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## Oral History: Thaddeus Stachura

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Interview with Father Thaddeus Stachura

BRETT: Today is June 22, 2017. I'm Brett Cotter and I'm here with Father Thaddeus Stachura and we both consent to having our voices recorded on this interview. I'm going to begin by asking Father Thaddeus Stachura when and where did you grow up?

PRIEST: I was born in this house, 96 Rockland Road, on February 20, 1936. My parents are children of immigrants, but my parents have brothers and sisters who were born in Poland, and brothers and sisters who were born in America. So my mother comes from a family called Rudnik. Her mother's maiden name, because it's interesting... it's Prachniak, that was my grandmother's maiden name on my mother's side. And on my father's side, my grandfather came from Śemesz, which is near the Slovakian border. But my grandmother came from Wadowice which is the town where the Pope John Paul II was born, you know? I tell people that, and the people say; That can't be the same Wadowice. No, no, that's the same one! What's the big deal, you know? It's not like we were relatives... Well anyway, my grandmother was born there, which is close to Krakow. And I'm mentioning this because my grandparents... I don't know about the grandfathers because they both died young... but the grandmothers didn't speak English. Ah... they could gobble a few words. I remember trying to talk in English to one of them. For instance: Un-yunts! What the hay is un-yunts? I need un-yunts! She wanted onions, give me some onions. You know, God, I couldn't figure it out. But anyway, my aunts and uncles all had their roots in the Czestochowa Parish, but keep in mind, that parish started at 1903, so my mother was born in 1903, on September 1<sup>st</sup>, right Tom? And she was born on Golds Street, which is kind of truncated now because it goes through Wyman-Gordons. And my father was born on Ellsworth Street also in 1903 in July. The church started in 1903, but it wasn't there, it didn't have a building. So my father was baptized in Saint Casimir's and my mother was baptized in Notre Dame, both of which have been suppressed so far. But that was a difficult thing for Polish people, they didn't have a parish that was their own. So in 1903, they started an assembly and my grandparents, of course, were part of the founders of the original parish. They didn't get a church up until, I think, 1906. And, of course, it's at the same place where more or less it always was. But it had no school, of course, when it started. And they started off with a grammar school, and they built a building for the grammar school. And then they built on, for up until the eight grade, and then they built a high school at the end. And the high school, in 1964, had a fire so they had to rebuild the high school part in 1964. I only tell you this because it kind of shows the difficulties that they had. Also, the church was on Richland Street, which ran from Vernon down to Millbury. But now with I-290, it was cut off. So it stops at Ward Street now. So the church is no longer on Richland Street, it's on

Ward Street. And the rectory that used to be to the left of the church was taken and added to a three-decker on Ward Street, and then they also built on to it both ends. So... here's the three-decker. They built on both ends, so the both ends are new, the center is old. But besides moving the rectory, they expanded the church back in the 50s. They put some extra on the front so that they enlarged the choir, and they put an addition on the back so that they enlarged the sacristy. Plus, they did a funny thing—they dug out a cellar underneath the church, so now there's a meeting room and a cafeteria under there—it's very nice. A cafeteria, of course, that means they have also a kitchen and so forth, and downstairs they also have bathroom facilities. All that took place under Monsignor Chwalek back in the 50s. I couldn't tell you the exact year, but it was about '53, or something like that, because I know I was working for Paul Keller at the time.

It might have been '54, it could have been '54. But anyway, I worked for Paul Keller. He was a bricklayer at the time. Across the street from the church there used to be a public school. It was made out of bricks so they knocked it down. The guy I worked for used to go and get bricks out of there while they were laying around for free, you know, instead of having them take it to the dump.

BRETT: 06:56 Around when was this?

PRIEST: Mid 50s. It might have been '54, '55. In '56 I was at Holy Cross. But anyway, I'm giving you my history... I didn't go to school at Czestochowa St. Mary's because we didn't have a car or anything. So when we moved to Auburn... Where are you going to go to church? You going to walk all the way to Worcester to St. Mary's? We went to St. Joseph's, which was only one mile away and not a bad walk. Go down this hill, up that hill, up that hill, you're there. But when it came time to go to a high school, I wanted to go to Parochial school, so I went to St. Peter's. I picked up a bus down here on a street right here. It would drop me off in front of the school. If I went to St. Mary's, I'd have to go down to City Hall, take a transfer, and then go back again in order to get up to St. Mary's. So that wasn't really very practical for education. When I got out of high school, I had already decided that I wanted to be a priest. But I didn't want to tell the nuns because, you know, I had classmates that told the nuns they wanted to be priests, and they did everything but polish their shoes, you know, by licking on them, you know...the way they treated them... So I said, no, no, I don't like this. So I kept it quiet. I decided when I was a sophomore I wanted to be a priest. I told my pastor. When I was a senior, he went and told them and they then scolded me that I didn't tell them also. So, you know...but... I tried then, I asked them to let me take Latin because I was taking Spanish at the time. They wouldn't let me take it because I was taking a secretarial course and, you know, I learned short-hand and bookkeeping and all this kind of stuff because it sounded like a good way to make a living. And as a result, I couldn't get into college on the first shot. I had to spend a year with a tutor to learn

some Latin, and I had to learn ancient history, and I think calculus and some dang thing, you know... But anyway, after that year went by, I took the test at the Holy Cross and I got in, and, of course with the bishop's earmark so to speak. The bishop had plenty of priest candidates at that time. The bishop was Bishop Wright. So the three of us, when we finished our first year, the Bishop Wright says, Take it over again. I *passed--they* passed! But he wanted us to excel in Greek, ancient Greek, and Latin. Well, I didn't excel, I passed! Now I heard that passing is passing, right? The bishop said—Take it over. Well, oh crap. I didn't want to take it over...the same professor, the same books and the same stuff like that. So I pulled out and went to the seminary, the Polish seminary. Not only that, but there were financial reasons for it. I paid my own way to go to college. When I went to Holy Cross, tuition was...Do you believe it?...seven hundred dollars...[laughs]... seven hundred dollars. When I think about it I say, nowadays it's sixty thousand almost, you know? When you throw in all the special tariffs that you had to pay... But anyway, to go to the Polish seminary I paid seven hundred and twenty three dollars, and I get tuition, room and board, and laundry...you know?

BRETT:

PRIEST:

11:09 [facetiously] Holy Cross doesn't even give me laundry!  
No, I know, they don't give anything. You know, just tuition. So I got out of the Polish seminary: tuition, room and board, and laundry. And I stayed there for eight years because I repaid it, that first year I had at Holy Cross, which allowed me to do good. Then I graduated from St. Mary's College in 1960. I would have been a graduate at Holy Cross in '59, but I graduated St. Mary's Cum Laude. Don't ask me how because I always worked. I worked even as a student in the seminary. I was a barber.

