



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Michael J. O'Sullivan

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

HOUSE: I'm Sharon House and I'm a volunteer with the Ruth Ann Overbeck Capitol Hill History Project. And I'm here today to interview Father O'Sullivan. We're at the O'Boyle Residence for priests in Brookland in Northeast Washington DC. Today is May 15, 2008. Thank you very much Father O'Sullivan. What is your full name?

O'SULLIVAN: Michael Joseph O'Sullivan.

HOUSE: And can you tell us when and where you were born?

O'SULLIVAN: I was born on January 9, 1932. I was born at home, I think, delivered by a midwife. And the place was Ireland, of course, but the most recognizable town in the area would be Kenmare, County Kerry. But also there was a little novelty approach; we were born at the foot of the Mangerton mountain, which is a misnomer because it's not high enough to be a mountain. It's only 3000 feet. So Ireland has hills but they don't have in my opinion mountains. And ...

HOUSE: Was it a rural area?

O'SULLIVAN: It's a rural area, very much a rural area, but there is one distinction that the mountain does have; on top of the mountain is an old volcanic place. In that volcanic place is what they call the Devil's Punchbowl. And the Devil's Punchbowl provides water for all of Killarney town and many other towns along the Laune river. And believe me it has never run dry. [Laughter]

HOUSE: Not in Ireland.

O'SULLIVAN: Not in Ireland. It has never run dry.

HOUSE: And were you raised on a farm?

O'SULLIVAN: I was raised on the farm, yes.

HOUSE: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

O'SULLIVAN: One brother and three sisters, wait a minute four sisters. That's right.

HOUSE: When did you decide to become a priest?

O'SULLIVAN: Well, I suppose it was quite early in my life. There was a priest in the family already from my father's brother. Dan was a priest and he worked in Dubuque Archdiocese in Iowa. And he ministered in that archdiocese all his life. So, it was always a big occasion when he made the trip to Ireland of course, like most immigrants of that era, the immigrants of the early part of the century. And they became victims of the, what is it, recession. And then prisoners of World War II. So, people who had left their homes in Ireland and came to United States in the late teens and early 20s and beyond, they had no way, there was no way they could really get back to and forth to Ireland. So somebody like Father Dan, we always called him, he came out at that time. I think he had one trip home and then fell victim to all of this. And his second visit to Ireland was in 1946. So that was the one of the things that happened. You might say it was a trivial matter but at the same time it was how our world of that time operated. There was no place to go. The recession was worldwide as you know and then came World War II, which really broke the recession's back. Because all the war materials had to be provided, you know. And of course Rosie the Riveter and all of the rest of the good things that came out of a World War II. Furthermore there was the fact that generally speaking a trip to Ireland was a full week. Just when I came over, they said I was on one of the faster boats; we were four and a half days in 1955.

HOUSE: You came to the United States in 1955? And how did you happen to come to the United States?

O'SULLIVAN: Well, when I finished high school and I entered seminary, it was a seminary that priests, graduates from the seminary, were prepared to serve in any part of the English speaking world. And how they operated was that the bishops in the English speaking world, especially for Great Britain, the United States and Australia and New Zealand, they wrote to the seminaries in Ireland. They wrote to the heads of the seminaries in Ireland asking them to ... if they had anybody who would like to serve in that diocese, Washington, DC, or Maitland [Australia] or Sidney or wherever else it was. And, I volunteered. When the list was posted, I saw that they wanted one for the year 55, you know, where they look ahead, were looking for people for such a time period, period of time; it's a normative kind of thing.

HOUSE: And that was your year of ordination?

O'SULLIVAN: That was my year of ordination; it was expected to be. And I thought well ... I haven't thought about it a whole lot, in fact for myself I had gotten the word that my uncle was going to make a trip the following summer. And I thought well nothing to be lost by waiting for him and discussing matters with him. But at the same time we were supposed to, when the list was posted, we were supposed to sign up and I thought well that doesn't seem all right so I'll take the best way out possible. I'll take Washington ... sign up for Washington, after all they're only looking for one. And if I'm lucky when my

name gets there, [laughter] they'll already have their one, and I'll have more time to think. Three days later I get a word that that I was supposed to go to the medical doctors and... for all kinds of physicals and all the rest of it. And to make sure that I was healthy enough to finish the rigors of seminary life and that I would ... there was no reason why I couldn't serve anywhere in the world for that matter. But, so a week, approximately a week, after the list had been posted, I was signed, sealed, and delivered to Washington, [laughter] DC. And several priests already from the seminary were working in the Washington area. So I wasn't coming as a stranger, you know. There were several, as a fact just recently Father Mike Kidd died. He was the year before, the year ahead of me. Jack Madigan is still here. Andy Cassin is still here. Father Treacy has died. So there were a lot of guys that I knew already from the seminary. So anyway when my uncle came home in the summertime, (a little anecdote here) we were chitchatting you know, he said, "By the way, Michael, "you have a diocese?" I said, "Yeah."

