

Synopsis of Interview with Father Bill Bichsel, S.J.
February 7, 1992 and March 5, 1992
Tacoma, Washington

Father Bill Bichsel, S.J. is a Jesuit Priest. He was born in Tacoma in 1928 and grew up in the Hilltop neighborhood. One of the interesting little stories he relates in his autobiographical interview of Feb 7, 1992 is that "in 63 years he has moved a mile". In other words, when he was born his family lived down at 27th and "G" and now he lives at 14th and "G" in the Catholic Workers House. As he says, "upward mobile".

Father's two interviews are extremely interesting. The first interview is rather autobiographical. However, from the perspective of St. Leo's parish history this offers a valuable insight into the type of person Father Bichsel is and what shaped his life growing up in Tacoma and beyond.

His father was chairman of the local engineers union working for the Northern Pacific Railroad. Later on, he became involved with the national organization. He remembers his mother as always compassionate and feeding many men who were migrant/transient types riding the rails. The Bichsel's home was right above the railroad tracks and each morning she would have a meal ready for a number of men. This early example of charity certainly instilled similar values in her children. This is evident in the active influence Father Bichsel took in the large Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners St. Leo's began in the 1970's.

Father Bichsel was instrumental in the Martin Luther King Center coming into being. He worked with many committed people over the years. Many are mentioned concerning the various programs.

Father graduated from Bellarmine Prep and entered the Jesuit seminary. He completed a portion of his education in Oregon, then traveled to Germany. After ordination, he returned to the Northwest and spent time at Gonzaga University as Dean of Students. Several years

later he traveled to Boston for graduate studies. After returning to the Tacoma area he was assigned to Settle Prep. This was a very difficult time for Father, both professionally and personally.

He had become much more politically aware and voiced his concerns to the constituents at Seattle Prep. He did not fit into the arch-conservative element he was surrounded by. The Archbishop then asked Father to transfer to St. Leo's. He gladly accepted and came to Tacoma in the spring of 1969.

Father has been instrumental in many social justice issues here in Tacoma. He has been involved in many political demonstrations voicing his opinion for what he feels is unjust in our society.

When he arrived at St. Leo's many of the Vatican II changes had just been initiated. Many parishioners were unhappy. His anti-establishment type of appearance tended to upset some of the parishioners. However, he feels that many of the older people actually were more tolerant of him than the younger. He became a focus and a conscience for the parish while he was in residence. Many of the social justice programs St. Leo's has undertaken evolved through his direct intercession.

I feel it is important for anyone who would like to gain more of an insight into St. Leo's, Father Bichsel, or the various social programs in the Hilltop community to read these interviews. They are insightful, interesting, and refreshing.

Father Bichsel currently lives in the "G" Street Community House which enables mentally challenged or mentally ill to cope with outside living. He espouses the work begun by Dorothy Day who instituted the First Catholic Worker House in 1933 during the Depression.

Bill Bichsel lives out what he believes.

February 7, 1992

Interview conducted by Professor Michael Honey with **Father Bill Bichsel, S.J.**, former Associate at St. Loe's Parish, founder of "G" Street Community, very active in social justice issues.

I am a Catholic Priest, a Jesuit priest, 63 years of age. I live in the Tacoma Catholic Workers [house] that is up on "G" Street, that is 1417 South "G" Street.

Basically -- what we do is -- we take in people from the streets, or people struggling with mental illness who have been on the streets or out of Western State [hospital], or people struggling with drug addiction, or people with just no place to go and we try to live in community [with them]. We do live in community. We live together, prepare the meals, do the dishes. We have a garden and we try to do the garden work together. Then we have another little house, too, in our complex. It's called the Lewis Jones House. It is especially for people with mental illness. Although, in the bigger house...called Guadeloupe House, people with mental illness are there as well.

We are trying to work with comprehensive mental health centers as far as being support groups for some people with mental illness. And we have a farm we are struggling with [to support] down in Chehalis. Finally we do have a core group down there. [Living there] with the idea of [helping] people...get out of our pretty violent, drug addicted, environment [and go] down there to...get their lives [back] together. So we are working on that. That's part of what we do.

We try to live -- this comes out of our own understanding of the gospel, our own understanding of the following of Jesus in our lives and what that means, and living it out -- non-violently. [We live] the way we understand it...not to return violence for violence...trying to resist evil as well. So we try to do that...the living out nonviolence. [It] has to begin with the living out amongst ourselves. So [we try to do that]...with all of us living together in this community and...work things out and trying not to kill each other. We get into fights but when you are living together -- all these things, you know, the tensions of living in a family are there. So, with all of our own shortcomings, we try to share out lives with one another.

We do take stands, political stands, as far as the violence we [believe] is...being done by our government in El Salvador or has happened in El Salvador and Nicaragua. We took stands against what was happening in our build up with the Persian Gulf War. On that occasion, the day the war actually began, three or four of us were arrested at the recruiting office in protest for our [United State's] resorting to force once again. We have been arrested at different times as far as our stands on El Salvador and the intervention.

Our tradition comes from a lady by the name of Dorothy Day and Peter Morin who started the Catholic Worker Movement in New York in 1933 during the Depression. She...was a journalist and reporter and worked very closely with the Communist Party and with the working people. [She] experienced a conversion in her life to Catholicism. A lot of her close friends and associates looked at this as betrayal. [She was] going over to the enemy, which they viewed the church as, pretty much an arch-conservative sort of an entity, that went hand-in-hand with the pro-government forces, etc. Well, she retained all of her old instincts and philosophies and became a real conscience to the Catholic Church in America. She took a real strong resistance against war, armament, and things of that nature. Basically, [she] ...had a kitchen, soup kitchen [and] took in people. [She was] trying to live out... [her] understanding of the gospel -- basically, feed those who are hungry, clothe those who are naked, visit those who are in prison...trying to live out what you say you believe and and trying to do that nonviolently. So, anyway, we live in that tradition. There are a number of Catholic Worker Houses across the United States and we are one of them.

Well, my little story begins -- actually where I am now. I am living at 1417 South "G" Street. I was born on 27th and "G" Street down where the Goodwill [store] is now. So I tell people in 63 years I have moved a mile. (Laugh) So how's that for being upward mobile. If this gets too boring, or you start yawning, just let me know. Raise your hand, I don't know, if you want to interrupt or say something, or [just] say shut up. [I] don't know what to do on that.

But I was born down there. In our family we were six boys and a girl. I was the youngest of the boys. My dad was a Railroad engineer. He was German my mother was Irish. So we grew up in the

neighborhood. Being born in 1928, [I] grew up during the Depression, as we all did. I went to school at Holy Rosary Grade School that was right across the street down there and it still exists. [It was] across Tacoma Avenue. It is that big church there at the end of Tacoma Avenue. The Benedictines taught there. So that's where we went to school.

Growing up during the Depression nobody had much, you know. ...there was no such thing as locked doors or locked windows. Everyone knew everyone else in the neighborhood or the wider neighborhood. If you needed four, eggs, butter, cheese, or whatever you needed, you'd go next door. Most of the time you borrowed from one another. That was constantly in motion that way. So you kind of grow up with an atmosphere of neighborhood community. [It's] the kind of thing where, you know, you just take it for granted. You know everybody's business. You know times are tough, that kind of thing, but nobody has anything. But, there is this remarkable thing going on that everybody knows everybody. You still fight the feuds...and things like that that go on...the pettiness and all of those things...that people have living with one another...the jealousies, petty, rivalry, all that. But it was a different kind of world. [A world] where you share[d]. I'm not trying to romanticize it at all but I think those are the kinds of things I experienced growing up.

