Mark Mauritus Barron OPC History Interview

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0:00:00 - Speaker 1

What was the province like at the beginning? Who are some of the people you remember and some of the events?

0:00:09 - Speaker 2

Well, I remember distinctly the setting up of the province on one of the feasts of the Blessed Mother. I think it was that feast in December, and I had stayed over and hadn't gone on any quias at Christmastime that year. And Steve [Stephen Driscoll, OP, Eastern Province Provincial] came and... read a document over at the House of Studies. And he apparently was opposed to the division of the province. And at long last, it was divided. Father Burke had come to River Forest as a vicar when we were still students at River Forest.

And that was from 1933 on. And then finally the province had been set up in 1939.

Steve came, read the documents, and immediately left and went over to visit a good friend of his at Rosary College, have luncheon with her. And then I guess he went back to New York shortly thereafter. Fenwick was my first assignment. I was there from 1939 to 1945. Went through three principals at that time, Father Finsel and Father Van Roy and Father, what was his name? He later died.

He had been stationed in the east and then was transferred from, I think, St. Vincent's or St. Catherine's out to Louisiana.

As so often happened, why they didn't meet with Steve's approval, and so he got rid of them by exiling them to Louisiana. As for the province at the time, I suppose there was a division of opinion. There were those who thought that the province wouldn't last. Old Father J.B. Conley maintained it wouldn't last, and I used to hear Benny Meyer speak about that, that he thought that it would, and it did.

I think that we had very high ideals in those days, and we, under the leadership, of course, of Father Peter O'Brien, I don't know what else to say about the early days.

0:02:47 - Speaker 1

What was the spirit like? You were divided by a lot of distance. And how did you manage to keep together?

0:02:56 - Speaker 2

With other people in the province?

Well, during those early days, of course, from 1939 to 1945, I was stationed at Fenwick. And I think that there were so many of us at Fenwick was probably the largest Dominican fathers' community in the province at the time. And because of the work that we were doing, I suppose my own personal feeling was that we constituted a kind of group by ourselves. We didn't share much interest with what was going on at the House of Studies or with the parishes. And I guess that we didn't mind the great distances.

In my time, I managed, after getting to Fenwick, and you travel mostly by train at that time, which I've always preferred to airplanes anyway.

But in my time, I went to California in 1940, and I visited down in New Orleans. And my brother, of course, came to Houston in 1947, which was after I'd left. So I think it was never any great issue of distances at that time. We did cover a lot, and people visited us from other houses.

0:04:28 - Speaker 1

Did you come down here after you left Fenwick?

0:04:31 - Speaker 2

My next assignment was to Madison, to Blessed Sacrament, not as a parish man, but to teach at Edgewood. I was at Blessed Sacrament from 1945 until 1951, when Father Schneider was pastor there. I lived at Blessed Sacrament. Sometimes, if the weather was rather bad, I would stay up at Edgewood. But I was teaching in the college and then having religion classes in the high school and would also visit the grade school rooms there. But I was there, as I say, during those years, right after 1945, after I got my degree from Notre Dame. And maybe that's why I was changed to teaching in a college.

But I got it. After Madison, from 1951 to 1954, I was at St. Anthony's in New Orleans and teaching at Ursuline College. The last year, as I recall, in New Orleans, I was also teaching at Jesuit High School. The Jesuits did not allow their scholastics to teach

religion at that time, so they made a call upon us at St. Anthony's to supply some men. And Sal Viti and Lex Goedert and I were teaching there, and some diocesan priests. And then I took on myself,

I was teaching a class over at Sacred Heart Academy for the religious of the Sacred Heart. Yes, after Ursuline closed. Ursuline closed after two years. I was there for three years. Ursuline College closed at the end of the two years, and then I was put on the teaching religion at Dominican High School, the Dominican Sisters from Rosaryville. And I hated to leave New Orleans. Let's see, I was there from 45 to 51. And then in 51, I was transferred to Xavier, Kansas, to teach at, let's see, 51 to 54.

There's a... break in there for three years. I know I came to Houston in 1957.

0:07:13 - Speaker 1

From 1951 to 1954 you were in New Orleans? Yeah. And then 1954 to 1957 you were in Kansas?

0:07:21 - Speaker 2

No, let's see. I left Madison in 1951. I was six years in Madison, three years in New Orleans. I hated to leave New Orleans.

Then I went from, well, in 54, I made a trip to Europe. When I came back, I found that I'd been transferred to this place in Kansas, St. Mary College near Leavenworth. And I was there from 54 to 57, teaching theology in the college and, well, saying a regular mass there every day. I was assigned officially to Holy Name in Kansas City. The last year there because of my unfortunate relationship with the chaplain, both of the college and the chaplain of the mother house, why I chose to live and commute daily between holding our name and the college across the border in the state of Kansas.