TOM:

PRIEST:

11:52 Wow.  
You know, you had assigned jobs that you had to do, but I took upon myself another job to help me pay my way. It's not that easy, seven hundred twenty three dollars sounds like a very small amount of money, but in those days, if you worked for a dollar an hour you were lucky, right, Tom?

TOM:

PRIEST:

Ya...sixty-five cents an hour...  
Sixty-five cents an hour. See what I mean? So seven hundred twenty three dollars was a chunk of money. But anyway—I got out of their Cum Laude from college and I got a letter from the bishop at that time, and he wanted me to go to Rome. And, you know, not being good at languages, I told him: Listen, I want to work in a Polish parish and I don't know how I'm going to learn Polish in Rome. I'm going to say here so I get more Polish because I'll get a saturation of Polish if I stay there. So he said: Good, stay there. So when I got out, of course, and ordained by a different bishop, by Flanagan, I spent seven years without being in a Polish parish. But after that, the rest of my life was in a Polish parish. I was in St. Joseph's, Webster, from '71 to '78, I came to Czestochowa in 78 to '83, from '83 to '93 I was back at St. Joseph's in Webster as the pastor, and I came back to Worcester as the pastor in 1992 or '93 and stayed there until

2014. Ah, I don't know, it's...I really enjoyed being a priest, but I always wanted to be in a Polish parish. I love their customs, I identify with the people, and not only that, but, you know, as I mentioned, with a bond here—our parents worked, but their parents were not. It's a strange thing because here you're grown up and you say: Well, I'm an American, not Polish. When you were a kid you were a Polish kid. You know, you go to high school, you're a Polish kid. You go to college, you're a Polish kid. Now, you go to the Polish priest seminary; now, you're not really Polish. So when they started off with the language studies in Polish, I was up against a lot of guys that came there speaking Polish. It's awful hard when you miss the foundations for it, you understand? You're supposed to throw yourself right into speaking because an awful lot of my classmates spoke it. But anyway, I picked it up, so that by the time I graduated I was able to give my sermons in Polish and listen to confession in Polish and prepared weddings in Polish, and baptisms in Polish... I don't consider myself fluent, but as far as what I just told you, sermons, preparing for weddings, preparing for baptisms, giving talks to people, I could handle it, you know? Everybody knows that I'm not from Poland, which is even, to this day, a black mark against you because the Polish parish Czestochowa and St. Joseph's in Webster want someone from Poland. So when I got old I asked the bishop to assign my associate, who was from Poland, and he's done a great job. He's really brought the parish up quite a bit.

BRETT: 16:95 Which parish is this?

PRIEST: Czestochowa. Of course, the one in Webster I took over, it was in bad shape—spiritually it was in bad shape. Physically it was in terrible debt and so I had a lot of work there—the place wore me out. But I suppose that's what a priest is supposed to do. But anyway, I ran that parish out there with the cemetery and the school. That was ten years as its pastor. Then I came to Worcester and I run the school for over twenty years. That may not impress you, but believe me, if you take care of the payment of the teachers, buy the fuel oil, replace boilers, replace windows, and fix the roofs and all this, I used to describe it as trying to walk a tight-wire over an alligator, or something like that, you know? It's terrible, it's very hard, very hard. But God was good to me so it's still healthy, it's still going good in Worcester. It's still going good in Webster as well. But when I got out, when I finished because I was very sick, you know, and very tired... You know, I had cancer of the prostate, and a bad case of sugar diabetes—the sugar diabetes almost killed me because my numbers were 800 when they first discovered that I had it and immediately they put me in the hospital and gave me insulin and then, ah, you know, one thing leads to another. Like I mentioned, the cataracts, all this kind of stuff—it's a lot. And then the cancer came back and things like that. When you're not healthy it's very hard to run a big plant. But anyway, when I was getting out, the school was in dire straits. I announced to the teachers and the children it was going to close that year. But then I got a big ground-swell of people that wanted it to stay open.

BRETT: 18:13 Who were these people that wanted it to stay open?  
 PRIEST: Priests and parents of the students and stuff like that, you know. But anyway, ground-swell of complaints and their petitions doesn't mean they come across with money. So I gave them a good chunk of my retirement money. I don't know if you want to put that in it, but I don't care if it's in a book or not but—in that year I gave them two hundred eleven thousand dollars that I'd saved up, you know. It pulled it through and now it's doing very well. This is 2017, that was in 2014, you know. When the people saw that it was going to function right and everything, not only did we hold onto the students that we had, but we got other students as well. And it seems to be doing very well now, so that they bought a new van this past year and they're doing thirty thousand dollars worth of brick work to plug up where it's leaking, and stuff like that. But the school is doing well! We have a marvelous principal. I don't know how he does it, you know, but... Don't you see? You got to remember I wasn't only the head of the school, I had to take care of all the maintenance of the parish and the spiritual maintenance, so I was...was really taxed, you know? Really stressed out. When I was a curate at Czestochowa, I used to go everyday either to a hospital or a nursing home, including Sundays. Seven days a week. So I had a lot of concern for the spiritual welfare of the people. That's a good thing because the people are going to love you for it. You take care of their mother and father when their mother and father are dying, they remember it, you know? It makes them closer to the parish. If you're always there and answer the phone when they call... See, in the modern church, priests put the phone on messages. People don't want to leave a message if their father is dying or their mother is dying, they want to talk immediately to the priest, you know? So I was always available, night and day, you know? To the point to where...when I was in Webster I used to answer the sick calls from the hospital there too be the other two parishes wouldn't answer the phone at night. But if it rang at one thirty, two o'clock, three o'clock in the morning I would answer it and go and anoint somebody.

And that's a good thing for the people! It gives them a sense of spiritual security, or whatever you want to call it. But anyway, I love the parish and... I don't know what to tell you about the growth of the parish. One of the pastors that they had that you have to make a note of because I think he was Pastor for almost forty years...

BRETT: 21:39 Bojanowski?

PRIEST: Bojanowski, ya. Do you know where his grave is?

BRETT: I do not.

