# Fr. Joseph Bidwill, OP Interview

**0:00:00 - Fr. Joseph Bidwill, OP**

What was it like when I came into the Order?

**0:00:03 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)**

Tell me. Don't say the line.

**0:00:08 - Fr. Joseph Bidwill, OP**

Well, I lived across the street from the House of Studies. And I guess what I saw was people playing ball every night during the summer or early spring. And it seemed like a nice bunch of fellas. And I didn't know what went on inside that house, but I'd spent most of my life playing on the grounds in the winter and the snow. climbing in that pulpit on the south wing of the House of Studies. That made an excellent place when you were a little kid to hide from your other brothers or cousins.

And when I entered the Order itself, it just blows my mind to look back at it from being in formation most of my life, ordained life, being at Smyth Hall for four years and then going to the novitiate and being involved in the new formation program that went to the chapter in '69. Because when I came in, I don't To my knowledge, there was no formation director, no vocation director.

It was Nick Walsh was the novice master. And somewhere or another, I think all my correspondence and calling, because I was only across the street, was with Nick Walsh.

**0:01:14 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)**

Where did you make your Novitiate?

**0:01:16 - Fr. Joseph Bidwill, OP**

At River Forest. It was my class. I entered in 48 in September and loaded things in the car and drove across the street. Had a big wingding party with all my grandparents were over and cousins and everything. I had a milkshake binge up in the second floor across the way. And having finished the last milkshake, we drove across the street. And all the communication was really pretty much right with Nick Walsh, as far as I can recall. He said what to bring by way of clothes and books and stuff.

I don't ever remember going over to the house talking to him. A lot of it was just by correspondence. Yeah, it was kind of weird.

**0:02:06 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)**

What year was it?

**0:02:08 - Fr. Joseph Bidwill, OP**

Well, I really didn't commit myself to coming into the Order until the Easter vacation that year.

**0:02:16 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)**

Of your senior year?

**0:02:17 - Fr. Joseph Bidwill, OP**

No, I went to two and a half years of Notre Dame.

I remember Father Van Roy, God love him. He came to me when I was a senior and said, did you ever think about being a priest? And I lied in my teeth and I said no. But I've been thinking about it ever since third grade.

I suppose those were my most valid reasons when I was a little kid. Father McIntyre used to live at the House of Studies, the first pastor there at St. Vincent's. I used to pick up myself or my brother or my cousins to be servers. He'd drive down the north sidewalk, the path, the windy path, he'd drive his car down that through the bushes, honk the horn. One of us had run out and he'd drive us to serve Mass.

And I remember him explaining rubrics to me as an altar boy. And standing in the sacristy next to the counter there, Father McIntyre explaining what rubrics were to me. I was attracted by that. I suppose Father McIntyre, if anybody, just because of his comfortableness with us kids and the servers and his times his gruffness was, you

know, I just like to be at church. I like to, you know, the serving, the way of the cross during Lent and the benedictions and the missions and whatever. And we were just kind of close because we were the family.

There were four boys downstairs and my brother and I upstairs and our two flat there. So we were available for serving when he needed servers.

And as I say, that was probably, you know, I liked that. I liked whatever he was doing and whatever it was doing to people.

And when I actually entered the order, it was because I was afraid of going to hell. And I figured the best way to not go to hell was to be a Trappist. But that was too far away. And this was safer. It was right across the street. And I didn't have to learn another confitier, because I grew up on the old Dominican mass. And about all I knew is it was a nice, good group of guys. As they walked around the block, used to shoot baskets with us in the three-car garage.

And playing ball, and I was super jacked. That was my whole life as a little kid, playing ball. And Petey O'Brien, Petey Bird coming over and chasing us off the grounds every once in a while. That was because we played ball right across the street from our house. It was too far to go down to the big field. Little kids, we ran through the bushes. And Petey Bird would come out and chase us off every once in a while.

**0:04:42 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)**

When you look back on that, what would be the reasons why you stayed when everybody else was gone?

**0:04:48 - Fr. Joseph Bidwill, OP**

Stayed where?

When everybody else was gone, like when? Late 60s. Late 60s?