From 57 to 63, I was a chaplain over at the Dominican Sisters' Mother House here in Houston, and was teaching at Dominican College, living over there. At first I was assigned to Holy Rosary, and then later the assignment was changed to what was then called St. Mary's Student Center. which was a smaller place, of course, than it is now. And then from 63 to 65, I was assigned to St. Peter Martyr Priory up in Winona, Minnesota and teaching at St. Teresa's College in Winona.

It got too much for me. In 65, I asked for a change, and I tried, unsuccessfully, to get back into high school teaching at Bishop Lynch in Dallas. And I lasted two months from September until around Christmas time. And I left there and was temporarily assigned out for a month at St. Dominic's in Denver. Left there, went from Denver up to Kenosha,

and was the chaplain of the Dominican Sisters out at Siena Dale outside Kenosha. I was there from 65 until 70 and then volunteered, unfortunately, for the job of chaplain at the Dominican Sisters of Racine.

I think both Bill Murphy and Tony Norton were leaving at that time. And I chose to live in the motherhouse itself instead of occupying the house which had been built some years previous for the chaplain and Dominican teachers at the, I remember Matt Hynous was one of the teachers there at the time. But I was found unacceptable by the sisters at Racine, and so I was politely asked to leave. I called Joop and asked if he had a place that I could come down and visit at Holy Rosary.

So I came down here, and I've been in Houston ever since. Well, I was in Racine from, as I say, from September until November.

I remember coming down on the feast, or just before the feast of St. Albert, patron of our province on November 15th, and staying here or being in Houston at Holy Rosary from that year 1970 to November 1970 until, well, November 1978. Now I'm over here, retired.

0:11:41 - Speaker 1

What did you think about the years you were at the Novitiate? What was it like?

0:11:46 - Speaker 2

I liked it very much. except one of the things I couldn't help notice was that there was a book published some years ago, "And Madly Teach," and all I could think of at that time up there with Malachy Quinn was "And Madly Compose."

And with all due respect to Malachy, I think that the music he was composing was even more difficult than the plain chant. But I enjoyed it there. I enjoyed it very much. I like to be back in a formal house. And I considered it somewhat of a distinction to be placed in the novitiate house.

So I had two very pleasant years there. But, well, my health wasn't too good. And already I was finding it rather difficult to be teaching to the younger people in this day and age. And I was just as happy to get out of it.

0:12:56 - Speaker 1

Looking back over your years in the province, could you single one or two people out that you feel may have had a great influence in your life or in the life of the province?

0:13:11 - Speaker 2

Well, I think Father Peter O'Brien did.

He was a great person for saving money and getting things started, I think, in the right way.

And I'm happy to say that after my coming here to Houston in those early years, 1970, I visited over in Austin and over in Louisiana and I saw Father O'Brien, and at that particular time, he was in that community hospital at Ponchatoula. And it struck me that he had mellowed considerably from the time that I had known him.

Of course, he was our prior at River Forest when we were students there that last year. And then I'd known him as provincial. I found him rather distant. As a matter of fact, I found that I could relate much more easily to people in the eastern province, not excluding Steve McDermott.

And Father O'Brien, I found rather cold. The same with Father Hughes. I think that if you were Irish and Catholic and Bostonian and voted the Democratic ticket. It was OK with Father Hughes, but with some of us, he didn't even bother to make those inquiries to find out whether we voted Democratic or not.

But he played favorites, and I certainly couldn't relate to him. I think, too, I liked Bonnie Marr. I think I would single out those two men.

0:15:12 - Speaker 1

It's interesting you should say that about Pete and Ed Hughes, because they were both Easterners, whereas Steve is from Iowa originally.

0:15:22 - Speaker 2

Yeah, well now Pete O'Brien is not an Easterner. He was from Chicago. But that is interesting that Steve came from that small town in Eagle Grove, Iowa, and there was a sister up at among the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, who was a cousin or something of his. And my mother had the distinct, I suppose you could call it, a privilege or a pleasure of belonging to the Third Order chapter at St. Pius in Chicago during the period when Kate Knowles, who I think was either Steve's sister or a cousin of Steve, and Janet O'Brien were both members.

So... Those were the early days of the province, and my mother was getting the reaction of both people.