HOUSE: You have a what?

O'SULLIVAN: Do you have a diocese? In other words have you been signed on for a diocese. I suppose he was about to make the big proffer of getting me into Dubuque, I don't know; it never came down to that. I said, "Yes." He said, "Oh where, where are you going?" I said "Washington." And then to my astonishment he said, "The state or DC?" I said, "You mean there are two of them?" [Laughter] So he said, "Yes." I said, "It's DC isn't it; I'm going to DC." And he said, "Oh, how did you get there?" "I don't know, I just signed up." I didn't know. I'm here by accident.

HOUSE: So were there other places in America that were on that list or that was ...?

O'SULLIVAN: Oh sure there was ... I think we had a class in our seminary that year of about 20. I would say half of them came to the United States.

HOUSE: So you had known some other people who have been to Washington? Or ...

O'SULLIVAN: Oh yeah just as I had said earlier there were a lot of Irish priests. An awful lot of Irish priests went to Florida, to the southwest, the northwest, Seattle, Sacramento, everywhere you'd drop anchor you'd find a priest. I find it interesting sometimes people are [at church] and you recognize [that they are strangers], and you say, "Where're you from?" "Over in Washington state." [they reply] I say, "Do you know so and so". "Oh yeah yeah," they say. I say, "I was in the seminary with him."

HOUSE: We are glad you came to our city. So when you initially came ... I mean a lot of our interview is going to be about the service at St. Peter's on the Hill. But, when you initially came you didn't go right to St. Peter's? Right?

O'SULLIVAN: No, I went to St. Camillus, that's in Silver Spring. Actually more clearly identified as Langley Park, Hillandale, Langley Park area. It was a parish just being established and it was inside the Beltway. Just inside the Beltway. It was a huge enrollment of people, maybe 2000 families in the parish, you know. This was when Washington was in full bloom, as you know at the start, with the expansion of government within the city of Washington and its environs. And so everybody's coming to work for the government after World War II and as the government continues to expand every place else, they have to find someplace for them to live. And so the building construction around Washington and the suburbs exploded at that time. Cardinal O'Boyle was the archbishop here and he was really hard driven to try and keep establishing churches to accommodate the, and schools to accommodate the, huge influx of people. Probably of the 2000 odd families that were in St. Camillus parish, I would say maybe 10 would have both partners of the marriage from the Washington area. Everybody was from somewhere else and for a long time a lot of people who worked and lived in the Washington area, they considered wherever it was they came from, home. And for a number of years a number of people that said, you know, that come Christmas they were going home for Christmas. They were going home for the different holidays. And also of course when it came to election times, the general election they had to get absentee ballots, because they were still going to vote at home. You know.

HOUSE: That's true of a lot of DC.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah, yeah. So it was a huge parish, there were the pastor and three other priests, including me.

HOUSE: It must have been very different from your experience in Ireland where people had been quite rooted in the community?

O'SULLIVAN: Yes, yes.

HOUSE: So when and why or how did you end up at St. Peter's?

O'SULLIVAN: Well, at least once a year there the priests of the diocese many a reassignment takes place, where the bishop moves around different people who would be more suitable to this area than the next. And so I proceeded from St. Camillus to Nativity. I went from just outside the District line, so to speak, to just inside the District line. Nativity Parish in Northwest Washington, Piney Branch Road and Georgia Avenue. And then, I was, I think, seven years in St. Camillus; I was four years, or for general purposes, four years at Nativity. And then I was assigned to, I was chaplain at the Washington Hospital Center.

HOUSE: Let me pause this for just a moment. Okay go ahead.

O'SULLIVAN: So, I was assigned to the Washington Hospital Center and I lived in the rectory not very far from [? not clear] over here at 12th and Monroe [NE], St. Anthony's. And worked at the hospital center for four years and then I was reassigned in November of '70 to St. Peter's on Capitol Hill.

HOUSE: Did you have any choice in that matter? Or was that just an assignment?

O'SULLIVAN: Well, there was a choice, you know. I being pledged to obedience, you know, you would have to have a valid reason for not accepting an assignment.

HOUSE: But it wasn't like you asked to ...

O'SULLIVAN: No, no, no. Well, like I said before, I never asked for an assignment and I never refused one. So ...

HOUSE: Except for your first, to Washington, DC, the diocese?

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah yeah. Well I didn't refuse that either.

HOUSE: No, you didn't refuse it but you sort of indicated you wanted it.

O'SULLIVAN: Oh yeah. I asked for it, yes.

HOUSE: Right.

O'SULLIVAN: Yes.

HOUSE: So, what were some of your initial impressions when you came the neighborhood in the early 70s?

O'SULLIVAN: To St. Peter's you mean?

HOUSE: To St. Peter's, this is on Capitol Hill, and this is at Second and C Street SE, right?