**0:05:00 -Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)**

Given the reasons why you came in, because they're my reasons too.

**0:05:04 - Fr. Joseph Bidwill, OP**

Oh, okay. Well, I guess I just thank the Lord that I came in for the naive, goofy reasons that I did. And I came to some way realize how narrow my life had been. gradually, bit by bit, coming into a deeper understanding of what life is all about. And my

commitment, I guess, you know, ignorant as it was, and Lord knows it was ignorant in simple vows, and then renewing that in solemn vows, the *usque ad mortem* meant that to me. And I guess that was right, too.

The reason, one of the reasons I didn't say anything until that Easter vacation to my mom of 48, you know, I wanted to be a Dominican, was because as soon as I made it public, that's what I was going to do. And I've been thinking about it since third grade. And driving back and forth on the old South Shore to Notre Dame, where I went for two and a half years. How many hours looking out the window, seeing my reflection, and talking, what should I do?

And specializing more in college and knowing that my heart wasn't in being in my father's business. But not being able to say that. But I knew once I said it publicly, I'd be able to do it. And I want to go across the street, and I'll stay there until they throw me out.

And then, you know, I hope. certainly grew beyond that but that basic commitment that this is what I felt the Lord wanted for me and this is the way in a way quote I had to save my soul and it's come a long way from that I'll tell you that and getting out of that whole well St. John one of the first texts I remember if you love me keep my commandments and the Father will love you and we will come and take our boat in you so I was very much of a legalist and one of the biggest transitions in my life was coming to a deeper awareness that God loves me, whether I'm a sinner or not.

And He's offering me all I need. To come to him and turn away from whatever's going on in my life. And the things I thought were big sins, I don't think are big sins anymore.

**0:06:59 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)**

Where do you see the Future going? Not for you or for the order, but for the Province. Where do you think it should go? What would your vision be?

**0:07:15 - Fr. Joseph Bidwill, OP**

My vision would be... Gee whiz, I don't know. I'm really assimilating that because these last five years I've been pretty much on my own in a way I've never been before, and it's given me a new perspective. I guess what I've found in these last five years is that I've been able to share more deeply with, let's say, non-religious and other women religious. Because I've worked an awful lot with women, religious, Dominicans, as well as others. That I've been what I would hope would. and I believe it's there already to a great extent that I wasn't aware of it when I left Dubuque in 73, is a deeper level of sharing and actualizing through explicit faith relationship the presence of the risen Lord.

And that's what I came to by the time I finished in Dubuque with the kind of two things going simultaneously at Dubuque, the five years of formation work and living with the Dubuque community.

Brought me to a deep experiential awareness of people who are trying to grow and then the teaching I was doing the teaching the grace course and coming to a conceptualization of how Jesus could be present and Finding The experience at Dubuque academic from the teaching and experiential in the community verified when I went out east and dr. Ministry program and that what began to happen in Dubuque continued to happen with other people, a whole set of people I didn't know. Some Dominicans, and in a sense, they caused me more grief because they weren't as far into the dynamic as we were, at least in Dover.

And a lot of good things there, and I was touched probably more by three novices there who were in the charismatic renewal. And I was kind of coming into that myself. And I found with lay people and some religious who were open to that experience, a real confirmation of what was beginning in Dubuque.

And these last five years, it's deepened in that. And most of my encounter, regular day-by-day encounter, has been with lay people and some, especially again, women religious, who have been into the renewal charismatic kind of experience. And that has really drawn me, and I see that as a hope, not only for the church, but also for the Order.

My experiences of the renewal in the Order have kind of confirmed that the priest retreat that Jerry Cleator encouraged some of us to make out in Staten Island back in 75, was it? And to see that I was able to relate to my brothers in that same way. And then the follow-up of that, that week we had down Holy Week in Dallas in 76, was that? We were checking that the other night. And to be able to share at the same level that I was with some lay people and other women religious with my own brothers, that was mind-blowing.

And it was a very wonderful confirmation. And I haven't been in any big community other than the community here at St. Catherine's with praying with the sisters. And my experience, which is developing now down in Louisville with the Charismatic Renewal and the prayer group here, which is not a lot of sisters here at the mother house, but mostly older sisters, were very open to this. And my hope would be for the province that this deeper interpersonal sharing, I guess, and not being inhibited by the things that we were inhibited by before of actualizing the presence of the Lord.