PRIEST: It's in Notre Dame Cemetery. Go in their main gate, I mean the original main gate with the stone pillars on both sides. Drive straight in and then there's a rotary in there with an obelisk in the center, and grass around that round rotary. His grave is plunked without a grave marker. I mean he's got a flat marker on the ground. And so hasn't Moneta—I think he was the

first pastor. Moneta is there, and Bojanowski is there. They don't have impressive gravestones. Now that may not mean anything to you but that means a lot to me. I like that. I think that's wonderful, that they're not trying to brag about buying a big gravestone, you know I was Pastor So-and-so, I did this, or that... Nah...just a flat marker. Bojanowski was the builder of that parish. He was not the first pastor. But he took over and he's the guy that built the schools. He's the guy that enlarged the schools, he's the guy that put everything into the schools. The second one who was one of the outstanding pastors has got to be Monsignor Chwalek. By the way, I brought this book so that you'd see his picture when he was a young man. I don't know if you can use a picture from a book like this , but....

BRETT: 23:15 Oh, I definitely can.

PRIEST: [paper rustling] There he is. I know it's all in Polish and you're not going to be able to read it, but that's him. He spent a good amount of time at St. Joseph's in Webster and then he was sent to be the pastor at Czestochowa at about 1950 when Bishop Wright came in, and Bishop Wright took out Bojanowski and put him in a hospital because he was getting senile, you know? Bojanowski didn't die until 1964.

BRETT: 24:04 Wow.

PRIEST: I went to his funeral, that's why I know—because I remember his funeral. But then again, Lekarczyk , I think, had a long term out in Webster. He didn't die until, I think, '65. You know, to put in thirty or forty years in a parish, that's something common. But anyway, that's Chwalek I'll let you take that book if you want. It has pictures of other priests that served in Czestochowa as well. But looking at this book, you kind of get an idea of the same thing you had in Czestochowa. That's why I say that you get those anniversary books because they'll show you first communion classes and how happy they were, the old church, and the new church, stuff like this...

BRETT: 24:56 If I could ask some questions...

PRIEST: Yes, ask some questions, go ahead if you want...

BRETT: 24:58 If I could go back actually to St. Joseph's, back here in Auburn; so that was Polish church, more or less, right, St. Joseph's?

PRIEST: No.

BRETT: It was not? It was more French-Canadian. Okay.

PRIEST: It was a mission church...

BRETT: 25:16 Was there that much of a Polish population in that church or were you one of the only ones?

PRIEST: We had our aunts, and our family members, the Selicki's belonged there, and we had a cousin, the Prachniaks were there, the Sidor's were there.

BRETT: But no population big enough to dedicate any Polish festivities?

PRIEST: No, no.

BRETT: 25:41 Okay. So when you went to St. Peter's, was that St. Peter-Marien? in Worcester, or a different...

PRIEST: No, no, the St. Peter's on Main Street.

BRETT: Okay.

PRIEST: You know, in those days, St. John's was on Temple Street and St. Peter's was on Main Street. It's hard to remember, that was a long time ago, you know?—sixty years ago.

BRETT: 26:03 So St. Peter is in Worcester on Main Street.

PRIEST: Ya.

BRETT: Okay. And when you went to St. Peter's, why did you want to be a priest? You said you wanted to be a priest but...

PRIEST: Ah, you know, I was an alter boy in Auburn and I was an alter boy when I was in high school. See, that's a wonderful question, you know, it's a wonderful question. Because the fact of the matter is, when I was young I didn't want to be a priest. [...] I was a little bit of a smart-aleck and stuff like that. Not bad, but I did a little bit. No, I didn't want to be a priest. I had treated my vocation -- family members and good neighbors. You know, when you were young and start walking up to church on Sunday, you might see the Cooney's walking up to the church, and the other people... We didn't walk in a crowd like a parade, but you knew they were going to church, these were going to church, and you might run into them walking to church... I don't have a good example on the part of the church members. I don't know if I'd even thought about being a priest. Of course, your mother and father always prayed for you. I think my grandparents did. I'm not so sure any of my aunts or uncles thought I'd be a priest, I think they didn't think so. But I've thought a lot about that question. I really think that God chose me, I didn't choose God. God chose me. After my confirmation when I was a sophomore in high school, God chose me. I say I decided to be a priest, but I think God chose me because God wanted me to be a priest. So matter what came up after I made up my mind...that's why I told you I had a year with a tutor, a year at Holy Cross, I had four years at St. Mary's College, and four years at St. Cyril and Methodius Seminary. So by the time I was ordained I was twenty eight years old. Because I was determined to be a priest. In fact, it's a vocation. God calls you, he chooses you, and you go. I've thought about it many times during my lifetime and I'd like to give you nice stories about, gee, when I was a kid I played mass, or I always wanted to be a priest, or I had a great priest who inspired me... I didn't have any priest who inspired me. As a matter of fact, a lot of priests we had gave lousy sermons, and I used to think to myself --I could do better than that. Pardon me, but I'm reflecting upon how I pondered certain things when I was in high school. But, ya... God chose me. That's why. And I got on with it. And I must tell you that I look back on my priesthood, I look back on my formation and preparation for priesthood and I loved a lot of it. Some of it was very difficult, an awful burden, but God always carried me through and I always prayed. I always prayed the Rosary. Of course, we prayed the Rosary, and once on the radio, and we used to pray it in the house here, you know, together. And we used to say our prayers together. My mother used to listen to our prayers [prays in Polish]. So what leads to vocation? I think decent parents, inspiration by good neighbors. So many

of the neighbors belonged to St. Joseph's—that's another thing too, you know? Where we went to school, you know, a lot of the kids were Protestants, but most of the kids were Catholics. And I think most of the teachers were Catholics—not all of them. Then I had one teacher, her brother was a priest, in the third grade. Miss Leek—remember Tom?

TOM: Yes.

PRIEST: And another one, Mr. Miller. After I became a priest he became a priest but he was much older. He was a Jesuit, and he was in the treasury because his father was a bursar back in the 50s. I don't know, I don't know what to tell you... Anything else personally do you want to know?

BRETT: 31:04 I also want to talk about the parishes and the institutions at which you were. And you said you served...