I remember -- especially -- it is very strong in my mind -- during the Depression, my mother out on our back porch. Our house was where the Goodwill is now. She had a table and chairs [outside]. Every morning she would feed three or four guys coming up from the tracks that were right down below our house. They [tracks] are still there but much more used then [at that time vs now]. And they [would] climb up from the tracks up into [the yard] and my mother would cook every morning [for them]. She would make the same thing all the time. Usually it was fried potatoes, bacon, and eggs and home made bread. So that was a part of our regular thing [life routine] growing up. And I can remember my mother -- you know, we were Catholics...were raised when you [were] not supposed to eat meat on Friday and things like. And she would be cooking bacon and ham and stuff like that for all these guys on Friday. I would try to convince her that she was committing a sin. [I'd

say] "don't you know this is wrong." But somehow or another she assured me that this was OK with God. We didn't have to worry about that kind of thing. But that was [one] experience.

My dad, of course, was a union man with the Railroad Engineers. Three of our brothers followed him to the Railroad and became engineers -- NPR [Northern Pacific Railroad] at the time. My dad became chairman. He was local chairman of the engineers here in Tacoma, Tacoma Division of NPR. Then he was elected to the National Chairman of the Engineers of the NP. So our union...the union tradition was strong in our family. We were raised very much with...[the values of] sharing. There was always this sense of helping the underdog...[that] kind of thing was there.

But, then there were a few black families living down from us on Fawcett Avenue. My dad was a very hard working, just sort of a person and my mother, too, very [much], you know. But, even with that, my Dad never really addressed the issue of racial oppression or racial inequality that existed here [in Tacoma]. ...at no time do I remember him saying...you know it's really [unjust treatment]. He thought everyone ought to be given an equal chance but he never really addressed [the issue] saying, " You know, what's happening to the Black people here in our community..." I think he was very much the kind of person, a man of his time...he worked. I think they [Blacks] were looked on as second class citizens. I know they were...even less than that. So you grow up with those ambiguities, the good and that which is lacking as well.

I wonder if the people who came up from the tracks to get food, if there were any blacks?

There were, Yes. Yes.

But you didn't see any problem there?

Oh, no. There was none at all. That was no problem. ...later I found out, too, that the Brotherhood of Local Engineers, during that particular time -- during the thirties and forties -- there was exclusion for people of color, which I didn't realize until later on. ...

Then we did all the things [kids normally do], going to grade school, you know, [at] Holy Rosary. [We did] whatever you do -- fall in love with a girl, this-n-that, fight, argue, play ball out on the rock pile. Then I went to Bellarmine High School and was taught by the Jesuit priests and those who were studying for the priesthood in the Jesuit order. They called them Scholastics or Misterys and they [also] taught there. At that time, Bellarmine was pretty much a school for the working class people. They [students of working class parents] were mostly the ones going to Bellarmine. Now it's a little bit different. I certainly wouldn't be able to get into anything like that now. But at that particular time it was mostly working class people. Tuition was pretty [?].

Those [Jesuits and Scholastics] who taught there, they did everything. They did all of their own janitorial [work]. The Jesuits did all the janitorial work and they did all the cooking. They lived right there. They did the coaching and they did the teaching. So there was a real sense of community there. And so I went to school there and participated in the sports. But going through there [Bellarmine] was that sense of community. They didn't have much. You were aware of the kind of comradery that existed there and the bonds and so forth that did [exist]. I think [comradery] struck me somewhat. I think, in certain ways, there were longings or desires to, maybe, imitate that sort [of life].

And when I was growing up, too, I know that Pearl Harbor had happened. Just kind of addressing what you were saying, I grew up in a neighborhood that was German, Irish, some Scandinavia...but, you know, kind of German, Irish, and Greek. Then down [from us] there were some black families and then Japanese were down a little bit to the North of us, going from Market right up to Tacoma Avenue.

I can remember, as I was growing up, I had a paper route going through this area. During the Christmas rush you [would] help out with the mail [delivery]. They would give us a job during the Christmas time and it was always in the same area. One of the things I recal...is that we used to walk from our house, all the time, to go down to the movies...go downtown either to the Roxy or the Rialto [unintelligible name of place downtown]. That was the heart of Tacoma. Everything took place right in there...right in that area. Ninth and Broadway was kind of like the

hub of everything...like Broadway, Commerce and Pacific and going from 9th to 13th. That was it. That was all. Everyone met there. Everything was down there -- all your stores, all your shops, your professional people, everything.

I remember going down to the store or walking down to the movies, one day after Pearl Harbor, this was in 1942. I'm not too sure -- maybe about March and going down Tacoma Avenue. They had the Japanese Day School there, the language school. After school and every Saturday, the Japanese students were there for language training and for cultural training and everything else. They were all exceptionally good students from the school system here in Tacoma. But, I can remember going by with this real eerie feeling. The whole thing was shut down and ordinarily there were kids outside in the playground below, playing. You always expected that. But it was all boarded up. I was in the 8th grade at the time and I remember what sort of eerie feeling it was and --

Was it already boarded up the day after Pearl Harbor?

No, No. Pearl Harbor was in December and this was the following March of 1942. I think it was, or something like that, when the Executive Order [forced Japanese relocation] came out. I think it was sometime in the spring time though...going by and seeing that [empty playground].

Did you have Japanese friends?

I knew some of them. I didn't. I knew some of them from my paper route and delivery of the mail etc. and the people that ran the little store there on Commerce. But I was always in the Catholic school system and there were no Japanese in the Catholic schools to speak of -- a few maybe, but most of them were in the public school systems. So I didn't have a chance [to know many]. But I remember how...how it was just kind of awe. I remember on Pearl Harbor Day itself -- on that particular day -- I was downtown that day. ...there were a lot of Japanese restaurants etc...and I know people were going in and ordering food and walking out without paying for it. There was a Japanese gas station going up Jefferson where somebody had smashed all the

windows. So there was a certain amount of violence that was beginning to happen.

Was there more of that leading up to the evacuation? Did it go on for a while or was it just in the immediate aftermath [bombing of Pearl Harbor]?

It was more immediate -- more immediate when it was happening. I think there was beginning to grow that sort of craze again...this is the enemy --

Nationalism?

Oh, yes. It was just played on. There was no doubt about it. We [were] most righteous. So, yes, that was strong.

So I went through Bellarmine High School and certainly wasn't a great student, by any matter or means. [I] played in the athletic program and things like that -- football, baseball, Then I can remember during high school when they [United States government] dropped the Atom Bomb on Hiroshima. I was hitchhiking over to Seattle with a friend who was just going into the Navy and they broke in to announce that the Japanese, pardon me, that we had just bombed Hiroshima with an atom bomb. We were staying, "an atom bomb, what's an atom bomb"? It was just kind of like...an awe...kind of thing. So the war ended that year.

I graduated the next year from Bellarmine. Then one of the guys that I knew real well had gotten out of the service. He hadn't finished high school and he wanted to come back and finish at Bellarmine so we got to be friends. I remember this girl I was going with told me that she heard that he [friend] was going into the Jesuit Order. I thought, you know, you're wrong. I don't think that. She said, "No, he's going into the Order." And so then I asked him about it and he said, "Yes that's true." He was going to enter the Jesuit Order and the Novitiate beginning in the Seminary down in Sheridan, Oregon. So he started to work on me saying, 'how about you; do you think you have a vocation, or do you think you have this kind of calling?' And I said, "Well, no I don't

think so." He kept working at it so finally one day I said, "Well, gee, maybe I do." I'm easily influenced. (laughter)

Is that saying the Catholics brainwashed you into becoming a Catholic priest? (student question)

(Laugh) No. Larry Donohue did. No, Larry did. So I get down there and we are down there four months, down at the Novitiate in Sheridan, Oregon and then he [Larry Donohue] leaves. The thought of this girl he was going with back in Tacoma became so strong that [he felt] I have to get out of here. So he left and left me there...my good buddy. So I entered the Jesuit order and I was at down at Sheridan, Oregon for four years.

It was after the war, in 1946. So half of the people who were in my particular class were right out of the service and half of us were right out of high school. So, anyway, there was a little bit of adjustment we all had to do there [in the novitiate]. At that time vocations to the priesthood and to the Order were on the upgrade.