I guess as I was sharing with you the other night, Tom O'Meara's talk to the students and just reading already this morning Matt Fox's talk, just seeing a lot of good in that, that getting away from the God out there kind of a thing and realizing that God is present in the dynamic.

One thing that I do have hesitations, you know, with some of Matt's sharing and some things, a workshop I went to down in St. Meinrad's last year is the value of getting into ourselves to find God. But what I'm kind of apprehensive about with some people is that they're not bringing in the explicit relationship to the Lord. And I see the abuses of that. People can cop out and run to Jesus and forget their brothers or sisters. But the other extreme, I think, is to find it all in the interpersonal thing is to wipe out something that I've come to see that is valid and real, especially in my ministry, of just simply preaching.

He died and He rose from the dead. And where is He? He's not locked in the tabernacle. He's present in the assembly. It's just all the things that Vatican II has had that I was reading in the 60s of the theologians who were feeding into Vatican II.

And my hope for the province would be that we can keep that alive. And I'm really... I never thought that I'd be so involved in face-to-face and group preaching and that I'd be so at home in preaching the Word. I thanked the Lord back in 1973, in the middle of my year out at Andover Newton, that I found out that I didn't have a job back at St. Rose, at Al. I thought I might go back there for some part-time teaching, but they didn't have the opening and I was notified of that, so what I was feeling drawn toward was preaching, sharing the Lord very personally with people, And Gerry Cleator gave me the go-ahead, follow that, check the preaching teams, check with Frank McNutt.

And I got as far along as that, spending the weekend with Frank and talking about it, listening mostly to what he was doing, and then got the offer here at St. Catharine's, which seemed to be a good way of working into it, because I thought my effectiveness might be long-range rather than short-range.

I'm here five years now. And it's not been nailed down here. The summers, I've practically been going all the time preaching, which has verified, in my experience, that I can be effective, and the Lord in some way using me, short-term in preaching a week retreat or workshop or whatever, that the Word, if you stick with it, and especially this reality of the risen Lord, and as that's going to be enfleshed in the dynamic of our own trying to build community, whether it's with sisters' communities or lay people or the brethren themselves.

I'm kind of excited, knowing this in some way as public, about whenever I would be back into a community with the brethren. And I would have certain expectations. I have to temper them because everybody isn't coming out of what I'm coming out of, but I sure want to share, and I'm going to have to share what's going on in my life.

If people aren't open to that, we have to take each other where we're at. But I think we have to share that.

**0:13:56 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)**

One last thing. If you were to name one person who really had an influence on you from the province, who would it be?

**0:14:12 - Fr. Joseph Bidwill, OP**

I would say right now what comes to my life in the last five years would be Frank McNutt.

**0:14:17 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)**

So for the totality of your life in the province, the biggest impact has been...

**0:14:17 - Fr. Joseph Bidwill, OP**

Gee, that's hard to say. I mean, I guess the big... As far as coming to know what a Dominican is, oh God, how can you say what a Dominican is? I think of Father McIntyre in his own way, who in some way as a pastor and anybody who knows him, which maybe most of the province doesn't now, certainly had an influence on me. And I don't know how I could say, I would say the students had an influence on me at the time when I was a young kid growing up.

From their attitude and their, their friendliness and their openness and their kid, you know, they're joking when they're playing ball and tolerating the non-ball players with the, because everybody had to be out there and they were. That attracted me. But that attracted me in a way, initially, I would say in a deep way as far as what it meant to be a Dominican, to proclaim the word and to proclaim not just the truth, but opening up that our ministry isn't just telling people the way it is, but in some way actualizing the power of the risen Lord.

And that I've been able to pray for people for healing. That I've been able to act like an idiot and play my harmonica or guitar before a hundred people, lay people or sisters. And to in some way be comfortable in knowing that the Lord is present and His power is available. I would say, you know what Frank has had to say about the healing ministry, that's opened up to me what Dominic must have been all about. What the Lord was all about.