PRIEST: Well, my first parish was St. Mary's, Uxbridge. There were Polish people there to the point where they have a *dompolski*. "Dom" means home in Polish. It was a hall and it was a barroom. You know, it was a place where they used to gather. I was there a few times only because they had some kind of a celebration or another. So I was able to celebrate a Polish feast a little different than I would have if I didn't have a Polish crowd in the parish. I was only there three years. Then the bishop sent me to St. Catherine of Sweden. I was there four years. Now St. Catherine of Sweden is on Wiser Street, which is off of Quinsigamond Ave. in Worcester, and the problem with it was—and it is a wonderful parish, I love the people—but the problem with it is if you're going to be Polish, that's not the place to be. Because there was a Polish parish nearby and only Polish people went there—almost all the Polish people went there. I longed to go there also. But after four years, the bishop upped me and sent me to the Polish parish, finally! But, you know, to be off your Polish language for seven years, to be away from writing sermons and stuff for seven years, puts you back a little bit in a language. So I had to scratch and claw my way back into it so that people would understand me. Now people are good. If you try at it, and work at it, they're very understanding because they know that you're desirous of serving them. But I can't tell you how many times I listened to confessions in Polish, or prepared people for weddings and stuff in Polish. But Webster was not as Polish as Worcester. Now that's an interesting thing...let me tell you about Webster: it's the first Polish-American parish in all of New England. The first. Before anybody in Boston, Fall River, Springfield, Worcester, Warren, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island...before any of those places had a Polish parish, Webster had one. It doesn't put them much ahead of the others because I told you Worcester started in 1903. I think Webster was 1887. I could be wrong. But I think it's 1887. But it makes it the very first in all of New England. But the next year they started another parish in Chicopee, the Franciscans because the Franciscans started St. Joseph's. Now, you gotta to keep this in mind—that this was all – of course this was all Boston archdiocese but then this was all Springfield archdiocese. Worcester diocese was part of Springfield

diocese. So we had good contact. When I was a young priest, there was good contact with all the parishes in Springfield. That means that when it came time for Forty Hours' Devotions, who would have first dibs on dates? St. Joseph's in Webster. So their Forty Hours' Devotions would last three days. It's May 22nd. But if you go through the different parishes, see what their date is for Forty Hours—it tells you when there was that list, practically speaking—because the next one, of course, would be Chicopee, and one of the last ones, later, Czestochowa, Forty Hours was in October—the third week of October. Well, when you take that there is somebody every week and you go through... Okay: you've got St. Joseph's in Webster, you've got Chicopee, you've got Three Rivers; a Springfield diocese that's part of Springfield, Indian Orchard, West Springfield, but then we also used to go... because West used to be the last and farthest. They had another parish up in Nashua, New Hampshire and we'd go to theirs. Remember I told you it was all... The first one in all of New England. So Nashua, New Hampshire is New England. We use to go to Forty Hours' in Nashua, New Hampshire. Then, of course, because over the years other parishes started up. Then there was a Parish in Gardner; it's now suppressed, it was St. Joseph's, Gardner. There was a parish in, I think it's West Warren. But the parish is now more or less is suppressed and is now only a chapel.

They take care of it from the town of Warren. But we used to go there, to West Warren, a Polish parish, and we used to go to St. Andrew Bobola in Dudley, St. Hedwig's in Southbridge; suppressed. Dudley's not suppressed but...

BRETT: 37:31 Now what do you mean by suppressed?

PRIEST: It's no longer a parish.

BRETT: Okay.

PRIEST: You can still have a funeral there and a wedding because they didn't sell the property yet, but when they sell that property you won't be able to do that. The Polish people go to a, what's used to be, Notre Dame—what do they call it now? Pope John Paul II Parish. That's interesting. For me it's fascinating—it's interesting. Because it shows the unity we had, and the camaraderie or the brotherhood, or the fraternity, or whatever you want to call it—a family feeling you had with all these other parishes. They needed one another's support because they were certainly a minority. Not the tiniest minority, but a minority.

BRETT: 38:25 These Polish groups?

PRIEST: Well, Polish period, you know? So anyway...

BRETT: To have solidarity with...

PRIEST: That is correct. Not only that but they nudge one another to do something or other, you know... But anyway, nowadays, they still have the Forty Hours' at St. Joseph's. I don't think they have it at St. Andrew Bobola anymore, they have one day of Adoration. They have it at Czestochowa, Clinton, —Oh, I didn't even mention Clinton. But Clinton has been suppressed. Not only that, but they knocked down the church that was

built only fifty years ago. And, you know, it was a brand new church fifty years ago. But it's gone now and they've closed the school as well. It's too bad. It shouldn't have been. If they had a different pastor there it would not have happened, because they should not have done it. It was the last school in the town of Clinton, Catholic school. They should have kept it open. They should have kept it going. I'm sure they could have if they'd operated differently, but they didn't. They operated like—Well, if the people want it we'll keep it. No, no, no...you've got to tell the people to want it, you've got to encourage them to want it, show them why they should want it. You know...show them the benefits of a Catholic education because it's not the same as going to public school. It's better than public school. But anyway, we had all those contacts. Then I never went much to Boston or Springfield Diocese. I used to go to Forty Hours' in Central Falls, Rhode Island. There's a St. Joseph's place there, nice Polish community there. They still have their Forty Hours' but I'm not so sure but I'm not so sure they'd invite the guys from Worcester because they have a Polish priest there from Poland. But anyway, they try to stick together the best they can—they're not perfect. Nobody is perfect. We like to envy the success of others, but you know, one thing—just to be able to speak English fluently—English—gives you such an edge in the United States that it isn't funny. When you come from Poland and you can't speak the English language—granted, somebody's got a job for you—you'll have a job at a foundry, or you'll have a job at a slaughter house, or a job piling bricks one upon another, or stuff like that—but chances are you're not going to have a job as an architect, although one of our uncles was an engineer, but keep in mind, he was born here and he went to public school and finally became an architect. He came from my mother's side of the family. My father's side of the family—I don't know of anybody who was a professional type person. I consider an architect as a kind of professional, you know. All the rest were just machinists, wire drawers, factory workers. But their kids did better, of course, that's what you hope for. Okay, got any more questions?

BRETT: 43:05 Yes, just some general questions. I guess this is in Czestochowa, when you were a pastor—not only when you were a pastor, but just when you were just there. Were there any tensions that you could feel in the community?

PRIEST: Ya, of course. You know, as I mentioned, it was always... You're not going to understand that I was very careful about myself. Let me back up to Webster. When I was in Webster I lived with a curate, another assistant that had no morals. He was an immoral guy. And so I don't want to give you any details. I won't give the details but he was a bad guy. I blew him into the bishop. Gee... The result of that was my being transferred after seven and a half years in Webster, to Worcester. It was providential. Instead of calling him a bad priest and straightening him out, they transferred me... which is all right. But I kept my mouth shut—not to the bishop, I spoke up to the bishop. So I get to the parish and people think,

because that guy was from Poland, that I'm opposed to Polish priests, that I don't like Polish priests. It's not at all the case! I worked at a Polish seminary for seven years! All my professors came from Poland and stuff like that, you know? Give me a break, get out of Buffalo, New York [laughs]. But anyway, I knew how they felt because some of them told me right out. When I became pastor out there I had people who protested. I had confirmation the first month I went out there, and people stood in front of the church with big signs made out of sheets, and with pen wrote on the sheets: We Want To Have A New Priest, because I had insisted that that priest get out of there if I'm going to be the pastor. I can't be the spiritual leader in a place where someone else is going to be the leader of evil! I don't know if you understand me—you can't work it that way. It can't be. Those were the days when the bishops were taking perverts from one parish and putting them in another, you know? Well, that don't work with me. You got to take them out, stick them on the side, and incarcerate them or something, you know? But anyway, so I wouldn't go there.