Now at that particular time, after the war, you are leading a life of real...you begin to get into what it is [means] to be a Jesuit. You are learning the prayerful life and [learning] what this is and how it fits into the Catholic Church and how this fits into the larger world and things of that nature. You are leading a very, very, sort of, monastic type of life. You know, you are way back in this monastery up in the hills. And so you are cut off from any kind of real commerce at all. I mean there is no radio -- at that time radio was the thing. So there's no radio, no newspapers, or anything else. And so, you know, it [solitude] is trying to get into the rhythm of this kind of life.

Tape 630 to 760 Father continues to talk about his seminary studies, mentions experiences on a trip back home to visit, and continues on to discuss his experiences teaching at Bellarmine as a Scholastic.

It seems that this kind of existence would lead you to be very apolitical. And yet you when you are teaching and when you are thrown into a social situation, during the McCarthy era, I'm just really wondering how that was to be confronted with that [politics].

What was it like to go from this very calm situation and all of a sudden have to deal with the social?

Well..as you are going through in the Jesuits...there was a political awareness and there were Jesuits involved in lots of ways, politically in different things and so on. Then my own background, my democratic background, belonging to the democratic party, the working party and stuff like that, was always there. I never really dropped that.

When I came out and we were going through the McCarthy era periods, I would -- One of the classes I was teaching was History. I would bring this [politics] out to the students and we would have forums on the McCarthy debate, what McCarthy was doing and the hearings. So that involved me in the life of the students more politically. Some of their parents didn't exactly agree with what I was saying. They were pretty behind McCarthy. [They felt] that McCarthy was all to protect the United States and defend the United States etc. So...I was not completely unprepared for it.

Then also the segregation issue, that was 1954, when the Supreme Court decision of Brown vs School board came down. That was always kind of a thing -- There weren't very minority students at Bellarmine, certainly not when I went through [as a student] or when I was teaching.

When you were teaching there [at Bellarmine] was it still a working class school?

By then it was coming out more...that you had more professional people in it. But it was still mostly the middle class working area while I was teaching. That was still true. But there were a little more smatterings of that [students whose parents were professionals]. When I was growing up and going there to school, it was a pretty simple division. Anybody on the South side was working class and anybody on the North Side had the money. Or that's the way we used to divide it -- from the North end you were professional and you've got money and from the South end, not[professional]. But it was beginning while I was still teaching there.

Then one of the things at Bellarmine High school...I began to question...was the ROTC. They brought ROTC to Bellarmine in 1935. And it stayed there until I think 1955. That's one thing about my involvement in ROTC. Going through school, it was mandatory that you take it for two years and I flunked it both years. ...at the end of six weeks, ordinarily you go from a buck private with one stripe...it was automatic. I never got that. I think I was the only one that went through and never got a promotion. I flunked it two years and I had to take it another year. Finally they [Bellarmine] dropped it. And it wasn't any sense of anti-militarism, as it was, I was just incorrigible at that particular time.

831--071 After teaching at Bellarmine, talks about going to Germany for four years of theology study and his experiences there. After Ordination he returned to Port Townsend for a retreat.

The setup for what the Jesuits are now [education] is a lot different from what it was when I went through [seminary]. Mine [education] was pretty traditional, the way it was for years and years. But you know, Second Vatican had happened 1962-65 and [the attitude changed to] let's throw open the windows to this stuffy old thing that's going on here, and to the legalism, the hierarchy, to who it was, John Paul XXIII. A lot of changes began to happen in the church and a lot of people began to be freed up. A lot a lot people who [were] in the priesthood left the priesthood and chose to get married, rather than go on and do this. So it was a time of opening up. ...sort of what, in a sense, Gorbachev has. If you open up, then a lot of other things happen. That's certainly what happened with the Church. And there was expression, there was laity assuming more responsibility, and at times coming into conflict with the hierarchy in lots of different ways, which is still happening.

While I was in Germany, John XXIII, became the Pope. They expected him to be just an interim kind of person, to kind of go along. But he kind of opened up a can of worms, which was really a healthy thing for the Catholic Church.

So then after -- you were finishing at Port Townsend?

Finished at Port Townsend in about 1960 and my first long [assignment] was at St. Aloysius Parish in Spokane which is right next to Gonzaga University. I was there for two years. During that time I was more involved with the poor in the parish. There was a certain amount of racism and things like that, which was evident to me at least, at the parish. So after two years at St. Aloysius, I went over -- right next door is Gonzaga University.

I was at Gonzaga University for three years as Dean of Students in Administration. You know [this] was a completely new world for me because I had not been formally -- I had been through the Jesuit course of education and everything, which was all of your [normal advanced education] but I had not been to a "University setting". So here I was Dean of Students, in charge of student life, that's your housing, your food services, student government, student organizations, discipline all those kinds of things.

And right away you are in this hub-bub of things, with all of the student life and things were going on at that time. The Free Speech Movement was starting at Berkeley and so forth. Things were getting 'perkable'. But they really didn't perk that much at Gonzaga because it was very traditiona. ...there were some things happening but they were mostly in the area of panty raids and things like that. They [events] weren't that much as far as real injustices, protests, things like that. Although there were some students on campus that began to [become aware]. My awareness began to pick up. Vietnam happened. The Gulf of Tonkin happened. And...I think...the real sense of the military, the injustice, that we were beginning to be involved in was beginning to come home to me. I had a lot of good friends, student friends, who were in ROTC on the campus and this was causing a little bit of conflict there but --

You mean they were having doubts about these [events]?

No. They weren't having doubts at all about it. But I was having doubts about what they [ROTC students] were doing and what we were doing about Vietnam. You know [the attitude of the government] we

were going to save you even if we kill you. And so these things began to push in me a lot.

There were some African [American] students at Gonzaga at this time who got involved in some racial issue in town. I took the part of the African students so I came into conflict with some of the town people, the people who donated to Gonzaga University, and things of that nature. So there was some conflict arising that way, too. Although I got backing from the President [of Gonzaga] at that particular time but --

Tape 134--151. Questions and answers concerning how he became assigned to Gonzaga in Spokane.

Was your reaction to things at this point mainly from just reading the newspapers and watching what was going on in society?

Well, what was happening in Spokane, it was a very conservative town. The John Birch Society figured really strong there and during my years at St. Aloysius [Parish] and my years at Gonzaga [University] they [John Birch Society] were a real strong force in the town. [They were] organizing people against the Communist threat and weeding out professors, etc. who [were] red etc., -- in universities, whatever. So this was going on in Spokane. When I first got there, I kind of looked at it academically. Oh, well, they are afraid of Communism and maybe you have to be afraid of Communism and things like that. But it was more when I got to Gonzaga where I saw...that I put it together. The people who were doing this John Birch thing were also the same ones who wanted me to expel the Black student from the University because he had been going with a white student there. So there was a lot of pressure put on [me] that way.

Then...at different times in Spokane [I] witnessed that [element] which is a very pro-military, very arch-conservative [element] at different rallies and meetings. I would go to a few meetings and try to bring up the other point of view. More and more, because Spokane was such a reactionary town, it was kind of pushing me to define where I was and what I wanted. At that time I still had a crew cut and things like that. But I think some of the racial incidents and some of the strong [people]

who were the backers of Gonzaga, and a lot of the moneyed interests, and a lot of these were tied into a lot of arch-conservative kinds of things, [helped me decided].

By 1966 I decided I don't want to continue this. In some way or another I'm not sure where this is leading me and I'm not sure what I'm doing here with it [Gonzaga]. I had real doubts about my continuing. So when you don't know what to do, go back to school. (laughter) So that's what I did. I applied to Boston University and got a grant there. I went back and got into this [program] in 1966. I got into a Graduate Program, Masters Program in Counseling, etc. that was a two year program. And, I think a lot of things that were happening to me began to take more shape in Boston...I guess away from everything. [It was the] First time I was at an all secular university. Most of the people in class with me were Jewish, etc. So I got along well, we got along well.