I think that from Janet O'Brien that her brother didn't get a fair deal because Detroit was left in the eastern province. And Kate Knowles, I think, well, she was sitting rather well. She was here living in Chicago, and her brother was provincial in the east. But those two people, I suppose that as far as influence on me is concerned, my own contemporaries had more influence, and especially one of them in the class ahead of mine, who was in the eastern province, and I could honestly and truthfully say he was the best friend I ever had in the Order.

Reason or other why he brought the relationship to an end and I've never been able to understand. It has bothered me throughout the years and I only can think of how much we lost.

0:17:16 - Speaker 1

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

0:17:25 - Speaker 2

No, I can't think of anything to say at this time. I prefer to put it off. I'd like to observe what will transpire at Forum.

I think that there is a gap in the province. I don't know how to seal the gap or to... cross the gap. I think personally that the best move in that direction has been made by Damien in calling for this forum and requiring people, if at all possible, well, it's a kind of command performance, and I think that's the only way you're going to do anything about it. We've all become so paranoid, I think, about the cleavage and the division.

I've tried to bridge the gap myself, but I'm not finding it easy.

And to my mind it's so unnecessary and it never happened in the past.

In my time, maybe I was just curious about people ahead of me. I think you always know better the people ahead of you. you don't know the people who follow you and I was interested in the people ahead of me, but I think we've to a great extent we've lost a sense of history and we're concerned only with our own contemporaries and maybe the people that follow us. I'm reminded of the line in a movie some years ago which I saw in New York around, I think it was being filmed in New York.

I stayed up in New York at Jubilee Year in 1963 and the name of the movie I think was The Private Life of Henry Orient with Peter Sellers in it. And this young girl has a crush on Peter Sellers who is represented as a great pianist. And she's fallen in love with him and her, her aunt. A part played by B.B. Osterwald, who was part of father Hartke's affair of a business down at Catholic You many years ago. I think she appeared and, uh, Sing Out Sweet land, I think in that production.

Why? She said to the young girl, Well, um, no, don't, don't let it bother you.

I remember when I was young, I. I fell in love with John Barrymore. And the niece turns to her and says, well, who was John Barrymore?

And as we get older, things like that, we do resent it. As if somehow the people that lived, anybody who was over 30, is dangerous.

0:20:33 - Speaker 1

Of course, you realize that's the whole purpose of my doing what I'm doing. We really do need a sense of history.

0:20:41 - Speaker 2

Do you? Do you? Gosh, don't get me going.

0:20:46 - Speaker 1

Well, actually, that's what I've been trying to do, is get you going.

0:20:53 - Speaker 2

But what use will you put this to? That's the whole point.

0:20:57 - Speaker 1

Well, we're going to edit it so that we can have given areas, and you mentioned a number of areas, especially teaching at Fenwick, where we're going to have people saying different things.

0:21:11 - Speaker 2

Oh, mm-hmm. I see and hear so much. Some of it I'm afraid we can blame on the Church. Why the Church ever made certain concessions, I simply don't know. And if the Church did, and I guess it did, we became positive iconoclasts after the Second Vatican Council we seem to want to beat each other to the draw in throwing out things that were not that important. I put it this way today that I try to distinguish in my own mind between what I would really put down as sacred cows and the things that are really sacred.

And. The younger generation seems to think anything of the past is just nothing more than a sacred cow, and you have to throw it out. This thing of reverting to our baptismal names or not taking religious names, I see no need of it. If religious life is going to be significant at all, I think one of the little ways in which it can be made significant and remain significant is the fact That, in the tradition established in the Old Testament, where Abram's name was changed to Abraham, and Jacob's was changed to Israel.

And where in the church, when a man becomes pope, he adopts a new name.

Why we have to revert to our baptismal name? Maybe simply we did it because the stress was on baptism and religious life didn't count for a roll of pins, so we dropped the religious name. Somebody teach, some sister teaching, working over at the University of Houston and calling herself Ginger. And then the sister that fired me up at Racine preferring to be called Susie.

Gosh. I can't see it.

And there's so many other things that... We simply lost our identity as religious, seemingly just trying to become buddy-buddy with everybody. I wrote an article during the week I substituted for Father Joubert recently when he went down to Mexico for the bulletin over at Holy Rosary.

I must give you a copy of it before you leave, but I... I set down in that article some of the things that especially gripe me. And I would be willing to say here that I think I would express the same thing to Damien.

I used to read the articles of Gerald Vann. And he used to make use of the word squalid. And I date it back to the time when Gilbert Graham was provincial and those few months I spent in Dallas. I think that the Dominican life in our country has become squalid. And I like to use the word squalor and squalid as antonyms of splendor and splendid. And there was something splendid about life before. It's just squalid now. That's all.

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