The bishop asked me would I go, and I said not if he's there, you've got to get rid of him. So the people protested *my* coming, which meant I didn't like Polish priests. But after a year or so, maybe three, everything settled down and it was very nice. People loved me, supported me. I did well. They gave me a lot of money. I did an awful lot of repairs in that place. I mean, when I say a lot of repairs, I repaired the towers on the church, put in all new windows on the school. There were holes in the side of the windows that you could put your hand through in school. They'd keep stuffed rags in there in order to keep the air from coming in in winter. So I did an awful lot of repairs, brought things up to code, up to snuff, so to speak. All right, so now I'm sent to Worcester. Your reputation follows you, or it precedes you. Well, it proceeded me. So the people in the parish thought I didn't like Polish priests, therefore, I don't like Polish people... But as I told you before, when I was an associate there, I spent everyday of the week going to hospitals and nursing homes. I was awfully attentive to their needs. I was always there, always there. Finally, you know, after a while, people catch on. They say geez ; he's always serving us and always there... I made sure I gave good service, I didn't take any- it had to be a solid service. Now I started off with two guys from America. One of them, when I got there—there were three in that parish—one left right away after a month to be the pastor of St. Joseph's, Gardner, Father Pichocki and he was only there a year and he died. The other priest was with me in Webster. Now, because I had difficulty in Webster, that I told you, right? –I needed a helper, one guy, a helper. And the helper that I had was a very holy guy, but I couldn't get him to do things like teach Catechism, or run the CCD, or take care of the CYO, and all this kind of stuff...or answer the phone at night... He was a carpenter and he wanted to build things. Also, he was heavy into Pro-Life. I mean, nothing mattered more than Pro-Life for him. And I don't fault him for that, he

was a wonderful priest in that respect. So when I went to Worcester, who do you think was one of the associates? The one that I fired. Because I fired him, the bishop said—You're going to have to tell him why you don't want him there. So I told him, because he was not doing his work, you know? So I fired him. So I end up with him, he spent another...oh, geez...ten years with me, because he really was a good priest. But there, I made concessions with him so that two days a week he went to march in front of the Pro-Life place against problems pregnancy. And he had his day off, he didn't even use his day off for one of these days. That means, he was gone three days a week. He had mass in the morning, that satisfied me, you know?. But anyway, it makes for a very difficult... You asked me if I had difficulties? I had plenty of difficulties. But God was good to me and made me happy. So I was happy. But I had another priest that came from Poland. I looked forward to getting him. He was first in Webster then he came to Worcester. He hit it off with the parishioners immediately. You know, when you come into a room that's dark you put the lights on, you say: Gee, hey the lights are on! When this guy showed up, the lights went on. All the immigrants brightened up. All the immigrants fawned over him and really went nuts about him. And I was the pastor and was still running the place, I said it's good, let me be the pastor, I'm the one that write the checks, as long as I continually write the checks. By the way, the authority is in the parish and I know that I could fire someone if I wanted to, you know, because I've done it before. Now—I see developing... what's developing? There's this seam, that I had never noticed before. I mean, there was always a difference between Polish people born in America and Polish people born in Poland. But usually it was the ones from America, whose parents still were here alive, you know? One of the priests from Poland, not the one who's there now. Not only did he emphasize the rift between the American born Polish and the Polish born Polish, which was always there, but it was never a friction. It was a seam, you knew there was a difference, but it was never was one that made sparks or friction because the American born were the children of the Polish born, right? In the 60s we had refugees coming in. In the 80s because Solidarnosc [Solidarity] we had more refugees come in, you know. All right, I'm there in '93 and I'm watching what's happening, you know, and, son of a gun, this priest, not only had a seam between Polish-Americans and Polish-Polish, but he had another seam between Polish people that he liked from Poland, and Polish people that he did not want to have anything to do with. That created a crack in the parish. That's a terrible thing to have, you know? To have a seam between Polish Americans and Polish born in Poland, that's understandable. But, I mean, that's just one of those things you're going to have. Because the fact of the matter is, the Polish Americans that are born here, they have a heart and a great love for the ones born in Poland. Of course, they sound like their mother and father. But to have someone make a rift between the people born in Poland... This didn't start to be noticeably bad until he was there

five years. So, ah, after his seventh year—I wasn't really responsible for it—I prayed for it—but I didn't initiate it—the bishop bounced him out to another place.

TOM: I don't think stuff like that should be put in print, though...

PRIEST: It's a terrible thing, you know. Well, you know, I don't care if he puts that in, it happens to be the history of the parish, Tom. It happens to be the truth. But anyway, when he got out, and this priest that I got now as pastor came in, he leveled it, it's like oil and water. He brought things down to the way they should be and they loved him very much as an associate, and after five or seven years with him, he became pastor and they loved him as pastor. But remember what I told you—for a Polish parish, if it's got a lot of immigrants in it, if you come from Poland, you'd have an easier time than if you come from America. But in retrospect, I'd do it all over again because I loved it. I loved it. And I maintain that when I was serving, where were they? Because they [couldn't get to America, do you understand? The Iron Curtain kept them subdued! [laughs]. Well all right. I filled in in positions where there was nobody else to do it.

55:25 You know, the church is in a tough part of the city. I think at one time it was red-lettered, you know? But—I'll give you a for-instance: He used to own a three-decker. What was the street that it was on? Motts Street up on Grafton Hill. He bought it for five thousand dollars with a three-car garage in the back yard and had paving with a driveway and everything else like that, you know? He sold it to a sister after...because it was driving him crazy to be a landlord. All right. I'm telling the you price of that house because all over Vernon Hill and Grafton Hill houses went pffft as far as prices—down.

TOM: Ya, they call it redlining. They claim though it doesn't exist.

PRIEST: Ya. They claim it doesn't exist but bankers knew where it was.

BRETT: Redlining in...