O'SULLIVAN: Yes. I'll tell you, I think the first thing that I look back, that beginning right there, the Capitol Hill was a unique area, a unique town you might say, a unique neighborhood within the city that's Washington. It was unique in many respects. There were quite a number of people living in, around Capitol Hill who were born and raised on the Hill and they were baptized and all at St. Peter's Church.

Everything was very quiet and peaceful, you know, but I think in some respects I would say that the area was, the area that constitutes the original Capitol Hill which is one that went to Sixth Street, I think in that area you had, was all residential and still is. But you didn't have any of the problems of integration at that time. Maybe there would have been but Cardinal O'Boyle, bless his heart, he beat everyone to the draw so to speak. And real quickly after he was, came to Washington as the archbishop, he integrated the schools. Quietly, just ...

HOUSE: When was that?

O'SULLIVAN: That would be 1950 I think. I'm not sure exactly of the date there. But it's a matter of the ruling in the archdiocesan archives.

HOUSE: Right. But it certainly was well before the public schools were.

O'SULLIVAN: Oh yes. Yes he just sent a letter to the to the pastors around. From here on in, there are no racial requirements; no people, no children, black children are going to be turned away from any of the schools in the Washington archdiocese. So therefore it was none of the subsequent battles that were witnessed through the integration ... none of those battles took place on Capitol Hill. There was an oasis where there was no trouble; people seemed, and actually did, get along together. The church was integrated. There were—basically the population of the church were—demographically, there were the older people. Many of the children in the school were actually not from the area because there were no children in the area. As I said the people were beyond that age. And so a number of cases in the school at that time, as is it still true I believe, were from, actually from the Washington suburbs. Where the parents brought them in, dropped them off at school and went on to work, and picked them up and went home. I would say it was a unique peaceful quiet very nice place to be in the 70s. The overall picture as I think I mentioned to you the last time was that when you heard “the Southeast” you thought “Oh!” Southeast did not have a good reputation. But back then the ... I didn't know that there was any reason for that definition of Southeast, you know. In fact I always said, I had to wait until I went to visit Maryland to be held up. [Laughter]. Which is true, I was held up, but I was out in Maryland when it happened. So, it was unique.

HOUSE: So what were some of the things that you did when you first came to St. Peter's? I know you've mentioned some of them when we talked on the phone the other day.

O'SULLIVAN: Well I think the first matter of concern was the restoration of the school which over the years had fallen. There were a lot of problems, physical problems that had to be taken care of.

HOUSE: Can I just have a minute to go back when you very first came. Because (I want to talk about the school) but when you very first came to the church. You mentioned the other day some of the things you did about ... to get to know the neighborhood and all?

O'SULLIVAN: Oh yeah. I always had the concept that being in pastoral ministry, being in a parish, not in a religious community, but being in the parish, that pastoral ministry called me, at least, out of the rectory and out of the church into the neighborhood. And I didn't have the Irish blackthorn then. I didn't need it.

HOUSE: Your walking stick?

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah. But, so I had some volunteers who helped at the rectory. Julia Curran was one, specifically. She then lived down, and with her husband and family, on 11th Street SE. But we had to figure out how, who's here. I mean this is our territory, who lives here? And we looked at, "Do we have a roster of parishioners?" Or we had these little boxes with 3 x 5 cards. And there were several of them around there. So the first thing I think I asked Julia to do was to coordinate all of these little files and so she went in and alphabetized the whole mess. And I said, "Well this is a good place to start." We got a number of the cards and hit the sidewalks and my objective was to visit every person listed in those cards who lived in the area, or if they were not in the area was there any way to find out where they were. I was blessed in the fact that the St. Peter's Parish was territorially not so large. It added a few steps by doing this alphabetically but I thought it was easier to do it that way and more thorough than going ... trying to get the lists coordinated by address. So anyway I hit the streets and I knocked on every door. I really found out that all of these, from all of these lists there were left about 300 people who belonged, and were still living, belonged to St. Peter's. And I was able to find through the neighborhoods where I came in rang this doorbell and found out who's here. And I said, "Well have you ever heard of Sharon who lived next door here?" So we'd try and track down ... they'd say, "Yeah." Usually somebody on the block that remembered him or her or them.

HOUSE: When did you do this walking, night time?

O'SULLIVAN: Well most of it was night time because during the day people were working. But I did it, I think I usually hit the streets after the, after lunch after the noon Mass. And I'd get back in time for supper and then I'd hit the streets again. And ...

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

HOUSE: Sorry. I think I let that tape run out so I just want to make sure this all gets covered. So you didn't have any problems at night?

O'SULLIVAN: I had no problems whatsoever. I was never dealt with or treated but with genuine respect. And from the people and the ... you know I'd go down to the Arthur Capper dwellings and the issue were there some scary buildings, high-rise buildings in there and the, whatchamacallit, the bulbs were not always working in the hallways or anyplace else. But I went in. If I was walking down the street and saw a bunch of kids hanging around outside someplace I made it my business to go right up to them and greet them and, "How are you doing?" You know, somebody might throw a basket or something and I would say you know ...

