremendous person. There are so many different people that have really contributed to seeing something of the goodness of the Lord in them.

0:11:43 - Fr. Cornelius (Interviewer)

If you had something you wanted to say to the province, publicly, what would it be?

0:11:51 - Fr. Edward W. Conley, OP

Well, I didn't sign up to say anything to the province.

I think What I would like to say to the province is to look at the talents of each individual and to recognize those talents, to recognize that none of us has all of the answers and that doesn't have to be done in our way, but to try to understand the talents and the abilities of others and to help them use these talents as best we can.