And then I became more and more involved. Of course, the Vietnam War strong and I became more and more involved with different groups in Boston. You know, demonstrating against the war. It was also the time when McCarthy decided, in 1968, he was going to cast in as a candidate, when Johnson said we wasn't going to run anymore or seek reelection. So we became backers of Eugene McCarthy and his very strong anti-Vietnam War stand.

Who were the visible people that you were with?

The visible people...well...there was a strong student movement, in Boston itself, where they would organize demonstrations and so forth. There was a draft card burning down in the Arlington Church and I started attending all these things and becoming more a part of this. I can't remember some of the names but it was a peace group in Boston itself. So, it was basically going to these kind of demonstrations and I guess getting more and more aware.

One of the things, too, that is kind of a landmark with me -- ...several things happened -- there was a Jesuit scholastic there, that's a person who is not yet ordained. He had long hair and was telling me how much flack he was getting from other Jesuits because he had his long hair. I can recall, back when I was Dean of Students at Gonzaga, I

used to get on some of the students there for having long hair. So anyway, he was saying, you know that they were calling him fag and queer and everything else because he was wearing long hair like this. It just hit me so much that I started growing my hair long like that...kind of solidarity.

Another thing happened when I went into this Irish Catholic area in Dorchester. I was working in a parish in Boston and I went to get a hair cut. I was just sitting down, and a Black guy just went by, and the barber said, "I hope that Nigger doesn't stop in here." So I just got up from the chair and I took off the thing [shoulder cape]. I said, "I don't need a haircut here." I walked out. It kind of solidified things for me about where I was, and I guess, where I was going.

So was it other's people's actions that were forcing you to turn to your own reevaluation?

Yes, I think so and what was happening with other people. I guess more of a growing awareness of what was happening.

Tape 231--301-Questions about Graduate program, duties with church, where he lived during first year in Boston, move to Dorchester, passing/meeting with Daniel Berrigan, small vignettes about time in Boston.

...It was a great learning time for me in Boston. I was in this program. [In] part of it I did this internship out of Boston State Hospital, working with people in the mental hospital out there, under real good supervision. Then I also worked on the drug addiction unit, the methadone maintenance program, which were really good things for me. I always had an affinity for people with mental illness etc. so working there was great. Then, it looked like I was going to get a job there and stay longer than my three years in Boston, and maybe be hired by the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, so I asked my provincial back in Oregon if was OK to stay another year.

But that fell through [because] they didn't want to fund me and have me stay there just another year and come back. So, anyway I came

back. I didn't let my provincial, in Oregon, know I was coming back. I wanted to look around because I wasn't sure where I could and any more. I knew I didn't want to go back into Jesuit colleges or high schools. And I wasn't sure where to end up, what to do, exactly. I felt different, you know. My hair was longer and things like that and so -- long story short -- the provincial knew I was back in [Tacoma] and he sent me to Seattle Prep High School. That was 1968-69.

You know, Seattle Prep is an upper -- they are the more moneyed class and I had a very difficult time. I was supposed to go there as a Counselor and teach five classes of religion and things of that sort. It was a very hard, hard experience for me. I began to question whether I should continue with this. The faculty were conservative, the students[were conservative], the parents were arch-conservative. I became more aware of the resistance of the Jesuits and others in the East, like [Daniel] Berrigan. ...there was Napalm, burning draft files and things of this nature [and] I was beginning to put this [resistance] out. Vietnam was still going on. I was getting flack from parents and students about my stand and what the gospel was. I would try to integrate what I understood religion to be, the living out of our belief, and that doesn't mean an identification with the American system, with the flag or anything else. And so I was running into resistance there and then. It was...it was a most trying time for me.

Also, my life as a Jesuit vowed celibate, I fell in love and that caused all sorts of consternation, pain and everything else for me. I didn't know what to do and I began to wonder, are you living a lie and this and that. Anyway, it was a tremendously hard year for me, 1968-69. And before when I taught at high school and when I was at Gonzaga, I always had control [of the students] and [at Seattle Prep] there was no control of students, whatever. I found that in my high school classes, I didn't have the control I used to have when I was a Mister teaching in the high school [Bellarmino]. I would not hesitate to bang a kid over the head or things of that nature. So pretty soon, there was a good kind of respect that grew. But I was a little bit forceful about it. Well, of course, that was no longer part of me now, being more aware of non-violence and things like that. And so it was a hard year for me. I didn't react the way...I didn't feel that I was very much in control of classes. I felt that it

was hard and they [students] weren't taking what I was offering. It was not that easy living in that Jesuit community which was pretty conservative. We were surrounded by, I thought, too much opulence, etc.

Were you living in a Jesuit house?

Yes. I was living in a Jesuit house at Seattle Preparatory School. So, anyway, my Provincial wrote to me sometime in March and said, 'what would you think' -- he wasn't aware of all the difficulties I was having...to some extent I think he was but -- "what would you think about helping out in Tacoma, going to St. Leo's in Tacoma for the summer?" That would have been the summer of, let's see...the summer of 1969. So I said, "gee, I'll go now." (laughter) They found no big trouble with it at school. Although, I was the counselor for the juniors, by that time classes had been somewhat rearranged. Anyway, I left there early, the beginning of May or end of April, and came down to St. Leo's.

How did you resolve this love thing? That raises a whole other dimension to the situation.

Yes. Well, I knew that I felt a real split in my life, being pulled this way and that way. And I just can't...whether it was fear or whether it was retreating from it, but my going down to Tacoma, was in fact the separation thing. This is where I have to be. And, you know, I think it was fight or flight and I flew. You know, it was flight more than anything else. And so anyway, as far as resolving it, I resolved it more or less. I still feel that this is where I want to be [in Jesuit Order]. You know even though I have my doubts, I don't look at myself and think maybe I'm chickening out or maybe I'm not really facing my own life by doing this. I still feel that...and so --

That's still the belief in being a Jesuit?

Well, at least, I didn't believe all of the [doubts] about a lot of things I had trouble with. I had trouble with the Jesuits [mission], the

great system of universities and high schools throughout the United States. They are a world wide order; they are a missionary order, too. They have a lot of influence in lots of ways, etc. And yet, I thought a lot of it was too academic, their [mission] was not tied in guts, head and guts, to what was happening. So I thought we [Jesuits] tended to be identified a little bit too much in this country with those who have rather than those who have not. So, I had problems that way. I had problems with the Church, Catholic Church hierarchy, that hierarchical kind of model, things like that. I had real problems with that kind of stuff. But, there were enough friends I had in the Jesuits, and there's enough tradition of people who have struggled within that tradition, that gave me heart and faith. You know, [there are] as a matter of fact, people who have struggled and made sense out of it. I guess, I wanted to be part of that, on the part of Dorothy Day, on the part of Dan Berrigan, on the part of people strongly in support of justice in the world.

Did you run into Dorothy Day yet?

No, I just knew a little bit about her but I hadn't run into her. So, anyway, coming out to St. Leo's was -- One of the things...I didn't fit in too well with the existing structure of the people who were there [at parish].

I, and some others, started the MLK [Martin Luther King] Center, at that time, in 1969. [We] Started it, basically, getting it to be a place for kids to go swimming. We had this old house that was on the corner of 14th and Yakima. The Episcopal priest, Father Winckley, who lived right behind [the building] at that time, let us use [it]. There was a whole row of houses there [then] from 14th to 15th Street. And so, [the] beginning [of] the MLK center. Then one of the things I centered in on, too, was my affinity for people with mental illness. So, this is 1969, and we now had people coming from Western State [who] were heavily [coming] into our area. And so we started at the MLK Center, the house on the corner of 14th and Yakima. At that time, and we'd have socialization or social nights on Thursdays and then [also] Wednesdays. People coming [in] and just being together and playing together and talking, playing cards and doing whatever. I grew more and more in

touch with that...with working with people with mental illness and my life was a lot into that.