HOUSE: Somebody was doing what?

O'SULLIVAN: Be fooling around with the basketball, I'd say, "You try working on that," I said, "and you might get some good at it." But I was always treated with respect. Nobody ever threatened me. We also had ... we were helping a lot of people in the Arthur Capper dwellings and south beyond Eighth Street which was like the oasis, the, what is now the Southeast-Southwest Freeway. And, it did come around and you had the segregated ... you had segregation, yes. Because all that area was black.

HOUSE: And housing ...?

O'SULLIVAN: Housing, yeah, and they were down to Eighth ...

HOUSE: Arthur Capper was what about ... was that as far down as M Street?

O'SULLIVAN: It went to M Street. Yeah. From the East Capitol Street it kind of went all the way down ...

HOUSE: You mean the St. Peter's boundary?

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah, we went to Half Street SW.

HOUSE: Okay.

O'SULLIVAN: And down there all along M Street, all the way down to the Sousa Bridge, that's the bridge on Pennsylvania Avenue.

HOUSE: Right.

O'SULLIVAN: And then northeast on Pennsylvania Avenue to 11th Street, then across 11th Street to East Capitol Street and back up to the home.

HOUSE: So you were walking south of the freeway down as far as M Street?

O'SULLIVAN: Oh yeah. Arthur Capper then on down to the projects, they referred to them as the projects, down beyond Eighth Street, down beyond that was all ... And then with the area that's built up in there now between Fourth and what is it, Fourth and Seventh is it? The new ...

HOUSE: The new Ellen Wilson ...?

O'SULLIVAN: Affordable Ellen Wilson dwellings, yes. They were all part of, in a certain sense, the Arthur Capper dwellings. They were all subsidized housing or whatever.

HOUSE: Right.

O'SULLIVAN: I loved what I was doing and I think the people, the people responded because what I was doing was more than anything else showing an interest in the people and in the area.

HOUSE: So you got to know the neighborhood and the neighborhood got to know you?

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah yeah. I think it is ...

HOUSE: More than just the parish.

O'SULLIVAN: Oh yeah. Oh yes.

HOUSE: There are couple other things that you mentioned it the other day when you first came. One of them had to do with a sign on the door to the church?

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah, there was a sign. Somebody had been, apparently, attacked in the church and so the church was locked and there was a sign on the door that said ... advising the people that the door was locked. But if they wanted to visit in the church they could to go to the rectory next door. And so I didn't see any reason for that being there because I felt that the church should be welcoming, you know, at all times. And I took that down, that sign and threw it in the nearest trash can and opened the church door, you know. And we never, we never lost anything of value. There was somebody made off with one of the chairs from sanctuary, you know. But the police got her; she was 'tre na cheile'.

HOUSE: What?

O'SULLIVAN: 'Tre na cheile', that's mixed up, in Gaelic.

HOUSE: Oh. [laughter]

O'SULLIVAN: [laughter] So if you put up the value of what might have been taken over all the years maybe it would be about five dollars in a flea market. There was nobody ... in fact there were a number of people that, homeless people, that use the church during, especially during, the winter months, during the cold months of the year. And, basically they recognized the sanctity of the church and were very, very protective of the church because it was kind of their territory. They knew they were known; they knew that the church was going to be open; and, I mean, there was some there over the years that, they'd come and ring the doorbell and when we got there, (when we moved up in the world where we could afford a secretary) they would come and ring the doorbell and the priest or the secretary would answer the door. And they'd say, "Father, I think you better go over to the church, there's somebody over there, he's drunk" or something like that. They'd come in and warn us, tell us. We'd go over and tell the guy to "go get" and he would go get. [Laughter] You know. There were a few that argued with, I mean, if they could argue and so could I [laughter]. And if they could shout and so could I.

HOUSE: So there was another story you mentioned about, not a story, but something else that you did to change the governance with regard to the Parish Council when you first came.

O'SULLIVAN: The Parish Council was, the idea was initiated, initiated from Vatican II, which was in the early 60s. And so most of the parishes responded, I think, initially by appointing, the pastor selecting different people for the Parish Council. So we had, when I got there, there was a Parish Council. And John Curran, the husband to Julia Curran that I already mentioned and their daughter was Patty Nishimoto and they lived down on 11 Street. John Curran was the president of the Parish Council. So after a year when I found the next roll call came around in the summer, I guess, I figured I knew enough about the parish, or I didn't have enough sense to know any better, I figured that we would have the Parish Council but the members would be elected by the parish. So if you want to serve on the Parish Council you gave the secretary your name and a short bio and then on a given Sunday, on a given weekend everybody voted and suddenly we had a democratic Parish Council.