TOM: That means that they won't lend anybody money to buy a house like...

BRETT: Right, what time period was this?

PRIEST: Well he owned the house in the 60s. Was it the 60s?

TOM: It was bought in '68 or something like that.

PRIEST: Now, wait a minute—ya, '68 you would have bought it when I pulled into St. Catherine of Sweden.

BRETT: 56:59 Who is redlining against who in this instance?

PRIEST: The banks as far as giving out loans...

BRETT: Right, right. Was this targeted against a specific group like Polish Americans?

PRIEST: No. The whole neighborhood. Period. The Lithuanians, Irish, everything.

BRETT: Okay.

PRIEST: That was the majority of the people that lived there. But since then, in the last fifty years or so, the Irish moved out so they closed Ascension Parish. While I was a young priest, not only was that church open, but they had a convent and a school and they had a high school for a while. Ascension had a high school. Their property ran all the way down to where the light

is, where Ward Street comes out of Vernon Street, so that those buildings down at the end of Ward and Vernon, made out of brick... Look at them, they have seals up at the top that would be for Diocese of Springfield and stuff like that, because all that in there belonged to the parish. Okay...it's all gone now. The church is still there but it belongs to St. John's, and the black people use it for mass, which is good. But I'm telling you this so that you understand that in fifty years all the neighborhood changed. Did it change for the worse or better? The price of the properties started going up and up and up and up. The price of rents went up and up and up. So if you wanted to buy a house now, if you wanted to buy a three-decker now...he bought his for five thousand dollars... You think it's easy to pay thirty five hundred dollars, excuse me, that's right—three thousand five hundred dollars. I think you could still get a small apartment, maybe. But the thing is, it's no longer five [thousand] dollars it's up to the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Because wasn't the house you gave Mary, when she sold it, it was one hundred thousand?

TOM: She said she got eighty or ninety thousand, I forgot exactly...

PRIEST: Eighty or ninety thousand? That was a big difference. [Tom begins to talk, but recorder cuts out] --Dorchester Street—everything—as the prices went up on all these places, and people were signing on a lot of them and making them look good as well. Neighborhoods changed. A lot of our Polish people moved away. Certainly the Irish people moved away, the Irish church folded up. [Tom suggesting other topics] Ya, the Jewish people moved to the west side of the city. And a lot of Latinos and blacks and Vietnamese, Chinese, whatever—had moved in.

BRETT: 59:57 Since the 1970s?

PRIEST: Ya, maybe since the end of the Vietnam war anyway, until the 80s I would say. But anyway, I lived there a long time. I think it's a long time—four and a half years as a associate and twenty one years as a pastor. I loved it. On my street two people got shot to death, If you go to the front door of the rectory you can see the house where they were killed. And we had a lot of violence near the church, and everywhere you looked, and robberies and stuff like that. So people say: What a rotten place to live! What a rotten place to live! It really isn't. In that section of the city there are absolute genuine people. When a place gets robbed out in the west part of the city, they just don't put it in the paper. You don't steal from somebody who has nothing. You steal from people who have something. That means the wealthy people of the west side are more in danger of being robbed than me. We were robbed, the church was robbed after I left there—the Father was a little careless about security and stuff like that... We were also robbed when I was there. We didn't manage to catch the criminal, but I had the cops come and stuff like that because we had a security system in the school—it was the school they were trying to rob—they didn't get away with anything. But, you know, you got no stereo and this and that and another...

BRETT: 1:02:01 When was this—was this in the 90s?

TOM: Sure I think it was probably in the 90s.

PRIEST: No, it was probably in the 2000s. It's 2017 now, Tom.

TOM: Remember they busted into the office and tried to remove the safe or something but there was nothing.

PRIEST: 1:02:19 It was after 2002. But that's all just fluff, so to speak. You know, dust. It didn't amount to much. But I maintain you got that all over the city. There are robberies all over the city, there are murders all over the city as well. So people look down upon the area where the church is. But I think it was magnificent, I loved it. I thoroughly enjoyed living in that rectory and with those people. I know, a lot of them moved out when I was there. I know that, but they didn't stop coming to church there. They moved to other towns, they moved to Auburn, and Millbury, and everywhere else. We got people who came in from Charlton. We have one lady who comes in from Leominster. I mean, that's a hike, but she says: Na, it's not too bad, you get on I-190 and come right down. I say: you know, that's true, it's a straight road, no stopping, no intersections and so forth, no red lights to wait for. But, it's still a hike as far as I'm concerned. We have people from Shrewsbury, and the ones in Shrewsbury used to be in Pepperell, they used to come in from Pepperell to go to mass, so, you know, they come from all over. But you know, that also means—that if they need a priest, you go up to Pepperell, or you go to Leominster to take care of it if someone is dying and stuff like that. But I always did that, and when it came to people in nursing homes... I went to nursing homes in Westborough, Oakdale, Holden, of course Worcester, all over the place in Worcester, ah, Millbury, the veteran's home in Brockton I used to go there once a month when one of the parsons were there—he was only there a couple of years and then he died. But, you know, if you just watch your time, scheduling your appointments and stuff like that, then you can do those things. It wears you out but you feel good about it, you understand? You get tired but you have a sense of accomplishment. So people look at that church and where it is: Oh, it's near County Square, oh I see the canal, oh, I see.... It's a lovely part of the city. I mean Crompton Park is nice, and if you park at the top of the hill, Vernon Park is nice, you know? And you've got Worcester Academy at the top of the hill—that's a nice looking school and facility and so forth... and if you look from the top of the hill you can, of course I never did it with binoculars, but you can look over the top of the hill and see all of Holy Cross College from View Street. You know, nice! So it's a good place to live. I think it's a *marvelous* place to live. And contrary to what a lot of people think.... Now when I lived at St. Catherine of Sweden, when I was there back in the late 60s... I didn't come back to '71... the filter works for the sewer works for the city of Worcester were on the same plane as us because the railroad used to go right in our backyard and then down by the sewage works. The air there was so bad that anything near there made from a metal like this, would tarnish and rust and everything. We had pin cushions... In those days when I was a

young priest you wear the maniple... I don't know if you know what it is—it looks like a small stole that hangs down from your left arm, but in order to keep it there, so that it doesn't fall off or go backwards, you always used a common pin. You put a common pin in it, slide it in and it holds it onto the sleeve of the alb. The common pins stuck in the pin cushions all would rust. The aluminum windows would all scale, that's how bad the air was. And it stunk at times, you know? Sewage works stunk, it used to stink. So St. Catherine of Sweden had stinky air. You grew up in Our Lady of Czestochowa—fresh air.