Then, also during that time, I began to get involved in the Vietnam [issue]. We were having a lot of Vietnam protests in the town at that time, 1969-70. So I was involved in that with different groups that were working to protest the war, our involvement with the Vietnam war. A lot of students coming out of UPS and some out of PLU and some other people in town were involved. Then along comes Kent State and Jackson State and lots of that stuff. You know we [protesters] got stronger and stronger.

And then I found out I was more and more involved with the Black community, getting more involved through the MLK center. We sponsored a cultural group. They called themselves the Black Resurrection and they were putting on plays and doing things like that. We had some film festivals. We had to hold it down at the Japanese Buddhist Temple one time because we couldn't find anyplace that would let us sponsor it. But the Japanese Buddhist let us use the bottom of their place. They had a 35 mm camera so we had it down there.

Couldn't you hold it at St. Leo's?

No. They wouldn't let us hold it at St. Leo's I ran into all sorts of problems there . At a particular occasion [priest] who was the pastor there and the Sister who was the principal of the school, we had real differences. But, anyway...then my Provincial decided that we [Jesuits] would put more [emphasis] or try to have a pastoral team at St. Leo's. So the ones [priests] who were there were given other assignments.

Then a couple other [Jesuits] came on [at St. Leo's] and we tried to function as a team. We tried to be more aware of what is going on in our community, more aware of what is going on with our black population, and trying to be more stretching out into the community, more than being a parish that is concerned about your school and your own concerns. And so we began to do that a little bit.

During this time, being involved with the MLK Center, etc., and being at a number of protests and leading some protests, I found out,

through someone else, that my name...that the FBI had a little file on me. I said, 'well that's interesting.'

We also started a farmer's market trying to bring produce into the city. We were involved more with the rights of the welfare recipients and trying to work with some of the things that way. The housing issues...we tried to do something as far as getting houses. We got into a group that began helping to rehab low income housing at the MLK Center. So we tried to meet all sorts of different needs. I was still assigned as a priest to St. Leo's but I was still working mostly in the MLK Center.

Then, also, I was involved in the Trident Campaign. [I] began to get involved in the Trident Campaign going on up in Bangor. They had the ground zero center for nonviolence there. There were people who were actively resisting the Tridents being there [Bangor] and the coming [transporting] of them. I got more and more involved with that as well. I remember the first time I was arrested was in...it was on Nagasaki day, up at ground zero. I think there were about 70 arrested at the same time. We had to go through the fence with this great big dragon-like thing that would portray a trident submarine. I remember sitting there, listening, and before I made my decision, there was a half hour for a [period of] silence and somebody was beating on the drums. A Buddhist was just softly beating on this drum. I don't know [if] I became more aware of my responsibility, I guess, of trying to do something about that [missiles]. But it was in that reflection time that they called for volunteers to go through the fence and I volunteered. That was the first time I was arrested up there at the Trident Submarine Base.

Where is that Base? At Bangor, right up here on the Kitsap Peninsula, on Hood Canal, where the Trident submarine base is. It was 1976.

Second tape 003

Well, I guess we are up into the 70's here so pick up where ever you would like to.

Well, [one] of the things, too, being at St. Leo's was [that] the Indian Issues were coming up, the fishing rights, and things like that. This is before the Judge Boldt decision, when the Indians were still

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fishing with the gill nets and fishing in their usual and accustomed places. They were being challenged very strongly by the state and everyone. While this was going on, you know, it was supposed to be against the law for them [Native Americans] to be fishing with their nets, their gill nets in the Puyallup River, etc. They had an encampment down along the Puyallup River by one of the Railroad tressels. They had it [encampment] there pretty much during the summer, and I'm not sure if it was 1970-71. But anyway, some of the fish that [caught] they were bringing up to "K" Street. A lady there by the name of Norma Raider, who was an activist, and actually belonged to the Communist Party here in Tacoma, was selling fish, salmon, out of her bathtub. She was a lady that had been in a wheelchair since she was 15 years of age and a tremendous woman. So I began to help her peddle some of the fish. Anyway, the Indians got raided. It was just like an all out war. They swooped down on the Puyallups and took away all of their nets, their boats, busted them [boats] up, beat them [Indians] up. Nine people were sent to jail. That sort of added a little bit more indignation to what was going on.

Was it private citizens who had done this?

No. This was done by the State Department of Fisheries, by the State Patrol, the Sheriff's Office, the Tacoma Police and everyone. But I don't think Ft. Lewis was involved. Anyway, there was an involvement, and still is, with the Indian community. I know, one time, they had...out in Milton, I think it's part of Auburn now...there is a Catholic Cemetery there that used to be an Indian School, St. George's Indian School. [It] was there and [had been] started by a Father [Peter] Hylebos from St. Leo's. He was the first pastor and founder of St. Leo's. Anyway, there was Ramona Bennett, a [past] chairperson of the Puyallup Tribe, [who] really contested rather that [Cemetery] should belong to the tribe or to the Archdiocese. So they tried to occupy the place. There was a big hub-bub on the thing [issue]. And, anyway, on the day that the Archbishop, at that time it was Connelly, did the blessing of the graveyard, I was there with the Indians. They had a Shaman who showed up to do the blessing of the burial grounds, where the burial grounds had been. And

we passed each other, the Archbishop and his blessing retinue going this way and I was going that way with the Indian retinue.

There are a lot of things [that have] happened to me at St. Leo's that were really good. The people, it was an older parish, some approved, some didn't. But, some way or another, they accepted me. They let me know they didn't agree with me in a lot of things but there was no divorce. Some of the older people understood more and were more supportive, actually, than the younger [ones were]. I decided in 1976...we had a meeting there...and this was after my arrest and things like that --

Trident arrest?

Yes. After the trident arrest, it was time for a change. [I decided] along with the group that had been there [St. Leo's] so we had a big [meeting] and to make a long story short, I decided that I was going to go. It was time for me to go. I said I was going to go on a sabbatical and the man [Order Provincial] that was in charge down in Portland thought I wanted to go back to school. All I wanted to do was hitchhike. So I took off and hitchhiked around the nation starting off from here. It took about six months to do that and it was a great experience for me. That's a whole other story --

Tape 061--266 Father Bichsel continues to talk a little bit about trip across country and a stop in Washington, D.C. When he returned from trip he went to Alaska for a while and then went to an Indian Mission in Hayes, Montana. He then community organized for a year and half in Seattle in Rainier Valley. More about protests and he returns to Tacoma in 1979 but is not connected officially with St. Leo's. Speaks about his views of community, sense of Security and Defense spending at expense of the poor. Speaks about community and building programs, political activism, arrest and four month jail term in Lompoc CA. Speaks about Tracks Campaign formed to protest transport of weapons and nuclear armaments.

During the time in Tacoma, we established Guadeloupe house, I and some others, which was, basically, a community to live together with mental illness. And, so, we lived in community. We rebuilt two old

house which we joined together. This started in 1982 and in 1987 we had a fire. Part of the house was burned by some people so it took a while to rebuild. ...I had, more or less, turned over the whole operation of the "G" Street Community or Guadeloupe House to these three young couples. Then it took so long getting it rebuilt that at that end of time [rebuilding] they didn't think they wanted to continue with it. So, it was at that point that, a young man, by the name of Kevin Coley who had worked at Nativity House and I, decided we would organize together to form a Catholic Worker [House] with idea we would take people in. We would try to live out what we believe, lived out the resistance, both in ourselves, the violence in ourselves, and invite people, who need a place to stay to, live with us and hoping to live out our belief --

Tape Number 2, 245--353 Father speaks about belief in non violence and theories of oppression of the poor class and the control of the wealth in the world, non-violence being a commitment beginning with an individual themselves. Speaks about causes and concerns brought on by violence, how community survives financially. Speaks about his various arrests and reaction of the Jesuit community.