HOUSE: So you had the election for the Parish Council?

O'SULLIVAN: Yes, and everything ... it was my hope, and it checked out good over time, that the Parish Council would be a clearing house in a certain sense for everything ...

HOUSE: Clearing house?

O'SULLIVAN: Clearing house for everything that went on in the parish. They, in other words, everybody on the Parish Council knew what was going on in the parish, and participated in the parish. And oversaw where needed. You know, for instance when the restoration of the church and rectory took place the Parish Council selected the, Vinia Gwynn and Andy Houston, the architect; Vinia Gwynn as the supervisor of the work; Frank Kraemer. They were delegated as parish representatives to deal with the construction people. And, of course, I always felt that since the liturgy is vitally important for, as a matter of faith that we should do our best to provide good liturgies. And so I always tried to get a good music director and offer a good music in church from week to week.

HOUSE: You had a variety of music there too, if I remember?

O'SULLIVAN: Yes we have a folk group as well as the regular choir. And also for instance the Parish, the school principal was a de facto a member of the Parish Council reporting regularly to the Parish Council on the school what was going on in the school and so forth.

HOUSE: So you started to say, when I interrupted you, about one of the major challenges you faced when you first came to St. Peter's and that was the condition of the buildings—schools and all.

O'SULLIVAN: Yes.

HOUSE: Tell us a little about that.

O'SULLIVAN: Well the school was, actually had reached the stage where it was, you know, clean up or bust, you know. It had reached the stage where it, some action had to be taken because it would no longer be able, it had deteriorated, really had deteriorated so much that it needed major repairs.

HOUSE: When was this?

O'SULLIVAN: This was the school, I don't have the exact year, mid 70s.

HOUSE: This was shortly after you came.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah, so the question was how to finance the restoration work. It went back and forth and back and forth and finally we reached the decision. The decision was reached we would sell the adjoining land to the school to a developer or anybody who wanted it and use the money to, for the restoration, to pay for the restoration costs of the school.

HOUSE: How was that land used before?

O'SULLIVAN: It was residential and that had been demolished. The buildings had fallen apart and demolished. It was just kind of, just a dump, it was there. A vacant lot. And also the four parishes to which the school was catering—St. Joseph's, St. Vincent's, and St. Dominic's together with St. Peter's provided some financial, not a whole lot, but some financial assistance from the parish. And then for the rectory and the church, I was happily abed like everybody else was. Suddenly one night I heard all hell break loose and it was the fire in the rectory.

HOUSE: What year was that, do you remember?

O'SULLIVAN: That was in the 80s, I think. I think it was the 80s I think, I don't know the exact dates, I'm sorry.

HOUSE: So, where did the fire start?

O'SULLIVAN: In the laundry room downstairs, in the basement.

HOUSE: And you could hear things burning?

O'SULLIVAN: Oh, we heard the phone or the alarm system went on and that kept going for a while until it blew up. When I heard it, got awakened to that, jumped out of bed and headed for the downstairs and the place was all smoke. So I called the other priests who were in bed and told them to get the heck out of here. I went across the street to the hotel, because the phone had gone out, to call the fire department. So, to survive we needed to do the work, so the Parish Council ... I can run forth with the planning over the restoration work.

HOUSE: Was there a hotel across from the rectory?

O'SULLIVAN: Well there was a an apartment building ... pardon me, the hotel has been there long enough now... it was an apartment building, you know. So ...

HOUSE: So I want to just note here that you received, I'm not sure when exactly, the Capitol Hill Community Foundation Achievement Award for ...?

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah ...

HOUSE: For being one of the leaders on Capitol Hill. And one of the things that was cited in that was your restoration in, leadership in the restoration of the building of the church and the school and the rectory.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah, rectory, school and church yes.

HOUSE: The church itself?

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah.

HOUSE: One of the other challenges that I know you dealt with you mentioned the other day was the change in the leadership of the school. From the sisters ...

O'SULLIVAN: From the sisters, Holy Cross Sisters, to the lay teachers.

HOUSE: Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

O'SULLIVAN: Well, it was ...

HOUSE: The issues there or ...

O'SULLIVAN: Well it was a matter of the Holy Cross Sisters who founded the school, actually on 133 C Street; that's where I think it started. And then they also started there for St. Cecilia's Academy. But the fact was that they, like all the other religious communities and indeed the religious life, period, they just didn't have the personnel to run the schools. So it came in the mid 80s that, early 80s that, the Holy Cross Sisters would no longer be providing sisters in the school, specifically, the principal. So, we had a couple of the sisters that continued to teach there for a few years. Sister Armella, is one name you will have gotten, stayed there for a while. But, and Doris Costantino of course was the great, great, great blessed, blessed to have such a wonderful person as secretary of the school. And so it was a question of, if we were going to continue, we needed a principal, so weren't going to have the Holy Cross Sisters and have the personnel to provide the principals.

