Fr. John Joseph Angers Interview

[Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)] (0:06 - 0:07)

Forty-one until? Forty-eight.

[Fr. John Joseph Angers, OP] (0:11 - 3:34)

Forty, that's right, we were young dads and then we left at the end of that year. So in 49, I was on my first assignment. Up to the Twin Cities, actually.

I had a summer course first in Chicago that I taught. And then immediately after that, that was one of the late courses, actually, and I had to hustle up to the Twin Cities to begin this course of studies up at St. Catherine's College. And so I stayed there for a number of years.

But our province, I think God has blessed our province in a number of ways, very beautifully. Whenever we seemed to need somebody to take care of the needs of the province, he seemed to be there. We needed somebody at the very beginning to kind of stabilize us, to get us started well, and so we had such an individual.

When his term was up, we needed somebody with a kind of a vision who was able to expand the building program of the province. And so we had people in that particular category. We needed people, Father O'Brien, our first provincial, and Father Hughes, who succeeded him.

After that, we needed people to kind of help us as we began adjusting the various ministries in our province and became accustomed to one another. We needed somebody who was able to understand the problems that we had as individuals and to try to see to it that the needs that we had were satisfied so that we would be a better and a happier group of individuals. And I think we had those people.

We needed people to kind of, well, look to our spiritual needs also after this beginning and the excitement and all of this kind of thing. And I think we had at least one person that I know of in that particular category that was a help to us in the spiritual dimension. We need people at the present time as we are in this kind of phase of transition to be peacemakers, to kind of help to solidify and to bring the poles of the province together.

Somehow, again, to be a strength to us at this particular time until we can really begin to accept one another and feel comfortable and good about one another. And that solidarity and that strength that comes from that particular type of thing. And I think we have that.

And thank God this will perhaps help us maybe in succeeding years to get over this particular transition that we happen to be in and to become stabilized in such a way that people looking at

us, young men, will want to join us because they see what we are doing as kind of good.

[Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)] (3:35 - 3:40)

Do you see a trend in the province in the past 40 years in terms of apostolate?

[Fr. John Joseph Angers, OP] (3:44 - 3:57)

Well, I think we've moved in... I'm not sure I have that much of a hold, as it were, on the evolution of our apostolates.

[Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)] (3:58 - 3:59)

What were most people doing?

[Fr. John Joseph Angers, OP] (4:00 - 5:22)

Well, I think of all of the apostolates, the one that was held in highest regard, there were two of them, really. It was the preachers, the missionaries, for example, and the teachers. Those were the two outstanding apostolates in the...

I think almost like ideals, things that you really strove for, that you looked up and admired these people who were a part of that. The people who were in parish work, for example, were held in perhaps the least esteem. At least that's my feeling as we begin.

I think we changed the mission. The whole church itself changed. And so the missions that we were conducting and so on, I think, became passé.

They were not really touching people. We had beginnings of going into homes and this type of thing, bringing the mission, you might say, into individual homes, to a group, a small group of people within a parish. And to me, the way it was explained to me, I never did this work myself, but it sounded as though that was really a good thing at the time.

And our Father Becker was kind of at the beginning of that.

[Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)] (5:22 - 6:04)

Do you see us going in a trend toward preaching today? I mean, we certainly went into the intellectual life in the 40 years of the history of this province. When you look at an outline of a history of the province, most of our parochial ministries were there at the beginning.

But as the province grows, we take on innumerable intellectual apostolates, many of which have since closed. But do you see now that we're going back to a preaching trend or a sense of a change in direction?

[Fr. John Joseph Angers, OP] (6:04 - 6:59)

Yeah, I can see people moving into that. Personally, again, I don't have firsthand experience of this, but I don't feel as though we're kind of with that as yet. I think people want to move in that direction, and I see a number of them attempting to do this.

The fruit of this, I'm not sure I can have any picture of or any feeling for at this particular time. I don't feel as though it's as, what would you say, as firm as it was in our previous preaching mission, the older style of preaching mission that we had. I think this is good.

It attempts again to capture a lot of people, and maybe small groups of people at a time. But I can see a lot of room for really improvement, I think, in the fruitfulness of that type.

[Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)] (7:01 - 7:12)

How would you describe the spirit in the early days of the province, the overriding spirit of the province, the people as you knew them?