So at some point in this odyssey, say in the 1970's or at some time, did you decided that you would not try to work through the church hierarchy?

With the MLK Center, it had support from St. Leo's and the Allen African Methodist Episcopal Church, as well as Holy Communion Episcopal Church, which was up on 14th and "I" but in a sense it was also sort of independent. We had our own programs going out of the MLK. One of the things we had going, this was in the 1970's, they had a gay rights group that was meeting there [at MLK Center]. They had some people who were on the faculty at UPS [University of Puget Sound] Dan Kelleher and Ken Smith started up a learning exchange. [It was] where people could learn...in order to learn German from you I'll, cut your hair, or whatever. So they had a learning exchange going on besides just the regular services of just food and shelter that we were doing.

The MLK Center is a huge organization now. It runs the men's shelter down here and it has a number of houses, about 15 other

houses, connected with it. Whether it's veterans [programs], some [programs] for mentally ill, [programs] for women and children, Maureen Howard,¹ who is the Director, is pretty involved in those issues throughout the state of Washington. So relative to when we were with it, it's a much bigger operation than we were [originally]. We were struggling.

Tape No. 2, #382--413 Father Bichsel answers question from class on whether he is still a Jesuit Priest. Yes. He talks about what he currently does, going out to Western State, still affiliated with Province [Jesuits], speaks about Guadeloupe House and liturgy and Tahoma Indian Center services.

¹ Just recently resigned, no information on new Director as yet.

March 5, 1992 Interview with **Father Bill Bichsel, S.J.**

Jesuit priest formerly assigned to St. Leo's Parish, Founding Member of the Martin Luther King Ecumenical Center, and active in many social justice issues in Tacoma, Washington

I think what I would like to do, Father, is address the social justice ministry that St. Leo's been involved with over the years. What I've seen from the research I have done is that this ministry got started at approximately the time you were assigned to St. Leo's. I would like to know what you found when you first went to St. Leo's and what the condition of the parish was, the parishioners, the different programs that eventually evolved and how they were received, that type of thing. How did the parishioners react and the reaction of the other clergy and religious present at St. Leo's then?

O.K. Well, I first went down to St. Leo's in May of 1969. I had transferred from Seattle Prep down there as an assignment. When I came Father Evoy, Father Harrington, and Father Morin were there. The school was in operation, the high school and the grade school. It was a pretty, in a sense, a traditional parish. It did the traditional things. A lot of the finances were going to the support of the school. A lot of the people who had lived in the inner area around it and a lot of the younger families had moved out. There were more elderly people around.

I think as far as St. Leo's, it is the oldest parish in Tacoma, Catholic Parish, so a lot of people have been touched by the school and by the parish and have worked and given their lives an awful lot to what it had been.

By the time I came, there was just a great history of what St. Leo's had meant to a lot of people, especially with the school and the families going through the depression, and [St. Leo's] being there available for them. For me, just looking at the past history of it, there is a very loving, tender, recognizing spirit that I have about what it has meant to so many people. So many people have worked so hard. I think as far as the outside reach [social justice], you know, there was a bit of that going on but I don't think that it was too active as far as reaching out to the needs of the nearby community. After I had been there for a while, we established the Martin Luther King Center. That was in 1969. Jan Perez and Bob Gallucci, Joe Seaberg, and Joe Drutis and some others who

were around joined in to help get this going. Basically, it was trying to meet some of the needs of the children in the Hilltop who had no place to go to swim. Then we acquired a building on the corner of 14th and Yakima. [It was] a house that actually belonged to the Episcopal Church, that was still functioning at that time, Holy Communion Episcopal Church on 14th and "I". Father Winckley was the one that gave it to us or let us use it. Jolly Sue Baker was the one that hit on the name of the Martin Luther King Center in 1969. Out of that we tried to coordinate some swimming programs for the youth of the area. Then we also began to work with the mentally ill. There were a great number of people [in that area]. It is a large catchment area for the mentally ill. All the services were located right in that area. The hospitals, the welfare office, the social security offices, the employment offices, the library, the hospital, low income housing, everything was right in that whole area. So, it was a real catchment area for the mentally ill being discharged from Western State and having really no place to go. Then we began kind of a social evening once a week and that carried over for a number of years.

Now was this a parish organization, or group, or was it mostly your efforts?

Well, it [organization] was mostly through the people, most of us were parishioners. It probably was not an out and out parish function as much as it was some of us who were operating it. We worked with the Martin Luther King Center for years. We tried to meet some of the needs, as far as sponsoring cultural events in the Black community. [We tried] to do something about housing, working with the Urban League and trying to bring some affordable low income housing to the area. There were a number of efforts that we made that way. By that time the Martin Luther King Center had grown and there were many more people on it and so that's the direction it took.

There was a change in the parish the next year where it was decided that it would be a team ministry. Then Pat Hurley, Father Pat Hurley, and Bill Hausmann came. Also Peter Byrne who was a scholastic at the time was teaching at Bellarmine. He became part of our team, our

core group. Then Father Evoy and Father Harrington had received other assignments and then Father Morin stayed on with us. The parish began to become a little bit more conscious, I think, with those efforts to relate more to the community about us. So with the coming of our core group there that was kind of to be the impetus.

We took stands. The Vietnam War was going on and [we] voiced our opposition to the war and the war effort. Then there were different ways in which people began to get more involved in some of the issues about housing, some of the issues regarding the mentally ill, that kind of [thing]. There was more and more of an awareness of that.

As the years went on -- I was trying to remember if it was 1970 or 1971. We started a tradition, I think it was in 1971. We started the regular Thanksgiving Meal for all the people in the neighborhood that has been going on all these 21 years. We also [started] the Christmas Meal. When we first started, we also had an Easter breakfast but that didn't carry [on]. We started, I think, in 1971 with the Thanksgiving and then the Easter meal, etc. It [meals] was for people to be more in touch with the poor in our area, etc.

Father Pat Hurley was, sort of, politically active, too. We began to support the United Farm Workers. [They] were bringing their efforts up into this area [concerning] the lettuce boycott and the grape boycott. [They were boycotting] the growers down in California and the stores that were handling [the produce]. They [growers and stores] had refused to recognize Union contracts or Caesar Chavez's Labor Organization, [the] union, farm worker's union. They called for help and assistance throughout this region. We responded and tried to encourage the boycott of iceberg lettuce and grapes that were primarily being sold through Safeway stores and others. So that [cause] became more integrated into some of the things St. Leo's did.

There was kind of an overlap of what the MLK Center did. It was really never clearly defined. St. Leo's began to give some money for the support of the MLK Center and by that time we had moved from the corner house down to 712 South 14th. We rehabed that house which became the MLK Center. Just when we got finished rehabing it for the MLK, there was this group called Recover who had been working out at Western State [Hospital]. [They were] working with people with mental

illness in the community but they were very handicapped because they needed to be community based and they couldn't get a base. They tried one other place and the residents of that particular place didn't want them in there. So we said we will give you the house that was to be the MLK Center. We supported their efforts coming in [to the Hilltop]. So that began to become a center -- that was the center for Recover. We rehabed that in 1970 and then Recover was in there until they outgrew that house. We had gotten another house, [that is] St. Leo's had gotten another house, down at 1419 South Yakima. It was a huge house so we redid that. It was mostly community effort. We rehabed it and then Recover moved in there where they had all their clients and staff. Basically, it was a treatment center, an outpatient treatment center for mental illness. It was people living right in the neighborhood relating to them really well. Then the MLK Center moved into the [original] little house, the little red one, and stayed there until about 1988-89 when they moved down to where they are now [basement of Interfaith Building at 1224 South "I" Street].