So we went to the public and advertised in the Catholic Standard [ed: diocesan newspaper] and, for a list of names and established a search committee and who suggested three names to me and, at that time it meant to also of course the pastors of the other parishes, and we individually interviewed the three candidates. Individually, and unanimously we selected Mary Randolph. And that was, I considered that, being divine guidance too, because she was young and knowledgeable and enthusiastic, and she gave us 13 years of total dedication. And then, of course, as so often happens in the religious, in religious people

working for the church, they finally reach a stage where they need recompense in accord, that's in keeping with the work that they are capable of doing and indeed are doing. They need to get more money, you know. That took some getting used to. I think more and more that it was a question of the people than the administration because most of the parents would say, with children in the school, they themselves had been products of Catholic school and they had to adjust to the idea that there's going to be no nuns in the school right now. It tears apart ... I think it probably, let me put it this way, that there was a good foundation laid and the transition to lay a leadership was, went very smoothly. I'm not telling you all the things that went ... the other things that happened. [laughter] It's not confession. But no, it went very well and then of course it has ... when I look back on that and realize that I had two, to me, two really wonderful associates in Mary Randolph and Pam Klobukowski, you know, who is leaving this year also.

So, in turning over the parish, so much of the planning and all for the parish, I was blessed with, with wonderful, wonderful people. I mean they came in and like, you know a lot of them: Jerry Conlon and those people I mean. They may not have been baptized by being plunged into the water like John the Baptist did. But when they came to St. Peter's they certainly plunged into the parish activities and all else that was going on, you know, I did recognize that they were far more knowledgeable than I was, or is. And they were able to execute and work together. I think it was magnificent the way Jerry's generation, so to speak, which is now probably the seniors generation there. But that generation merged and it ... we had maybe the Parish Council as half and half, the Parish Council was, were the old people, the old generation and they worked like they were all the same group, age group, you know. It was wonderful. Wonderful people make a wonderful parish, wonderful people make a wonderful community and I've been blessed to have that, wonderful people with me.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/SIDE 1

HOUSE: I know St. Peter's has been involved with the Capitol Hill community beyond the parish members: Capitol Hill [Group] Ministry, and I know you have already mentioned relationship with some of the homeless. Do you want to talk about some of those broader community efforts the church has engaged in?

O'SULLIVAN: Well, we've always been involved to greater or lesser degrees with the Capitol Hill Group Ministry, which is an association of, kind of the loosely, there are no officers or anything else, loosely the pastors of the churches on Capitol Hill. And the biggest part of that undertaking has been, you

know, the soup kitchen at the Church of the Brethren to which St. Peter's contributes on a regular basis financially. They have been also, the St. Peter's Parish provides a noon meal for SOME each month.

HOUSE: That's: So Others Might Eat?

O'SULLIVAN: So Others Might Eat, yes.

HOUSE: [spells it] SOME.

O'SULLIVAN: So then St. Peter's has for years been affiliated with the Tyler School and they, every Christmas they [parishioners] do the Christmas tree in the back of the church and they hang the labels on the Christmas tree that identifies gifts needed and clothing or something else by children and the age of the children or adults' age, size and so on and so forth. They take the label off the tree and go and buy the gift as suggested there for them. And that has gone really big in terms of; there may be as many as 500 individual gifts. I don't know for sure how many but it's large. Everything is brand-new, bought to size and dimensions by the children or adults. So I don't know what else.

HOUSE: Okay, I know a lot of community groups have benefited too from just using the space at St. Peter's as a social hall down there. I know the Capitol Hill Restoration Society has met there, the Capitol Hill Day school I think has held school functions there and I think even one of the unions at the Library of Congress, the Congressional Research Service Employees was founded in that basement.

O'SULLIVAN: That could be, that's, that hasn't been active through the St. Peter's since I've been there.

HOUSE: The union or the ...

O'SULLIVAN: The union.

HOUSE: Yeah, I think they just founded it there. I think they use space in the Library of Congress now.

O'SULLIVAN: The rule was that any organization that was on the Hill, existing on the Hill, where if they wanted space for meetings or other activities they were free, provided the space was open on the given dates they wanted it. Or they could work out an arrangement to get a date. The fact was that every community living on the Hill were welcome to use the space for free. And so we had the Restoration Society. You had, recently one of the meetings of the village, it takes a village I think ...

HOUSE: Capital Hill Village?

O'SULLIVAN: Capitol Hill Village yes. And there's lots of different groups. From time to time we've had like choral groups from the Hill, years and years ...

HOUSE: What kind of groups?

O'SULLIVAN: Choral.

HOUSE: Oh, choral groups.

O'SULLIVAN: Yes, people that like to get together and sing. But that's the rule if it's a Capitol Hill community group and they need space, if we can accommodate them we will. Like the AA is one that that they use every day, every day of the week.