TOM: They built a new plant in the 50s...

PRIEST: I know...

BRETT: 1:06:52 So when you mentioned earlier how there's kind of a rift caused by that breach between Polish people born in America and Polish immigrants, and I was just wondering if throughout your time at Our Lady of Czestochowa both as the curate as well as Pastor, were there any major rifts other than that?

PRIEST: No. Not to my knowledge.

BRETT: 1:07:12 Were there any other ethnic communities, well not communities, but ethnic groups that went to Our Lady of Czestochowa that weren't Polish?

PRIEST: Now, we had Irish people because they married Polish girls or something like that, French... See, we had a very good Priest, Father Kasanowicz, when I got there. He was the one that I fired in Webster. He was very good pro-life. I mean, he gave great sermons, and the greatest sermon he gave was his actions. He really was pro-life, I mean strongly pro-life. And because of that, and because he was such a holy priest, he attracted some of the people that met him at the pro-life activities in the city. So we had them in the parish. And one of them is now studying to be a priest, a son of one of those families—I probably baptized him when he was here. John LaRochelle. He's in Boston right now studying to be a priest. So, ya, we had French. We had some Lithuanians. But you had to understand, this is America, so a lot of the girls and a lot of the boys as well. But... see...if the boys married an Irish girl, they went to her parish. They'd go to the girls' parish. Likewise, it goes round. So if an Irish boy married a Polish girl, good chance that he'd come to a Polish church, at least until their children were grown up, you know. But, no, I never noticed any seams or rifts between the Irish or the French. There's not too many Germans or Slovaks. We got Hungarians. They don't have any Hungarian church, you know. I don't know how many other Hungarians we got.

BRETT: 1:09:19 Okay. Were there any festivals at Our Lady of Czestochowa? I'm sure there were some sort of...

PRIEST: Ya.

BRETT: Could you detail those a little bit?

PRIEST: Well, of course they did it for social reasons, but they did it to make money for the school as well. It's been going on for I don't know, fifty years? Maybe not fifty, but close to it. Well, first we started it in Webster.

Then after Webster was successful, then they started it in Worcester, but it wasn't forever.

BRETT: 1:10:01 What was the festival called?

PRIEST: Oktoberfest. You know, just a Polish festival.

BRETT: Okay.

PRIEST: We had Polish foods and Polish pastries and stuff like that. And it was very, very successful. If it was anymore successful we couldn't handle the crowds.

BRETT: Okay.

PRIEST: Because it was always downstairs underneath the church. Where were people going to park? They'd park in the parking lot in front of the church and on the side of the church. On Sunday afternoon, we'd park at the funeral parlor across from the rectory for mass, but when the afternoon comes, they might have a funeral. In other words, people didn't want to use their own funeral parlor for a parking lot. But we always had the option to open up a gate and let them into the schoolyard. We used the lower part of the school for parking as well. But it was very successful and we always had flea market stuff and I always looked for it because they always had stuff there from Poland. Yup, my God... Well, when I was young, when I was in the seminary even... 1:11:22 You see that picture up there? I told you I painted it, right?

BRETT: Our Lady of Czestochowa?

PRIEST: Yes.

BRETT: Yes.

PRIEST: You couldn't buy a picture like that for blood or money. It's just—there weren't any. They just didn't have any on the market. You couldn't get a good sized picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa—period. So I always painted it from a little prayer card. It was an awful job to expand it. Nowadays you can get them painted in Poland. You can get them painted from icon makers and stuff like that, but when I painted that you couldn't get them. You couldn't get any publications from Poland. You couldn't get any books from Poland. No holy things like holy cards or medals and stuff from Poland. Nothing, you know? You probably say, what medals? Well, you know, when it comes to our miraculous medal, in America's medal you've got little sayings on the outside the medal. It's in English. But in Poland it's all in Polish. Any other medal as well. Whatever it is, in America it's English and in Poland it's Polish. There were no medals, there was nothing from Poland. Remember, after the Second World War, that iron curtain came down and nothing got out of Poland. Nothing got out of Poland. No body and no... Although look, I must tell you because it's interesting—I don't care if you tape it or not—. One of my professors in the seminary was Zdzislaw Peszkowski. Zdzislaw Peszkowski was a captain in a Polish cavalry in September 31, 1939 when the Nazis blitzkrieged the country. Well, he was gathered up, so to speak, after that. Because you had to understand—the Nazis hit from this side. Where did they get hit on the other side? The Russians were with the Nazis at the

beginning of the Second World War—they hit from the other side. When the Russians came in, they collected all of the captains and all of the... If you were a mayor of a city, if you were a professor in a university, if you were a teacher of a note in a school, they were all gathered together so that there were thousands of them. They brought them all north to the Katyn Forest and killed them. You've heard of the Katyn Massacre. But anyway, it's an interesting place because less than ten years ago they were celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of that massacre. But the president of Poland had a bunch of the big shots in Poland going to the Katyn area, they all flew up there by plane and they crashed the plane so that they were all wiped out. I don't know if you ever hear about it...

BRETT: I think I did hear about that.

PRIEST: But anyway, Pestrowski escaped from that place, that bunch. He ran his way into Russia, being able to speak Russian and all this kind of stuff was a help. From Russia he worked his way down to India, and India was English at the time—the English government owned India, remember, until 19...

BRETT: 1949. [actually 1947]

PRIEST: 1948 or something like that—I don't know. But anyway, from there he got shipped as a refugee to England. In England he was a Polish refugee, a young man...he was young...that the Greek... She called herself the last of the red hot mammas, she was a Polish refugee, a Jewish woman from Poland, and she sponsored him as a refugee, sponsored, you know, to come to America, and she sent him to school at Orchard Lake, where I was as a student. He stayed there until he became a priest and he stayed even as a professor. He's one of those that had trouble getting his papers in order to be ordained. But he showed me the picture of Sophie Tucker once, that she sponsored him. I mean I think that's something great. After he retired, he went back to Poland because now Poland was free. And not only that but John Paul II was the pope. And so, ah, he loved the pope so much, I think he wrote either five to seven books on John Paul II. But he also wrote heavily in books and pamphlets and articles to the point where they made him Monsignor for the contribution to the literary world about Katyn. So now, I've got a medal, wherever it is... but I have a medal with his picture on it—impressive picture to commemorate Katyn because he was one of those that kept the... You see, people though that the Nazis killed all those people. But after the war was over, everyone went there, they dug up some of the bodies and they found out all the shell casings from the bullets were Russian. If the Nazis had killed him, there would be Nazi-German cartridges. But there were Russian cartridges. The Russians killed all those people in Katyn. And even now, some people think that because the president and all the big shots from Poland went to Katyn to commemorate the anniversary, it was the Russians that screwed it up so they crashed somehow or other, which is kind of a stretch, but I wouldn't put anything past them. But it's interesting—I think he's dead now. Zdzislaw is dead. I loved him. Good guy. A very generous guy. He was a

professor in the seminary. He taught Polish homiletics but he also taught Polish language and his classroom was the Polish room because he had all types of polish crap in the room. He used to get stuff out of Poland that—to this day I still don't know how he did it. He had to have somebody in Poland that gathered it up and smothered it out so it could be shipped to America. Because I told you, like a picture—you couldn't get a picture, you can get a book... If you get a book in Polish it was printed in America, you know? So anyway...