[Fr. John Joseph Angers, OP] (7:13 - 8:02)

The people as I knew them, I would say were, I think, very enthusiastic about what they were doing. That was my impression. Again, not that I traveled in the province at all, but in the encounters that I had with various brethren throughout the province, in one way or another, it seemed as though they were really taken up with what they were doing.

They were enthusiastic about it. It was maybe because of the newness of the province. Whenever you have something new like that, there's a newness that kind of keeps you moving, as it were.

And until that wears down or wears out, you have a great deal of thrust, I think, and support, mutual support for one another. And I felt a kind of that type of thing present within us.

[Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)] (8:03 - 9:04)

You're not the only one to say that. Other people have said it, too, which is interesting when so many are afraid of the division. What I really hear people saying is that if there is division, it would seem it would give us new life.

And I've heard a couple of the older guys say, too, that Rafe Burke was placed in charge as vicar of the Vicariate because the provincial in the east really wanted the thing to fail, that nobody in the east wanted this new province, and that it was very difficult in the early days. But dedication and enthusiasm and solidarity, a couple of people have mentioned, too, are the words that I hear coming from everybody who I talk to. If you could name one or two men who you really feel were an influence in the early days of the province, either an influence in your personal life or an influence in the spirit of the province, maybe besides the provincial, who would you spotlight?

[Fr. John Joseph Angers, OP] (9:06 - 10:04)

Well, I think the one that is really outstanding to me at any rate is Father Farrell, Father Walter Farrell. There was something about him that lent, I think, lent a spirit to the entire province itself. Certainly the teachers, the teaching apostolate was very much enhanced, I think, by the fact of his presence.

I had the good fortune of studying under him for only a semester. Our class was taken over because one of the professors had developed a sickness or an illness and asked him if he would continue with us. We were young dads at the time.

But the example of his life was a very powerful influence in my life, and I think in the life of a lot of the people living in the studium at that particular time. Just what he did and the way in which he did it and what he was as a human being was very powerful.

[Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)] (10:05 - 10:12)

You're really the first person to talk about him, which kind of surprises me. I thought it was really painful to pick that up a little bit.

[Fr. John Joseph Angers, OP] (10:12 - 10:14)

Yeah, I thought he was a terrific individual.

[Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)] (10:15 - 10:30)

Many, many people mention Bernard Walker. In fact, I was almost beginning to see for him as becoming Bernard's golden jubilee point. There was really so many people who speak of him so highly and wanted him to be mentioned.

[Fr. John Joseph Angers, OP] (10:31 - 11:53)

I think George Kinsella was a very unique individual for the position in which he was in as a student master. So many of those early classes, for example, went through his hands, as it were, and just felt that he was—I felt that way, I think. There was something special about him, I thought, that was quite stabilizing.

One of the things that he attempted to do, looking kind of back at it, he tried to help us, I think, to become mature individuals. Which I couldn't find with Bernard all that much. Bernard was kind of more the father type.

He imposed himself so that—it was hard for him, I think, to relinquish a job to somebody and allow the person to do this by themselves, as it were. He almost had to stand over them and—Watch and see. Yeah, right.

But Kinsella was not that way. He would give you a job to do, and he would trust that you had—he had worked on choosing you, and he gave you the trust that you would be able to do it. And I think that was a very powerful and a very helpful thing to students, at any rate.

[Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)] (11:54 - 12:00)

If you had one minute to say something to the entire province, what would you like to tell them?

[Fr. John Joseph Angers, OP] (12:05 - 13:22)

Why don't you cut that off? I think we need one another. I think that if somehow we can feel that need that we have for one another, that could bring a real strength and a unity to all of us.

I think the younger men need the wisdom of the older men, the older men who have lived out this particular life and have worked in the apostolates, that they've been in, who have the experience of living out what you can gain in no other way but by living it. And I think the older men need the enthusiasm, the hopefulness that the young men bring into the lives and into the apostolates that they become engaged in. The minute we feel somehow that we don't need one another, I think we're on the wrong track, and we're not going to be strengthening one another or helping one another out.

So my hope is for all of the members of the province that we recognize the strength that we bring to one another, whether we're old or middle-aged or young, we just have to have one another to be good Dominicans.