HOUSE: St. Peter's, of course, is in a unique location being so close to Congress. Have there been special relationships with Congress during your time as pastor there?

O'SULLIVAN: Well, St. Peter's is supposed to be the church for the House side. Of course there is no territorial division of the government property on the Hill or all the way down the Mall. There is no division that says beyond this. Congress persons generally speaking maintain membership in their home parishes. On daily Mass and weekends when they're in town (you know more about the schedule of, their in and out schedule from the Washington, than I do). But when they are in town for holy days or daily Mass, they come to St. Peter's. A couple of times we had for instance, we had a prayer service for the opening of Congress in St. Peter's Church. And then I think they usually had a coffee in the hall, something like that. But there is a prayer service in which I was not involved. I think maybe that way if they wanted there to be a religious person involved, he or she would be whoever the chaplain was on the House, because that way you avoid confusion.

HOUSE: I see, so this wasn't necessarily just a Catholic prayer service?

O'SULLIVAN: This was an opening of Congress prayer session.

HOUSE: I see.

O'SULLIVAN: That was initiated from the Congress and I don't know how many times it happened, but ...

HOUSE: I've heard of something called First Friday?

O'SULLIVAN: The First Friday club, that was years ago. That hasn't existed since, we'll say maybe '75 or '80. When as Catholics if you were going to Mass and receive the Eucharist on any given day you had to fast from midnight the night before. Well the First Friday devotion was a worldwide devotion to the Sacred Heart and on the first Friday of each month people were urged to attend Mass and receive the Eucharist. Well, as an act of reparation for the sins of the world. And, it was established on Capitol Hill for the Congress and they came and they usually had Mass on that Friday, the first Friday of the month in St. Peter's Church. They probably had the Mass at seven o'clock. By the time I got there, there was no Mass anymore and then they went to the Capitol Hill hotel, to the hotel down there on ... it's now the Capitol Hill, police use building; it's there on C Street.

HOUSE: Right and I think some of those committees maybe use it too.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah, so at any rate they would go there for breakfast. Well, by the time I got to St. Peter's in '70 there was a Capitol First Friday club but it was a luncheon only because since Vatican II removed the obligation of fasting from midnight, the people were able to go to church in their home parish before they came into work, you know. Or go to St. Peter's at noon time. So it was one of those things just that drifted out of existence, you know.

HOUSE: I understand you started the St. Patrick's Day Mass and party at St. Peter's. Do you want to say anything about that?

O'SULLIVAN: Well ...

HOUSE: It's an annual event now right, and very popular.

O'SULLIVAN: Well, yes, the choir had some little get-together in one of the member's homes and somebody produced a tape of the Mass and played it. And everybody listened to it with rapt attention, of course. So I said, "Well, why can't we do that at St. Peter's?" And this was a Christmas party, I think. And they said, "Well why not?" So I said, "Well, let's do it." And so the choir director got busy and the choir got busy, and different people got busy and everybody chipped in; worked their butts off and it turned out that we couldn't believe it when the—we've always had the party the Saturday before St. Patrick's Da—and we couldn't believe it, when the first party with very little time for propaganda to publicize that. You couldn't get another body in that church no matter how you tried. It was jam packed with people. And it has, it has fallen off some. When I say fallen off some, maybe 20 or 30 people. [Laughter] but it's ...

HOUSE: 20 or 30 fewer?

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah, it might be that but you can't tell really; you can't tell. But it's something that the people look forward to, people that have been there. There are people who have come from out of town for it, to be there at that Mass. It's a wonderful community builder. Again it's part of my philosophy that you don't engage, you don't become involved in social activities, to raise money. You know, years ago you remember you had the picnic and the bazaars and the carnivals and all the rest of it to raise money for the church. We raised \$2000 from the Christmas car raffle and you spent, you know, 20,000 hours of your time and other people's time, you know, and all the rest of it and drove them crazy. Because they were so concerned. First of all they had to make enough money to pay for the car and then they had to make some money to make it worthwhile. And either way I ever looked at these things, they're never worthwhile because I never knew somebody who was the chairperson of the raffle this year who volunteered for it next year. You created an atmosphere of fear. Fear in the sense that, "We can't", "We've got to make", "We can't afford this". No, you don't have to; this is an investment in the community. What we do, whether it be the yard sale, the flea market, St. Patrick's Day party, it's all part of the investment in the community. And I think St. Patrick's is specially that way. Everybody who worked in the first St. Patrick's Day party are still working now. And looking forward to it. It's doing what I thought it should do and that's build the community. And then have fun doing that. If you're working for the church you should have fun doing it, you know.

HOUSE: From what I hear that's definitely the case. People are working on it and you going to it.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah, yeah.

HOUSE: How long did you serve at St. Peter's? Serve as pastor?

O'SULLIVAN: Well, 35 years.

HOUSE: Are there, are there any other memories at the church that you want to talk about now that I haven't brought up?