There are a lot of different things that went on there at the MLK Center. By that time there were a number of people who took over the organization of it, the running of it. One lady, Ellie Pedersen, was kind of the director for the first year. Later she went to Madonna House up in Toronto where she still is. Then Zoe Magden and Susan Anderson, two other women, ran it. Zoe Magden and Susan did a wonderful job. Two wonderful ladies. It was all sorts of services. It was an emergency shelter, it was clothing, it was food. We had the food bank established there. We had the first food bank in Pierce County. We started that in 1970, that's just after all the Boeing layoffs and everything started happening and unemployment was terrible. We had our first Jesuit Volunteer¹ come, it was either in 1970 or 1971. We actually established the food bank down in the corner house where Mary Jo Blenkush lived, that's 1421 South Yakima². So, the food bank operated out of the house and out of the garage behind it for a number of years. And then after that we moved down the alley to the MLK Center where it operated out of

¹ Jesuit Volunteers were young professional people who volunteered their expertise in exchange for minimal subsistence, room and board.

² Correct address is 1423 South Yakima.

the garage there for some years. So...what was I going to say? So anyway, we established the first food bank there. Then in the MLK Center at that time, there were some parishioners from St. Leo's who were working there as well. They kind of worked with outreach...Nancy Guelfi and Ed Jones and Patty Coogan and Barbara Bichsel, my sister-in-law, and a number [of others]. They would help to man the phones. You had all sorts of emergency services that were being handled and so it was all volunteers working there. The old apartment house that has now been rehabed, we used that for emergency housing a lot. We just kind of scrounged around all over the place for people needing shelter, etc., and people needing to be put up [for shelter]. Zoe Magden did a wonderful job.

Then in 1976 Sister Marilyn Peterson and [Sister] Patty Uphus took over the running of the MLK Center. They were, at that time, two Dominican nuns. Marilyn Peterson had been the head, the Provincial, of her Order in this area, the Tacoma Dominicans. She had done her time as Provincial and then she and Patty ran it beautifully. It became more of an Ecumenical thing. We did things more with the church next door, the Allen AME Church and then with the Episcopal Church. We had done more with them before, but by that time, I think about 1977, the Holy Communion Church had moved out [of the area]. It was truly a MLK Ecumenical Center so we [were] kind of working in conjunction with one another. Some of the other projects taken up, too, during those years...The Allen AME Church and St. Leo's vacated the alley way, running between 14th and 15th. Then that [area] was all parking for the vocational school and it was just complete mayhem. So, we vacated that and made a park out of that whole alley. It was a St. Leo's and Allen AME Church [effort]. We called it ALLEO Park. It took us a long time to get to that point -- to get the two churches to work together, etc. There were a lot of ups and downs and ins and outs. That's a whole history in itself, but we did develop that park and planted the trees and all that stuff down there.

Why do you think it took a while to get the two churches to work together?

Because there was some feeling that back during the Depression that one house, the house that was the MLK Center, belonged to the AME Church, the property did too. We got the OK for them to remodel it and use it as the MLK Center and they [AME Church] said OK. But there was some bad feeling back during the Depression, I think. [At one time] it looked like they [bank] were going to foreclose on the Allen AME Church. I think one of real estate persons was a person belonging to St. Leo's. And, so, they had real fears that it [Allen AME] was going to be closed. Another thing...the house and the property that was used for the MLK Center was right across the street from the school [St. Leo's] and everything. I think there was one property manager, for the property at that time, who thought about getting a hold of that property. So, anyway, the people there [Allen AME] just really didn't like that [perception] about us. The lady who was living in it [house] was a parishioner of Allen AME Church and they felt she had been high pressured [to sell]. They made sure [she didn't sell] and I don't blame them at all. So, they maintained the property until -- it was kind of a natural [ongoing fear] -- which was kind of understandable. But I think certainly we worked [it out]. It took a couple of years time to when we could [work] and put the ALLEO together, you know. (laugh) Put the park in...

During this time when everyone was so active, did all the parishioners agree with the direction that things were going? Was there a lot of discord? Did a lot of people leave the parish at that time or not?

Yes. There were people leaving the parish. Some did not agree with the emphasis -- there began to be more of an emphasis on social justice, about our non-military involvement, or opposing the war in Vietnam, and some of our [government's] unjust policies that were becoming apparent in Latin America, and treatment of the Indian people, etc. So, we began to -- we were more of a vocal voice opposing that. A number of the people didn't agree [with us] and some moved out.

Then in regard to the school, the girl's high school ceased in 1974 and that caused some of them, other parishioners to leave. Then there was controversy over whether to keep the grade school or not. Pat

Hurley was pastor at the time. You know, part of the thing is that so much of the parish budget was going to finance the school...it was just kind of going completely to the school...and the girl's high school. Most of them [girls] had come from outside of the parish from other parts of the city. In effect, we were subsidizing the school. He just didn't think that was a just situation. We weren't getting that much help from Seattle [Archdiocese offices]. Eventually there was a merger between Bellarmine, St. Leo's and Aquinas, the two Catholic Girls Schools, and...it was a happy merger. Then there was more involvement as far as the grade school with a lot of hard feelings. People left the parish who had been in there...some of the younger parents, etc. They saw no reason to have the parish end [the school]. The only thing that was keeping it going was that we had a number of Jesuit Volunteers who were teaching in St. Leo's. They were teaching in the high school and there were some who were teaching in the grade school yet. So, budget wise, there was just no way at all that it [school] was making it. Then the numbers [enrollment] were dwindling. I myself, I was pro and con on it. I saw the real advantage of having those children around and being able to have it...where it's mixed. Racially you had a pretty good mixture. But the other part of [the question] is, you know, how long could you do that and how good of an education could you give them [children] depending upon volunteer help all the time. It was a matter of justice too. But when the school did close there were a lot of people that felt really hurt by that and left [the parish]. Then some [were] leaving and others [were] coming back. I have to say this, some of the older people, and especially older women, who have been there have grown with the whole change. Some of them have just really progressed beautifully.

Do you think some of the parishioners who originally had difficulty with the change in emphasis to more social justice issues, that part of the problem was they had just dealt with Vatican II and the physical changes that were done to the church and the changes in the liturgy upset them, and then this on top of that?

Right. Yes. Vatican II introduced changes. We would try to implement certain things, like moving the Communion rail and taking

the American flag out of the sanctuary, so that people don't get mixed up with their allegiance to God and their allegiance to America. They are not the same thing. Gradually there were those [for whom] the changes were a bit much. I think they tried to incorporate people into the decision making but there were probably a lot of mistakes made in that way too.

With some of the programs that were started over the years, did you find that they just didn't work, or were there some that you hoped to get off the drawing board and initiated and maybe progressed for a while and then had to disband?

Well, a lot of my connection was working through the Martin Luther King Center and those different programs. Probably the MLK Center is a program that has stayed on and flourished more. As a matter of fact, I even had some problems that it became too bureaucratic and too much of bureaucracy. Where as, when Sister Marilyn and Patty were co-directors, they [staff] were well integrated into the neighborhood and were trying for different programs. One of the programs that we stayed with for along time, initiated by Sister Marilyn Peterson and a board she gathered, was Neighborhoods First. Basically, it was to rehab low income housing for people, and low income families, [so they could] get into something they could afford, etc. It stayed on and existed for over 10 years and went through a lot of ups and downs. We remodeled the corner apartment [building] that did belong to St. Leo's. It was deeded over to us by the Archdiocese and it was to be a cooperative for five low income families. They [apartments] are pretty much still functioning that way. The rent they pay is still only \$100 a month for [each of] the five families, or maybe it's \$120 now. But, Neighborhoods First, I thought we did some good things. [We] pushed the city into starting the Urban Homestead Program again that had been shut down for some years. We got Community Development to start that [Urban Homestead Program] again. We tried to save some structures around the city for low income housing. Some we were successful in and some we weren't.

We started a Hilltop Farmers Market that ran for about three or four years. It ran up behind where the Evergreen College is. That used to be the old Safeway Building and it was in the parking lot there. We

ran every Saturday, all during the summer, for about four years or so. Unfortunately, that wasn't able...it didn't continue. There was a cooperative that was functioning among parishioners of St. Leo's that ran out of the MLK Center. We had a couple of Jesuit Volunteers working with that for about three years and that did not last. At least while it was going it seemed to be doing OK.

Then people began a campaign against the Trident Submarine Missile. People from St. Leo's became more active in that as the years went by. Then that [activity] continued as more people became involved because of the construction of the base and the coming of the first Trident Missile. After that we discovered the White Train carrying the weapons into the base itself. A number parishioners became active in resisting the role of nuclear proliferation, etc. That all started and was happening in the 1970's as well. Then also, as I said, we were involved in Caesar Chavez's struggle for justice for the UFW [United Farm Workers]. Often people would go down to California to get in on the picket lines. There were some arrests and things like that down there. So gradually, I think we began to address those issues more...the war making gene of the United States. [We] tried to address that and all the evils that go with it. [We tried to address the issue] of all of the services that are cut to people in education, health, housing, food, employment, employment training, etc.

How did the Archbishop view this at the time? Was there ever any problem for St. Leo's coming from Seattle, in that respect, for political views?

No. No. It was Thomas Connolly [who was Bishop] before Archbishop Hunthausen. Archbishop Hunthausen, of course, was a great supporter. Even before [Hunthausen] when Connolly was Bishop, [who was] a very traditional, old church time Cardinal, who ruled something like an aristocrat, he [Connolly] was very supportive of any efforts for justice and what was being done in that area. He gave the MLK Center money at times. He and I got into disagreements at different times. I sent him a telegram once to join and get on the picket line down there in California. ***Did he?*** No. He didn't. (laugh) And another time I wrote him about some [campaign]. I thought the National Black Office

needed help. There were no funds actually coming in. He hoped to hit just those parishes where there were just Blacks. I said, for the Northwest Progress [Catholic newspaper], you tax everyone for that thing. This is a province, or diocesan concern, why just stick with a few parishes like that which are pretty poor. So he wrote back and told me to mind my own business. (laugh) But, anyway, he was supportive and there were no big problems.

How about the city officials or people in government of Tacoma, has there been much support over the years for programs that were initiated, or opposition to things that you were doing?

Well, you know, I think on [some] things at different times officials would [support us]. When we [were] considering housing for the mentally ill, we got some support from different [people] but kind of limited support, I think. There was some support -- we tried to get some support through Community Development. At times we did get some support. But, it's like you are attacking a bureaucracy all the time. It is very hard to deal with. It's hard --

How do you feel the other Catholic churches in Tacoma look at St. Leo's? What do you think they feel, or the differences...

Well, let me put it this way. I'm not sure but I think some look favorably but to a lot [of people] it's a church where there are a lot of odd people down there [at St. Leo's]. I think they [other churches] are becoming more and more socially conscious. But, I think, it was a point of well...they are doing a good job. So, they [other churches] just let us [do it] rather than see that they should be involved or should be extending [support]. That [awareness] did help certain elements in certain churches and eventually people from different parishes did bring some support for the various programs.

Do you see St. Leo's as being the role model for the future or the survival of the church and the programs that need to be addressed in society?

Well, I see, it has a long way to go yet. But certainly it has to...we have to live out what we believe. I think that the message is pretty close.

We have to stand by those who are deprived, etc., because the message of the gospel, and the message of Jesus is too apparent. I think, in some way, parishes can't remain triumphantalist kinds of gathering places. We have to take off hats, coats, and shoes and give them away and then start in working together. It has to be real. What I believe has to be translated into the world. We have to oppose injustice. We have to stand up against it. We have to go to jail against it...whatever has to happen. We are living in very unjust, unjust structures where people are completely plowed under. So, it has to be in touch with all that. I think St. Leo's is trying to and I think it has a way to go yet. It has to be involved with the poor in some way.

I would like to ask you a few questions, going back a few years. Since you were born and raised here in Tacoma, during the 1920's, 1930's and 1940's the neighborhood area of the Hilltop, I think we touched on this once before when we talked, was it very integrated? Since St. Leo's was the first Catholic Church did you find a variety of ethnic backgrounds or racial backgrounds among the parishioners?

In the neighborhood...well...I think, basically, in the Hilltop neighborhood there is a diversity. There was a diversity of Black, White, Native American, and Hispanic, that still exists. Of course, now there is a large East Asian population on the Hilltop as well. So there is that diversity. When I grew up...I was born in 1928. When I grew up the most ethnic diversity was over on "I" Street and Yakima, etc. There was a Greek enclave and then there was Irish and German. And then up around "K" Street and that whole surrounding area, going from 11th Street over to 19th or 21st, it was Italian, heavy Italian population. The Norwegian population was up there as well. It changed as the African American population came in during the 1950's, etc. Many of these people were discharged from Ft. Lewis or had been in the service, etc. So, I would say, in certain ways, it was like some of the other big cities. There was flight out of the area by the younger families, etc. A lot of the older families remained. Then the African American families who were there began to come in. Also, as I was growing up there was a strong Japanese population going all the way from "I" Street right down to

Jefferson Avenue and all the way from 13th down to 21st or beyond. That was there up until the [time] when all the Japanese were deported. There were some families that came back.

Did any of the churches address that issue at that time?

At that time? **Yes.** No, I am not aware of any. Although there were St. Leo's parishioners around there that supported the Japanese. But, I'm not sure how much people spoke out against that [resettlement]. I got the impression...not too much. Right where we are living, there was a lady, Fina Chouinard...she was 93 and died about 8 months ago. The family next to her was Japanese. When they had to go out to the Puyallup Fairgrounds, she would visit them two times a week and bring food to them. That was happening with other people who had Japanese friends in the neighborhood. Stuff like that. But, I don't recall that they [churches] really did address that issue.

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Yes. I think St. Leo's tried to meet the needs of the elderly there, too. During those years, the early 1970's, [by] having regular meeting times and trips and outings. Sister Consuella is handling that program now. And, then I think they [St. Leo's] got involved in the Sanctuary Movement.³ That was when Father Chuck Schmidt was there.

Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

Yes. The whole [Parish] Council and the church decided that they would become a Sanctuary Church. They went down and escorted this family up here from California. They were given a house, right across the street from our house, Guadeloupe House, to live in. The Domingo family...they were known as the Domingo family at that time. They had to conceal their identities. It is the Viadares family. So, they came [to Tacoma] and the parish and the staff, etc. supported them as a Sanctuary family. But then over the years, I think the Viadares family

³ Social Ministry Program initiated in 1983 offering shelter for families fleeing persecution in El Salvador.

felt less support, from the parish, then it had been getting, possibly from the parish staff. I think there were conflicts and some misunderstandings. But they stayed there for about 8 years in the support of the parish. They are now living in a Habitat House up on 9th Street. They still come to St. Leo's on Sunday, etc. That was all part of trying to resist the whole -- the whole thing of deporting the people from El Salvador to go back and face death -- face death in El Salvador.

They are not in any risk of deportation at this time?

No. While they were here they received their green cards. They are entitled to work.

Was there a lot of controversy in the community when the church took that stand?

No. I think it was pretty well accepted. I think there was some objections on the part of some people at St. Leo's, etc. For the most part, I think it was a good healthy thing and you know people felt that way more.

Were they the only family that they sponsored?

Yes. They were the only family.

Do you know if there were any others here in Tacoma that sponsored families?

I think there were some other people and organizations that did sponsor families. I think St. Michael's Church in Olympia was underway to become a Sanctuary Church but I can't recall who else. Well, I know there are so many other things but I just can't think right now.

(At this time, it was obvious Father was tired, so I decided to close the interview.)

Oh, no, that's all right. You've given me a real good insight into St. Leo's and I really appreciate it. So we'll end it there, O.K. Thank you.