O'SULLIVAN: There are lots of memories I have [laughter] Sharon that you might bring up if you want to. But I'm going to be noncommittal on it.

HOUSE: You're going to be noncommittal, all right [laughter]?

O'SULLIVAN: Yes.

HOUSE: I tried to do my research but I don't know if I've, hopefully, got a lot of the best. I know you were honored by your friends and parishioners on the occasion of your ...

O'SULLIVAN: I would like to mention the fact that we, on a couple of occasions, opened the church to debate on social issues which involved people from the Hill as well as, what's his first name, Peterson, the newsman?

HOUSE: Gordon Peterson?

O'SULLIVAN: Gordon Peterson acted as the moderator of a couple of meetings in a public service. I would call them public service promotion, because they dealt with the social teachings of the church, on peace and so forth. Father Bryan Hehir was the head of the Catholic Bishops social service committee and he was involved. George Higgins was the diocese involved. It moved very well but they were hot topics, the social issues. It went off very well, with good crowds.

HOUSE: There were?

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah.

HOUSE: And when was this?

O'SULLIVAN: In the 70s or early 80s, I'm not sure. But we did have an opportunity, provided an opportunity, to use the space for social seminars. We call it that. Yeah.

HOUSE: I know that on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of your ordination there were quite a few celebrations both here and in Ireland. When was that again?

O'SULLIVAN: In '05.

HOUSE: 2005.

O'SULLIVAN: Yeah.

HOUSE: So, do you want to talk a little bit about those celebrations that were here and in Ireland?

O'SULLIVAN: Well, I felt, you know, I'd been at St. Peter's 35 years. I'd been a priest for 50 years and I spent 35 years of those 50 years at St. Peter's. So, we had a parish-wide party at St. Peter's on the date, the Sunday nearest the date, of ordination, which was the 5th of June. And Andrew [ed. Andrew Mills, music director at St. Peter's at the time] did a special music for the liturgy. And the parishioners folded up

their sleeves and got all kind of goodies and a grand old time was had by all. And then I had decided that I was going to have a party back home and use it as an occasion for kind of a family reunion. And so, I think from 30 to 40 parishioners and friends from here went over.

HOUSE: Went to Ireland?

O'SULLIVAN: Went to Ireland for anywhere from an overnight to 10 days or something like that, you know, different times.

HOUSE: That's quite a tribute, I think, to have all those people.

O'SULLIVAN: I really couldn't believe it, I really couldn't believe it. And, it was totally unreal when it came to the question of the reunion, there were people there, you know, first cousins that had never met each other. And so it was a really great celebration of family and friends. I get kind of emotional when I think about it. Lynn [ed. Lynn Freeman, rectory manager] did the work on listing the family tree to the best that we get it with ... So there was one couple as a first cousin and he had died quite young and left two little kids and they were there with their mother whom I had never met any of them, you know. But at one point they were going through the family tree and one of the kids now a married woman she said, "Mommy, mommy here's Daddy. Daddy's here." You know, it was a fantastic and everybody loved it, I think. Everybody loved it. The weather cooperated and so it was really a great trip to Ireland.

HOUSE: And this was in Killarney?

O'SULLIVAN: In Kenmare.

HOUSE: In Kenmare. Is that where you went to seminary?

O'SULLIVAN: No, I went to seminary in Kilkenny.

HOUSE: I see.

O'SULLIVAN: I went to high school in the Killarney. And seminary in Kilkenny. And said the celebration Mass in Kilgarvan. And Kilgarvan was the parish church that where I grew up, where I was baptized and made Confirmation, First Eucharist, you know.

HOUSE: That's wonderful. Well, I assume now that you are no longer the pastor you are having time to enjoy your golf and travel and maybe walking. Are you getting a chance to do those things more now?

O'SULLIVAN: No.

HOUSE: No?

O'SULLIVAN: It's ... I'm finding out I think with a lot of people, it takes a lot more adjustment to retire than it does to go to work. You know, because you're now a one person interest group, whereas at work you've got several interests in all. You know, retirement to a lot of people, I will say that it takes time to adjust to retirement. You don't ... I'm retired, I can't, so to speak willy-nilly call you up and say, "Hey, Sharon, the sun is out, let's go out and play nine holes." You know, because you'd say, "I've got to take my kids someplace" or "I got to do this," you know. And then you go ... I'm gradually moving in, but I ... it'll take some time. It'll take a little while.

HOUSE: Well, I've enjoyed this very much and I thank you very much.

O'SULLIVAN: Well, I've enjoyed it. Let's as they say, you know, it shows how much I have adapted. I used to shudder when somebody would say, "Let's do lunch!" I would say, [laughter] "What happened to the English language?"

HOUSE: [laughter]

O'SULLIVAN: And so give me a call and we'll do lunch sometime at the club.

HOUSE: I'd love to.

O'SULLIVAN: Good, good.

END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 1

END OF INTERVIEW