TOM: In Wisconsin or something like that?

PRIEST: Wisconsin, yep. So anyway, once a year he would have a recognition day for all of the students. When I say all the students... you didn't have to play sports, you didn't have to be an over-achiever in academics, you just had to have something you could pinpoint. I was mailman—that's why remember where he used to get all the stuff—I used to have to go to the post office, which bordered our property, but I would have to go over there with a wheel barrel, you know, and take... I mean that's how much mail we used to get. They didn't deliver it to the school, we had to pick it up at the post office. I used to go through the seminary grounds and then come back with the wheel barrel. But anyway, the Assembly of the... I think it was... St. Thomas Aquinas Fiesta... they got them all together in an auditorium and call out names and he would tell you why: Stachura! Because of good postal delivery! And he'd come by and give me a big medal from Poland—a good piece of crap, made out of lead or something like that. I got a book from him one year. The book was good though. But everybody got something. You probably say: Big deal. Well, it really was a big deal. The stuff was contraband. You couldn't get it! Just a simple thing like a small book. Fantastic. Or you'd get something made out of cloth, or a little plaque with the Blessed Mother, or a little picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa. All these things were treasures for us. He did it every year, he did that every year out of his own pocket, which didn't have much in it but lint. You know, I don't know how he... although I do know one way. As I remember one year he got rolled up a beautiful picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa painting from Poland, which he sent to Florida or something like that because someone asked him if they could buy it, and that's how he made his money to pay for all of the other stuff. See, stuff in Poland, under communism, was so cheap that it just didn't make any sense, you know. But the people didn't have any money. Cheap is only good when you've got money. But if your pay is cheap also, where's the advantage of the stuff being cheap? You still can't buy it. So people in Poland went a long time without having enough food, or enough clothing, or enough shelter. You know, so, things are better now. Well, I think they're better now. But anyway, that was Zdzislaw Pestrowski.

BRETT: 1:21:56 When was this?

PRIEST: Well when I went there he was a professor already in '56. He was a professor...

BRETT: Was this at St. Mary's College?

PRIEST: Well, he taught at the college and at the seminary.

BRETT: Okay, so...

PRIEST: 1:22:10 The college was a pre-sem, a minor seminary. That's why they suppress the college now, because now all their students come from Poland. They come here, many of them, as priests already and they go to there to learn the English language and the customs and so forth.

BRETT: Okay.

PRIEST: Of course, they still have a prep school for Polish-American kids, which is extremely successful.

BRETT: So I just want to be clear—when this professor was...

PRIEST: It was back in the 60s because I graduated from college 1960 and I was ordained in 1964.

BRETT: Okay. So this is when he was at the seminary?

PRIEST: Yup.

BRETT: Okay, awesome.

PRIEST: 1:23:01 He was great. But I had a lot of great professors. Chop, ce-ce o peh-peh, that's' Chop [spelt] in Polish, that was his name, Chop. Jaszinski, a fantastic, good, intelligent guy. Konstantin Seran had a superior intellect and memory. He used to teach a course in Latin. We had English translations too, don't worry. But he had it all by memory, he had everything memorized. St. Thomas: he'd sit up there, and he'd tell us everything by memory. I used to think to myself, what a waste, you know? I mean, it was in a book, I could have read it in English, the same thing, because I did. Because when we had tests, we had tests in Latin too, so you had to answer everything in Latin. [phone rings and recorder cuts out] He used to have outstanding service from the Booster's for the men, and Our Lady of Czestochowa Guild for the women. But previously, they had a Rosary Sodality which failed. When I got there they turned in their books and their money and didn't want to run it anymore. But after they didn't want it anymore, we had a bunch of people from Poland, strictly Polish people. They wanted Rosary Sodality. So this Sodality is a new Sodality, but it's also Rosary Sodality. I mean, you just say the Rosary together, you have processions and things like that. There used to be... My father mentioned that when he was young he followed the people that prayed—Tom, remember he said St. Michael's society in Czestochowa used to have swords? [back to Brett] That was a big thing, to carry a sword, like the Knights of Columbus do, you know. But we used to have St. Michael's Society, and I don't know what else. But I think you've got to look into it because there was a PNA Club on Lafayette Street, Polish National Alliance. That started off as an insurance for immigrants, health insurance, and life insurance. Then there was PNI, that's on Millbury Street, Polish National...it had to do with...

BRETT: 1:25:31 Polish Nationalization Independence [PNI Club]...

PRIEST: Yes. They were established to help people get their papers for America to become Americans, in other words. Polish American Vets started after the Second World War. They had a nice place on Temple Street, which is now

occupied by the Gaelic or the Irish-American Association, they took it over. But it's a beautiful place. But Polish American Vets of World War II-- they should have opened it up to the ones from Korea and the ones from Vietnam, and so forth. But there was Polish-American Vets World War II. So they cut their own throats, so to speak. They're still alive, but they no longer have a meeting place. They meet downstairs in the church, as most of the members are dead. Not only that, but now, the big shot in that is a commander or whatever you want to call it—is a woman. She's a veteran. There's a women's auxiliary, but none of them are veterans, they're wives of the veterans. But this woman is a veteran from the Vietnam War. So she's holding it together now. I'm trying to think... You know, there are some famous people like General Samborski belonged to the parish, also Joe Benedict belonged to the parish. We had a lot of lawyers, dentists, doctors—a lot of professional people, because we still do have, you know? Because a lot of the Polish people want their kids to have a profession. They want their kids to go to college, which worked a generation or two ago. I don't know how well it's working now, because you can go to college and end up working at McDonald's, you know. I mean I hate to say it, but... We had women lawyers; they claimed to be the first women lawyers in the city of Worcester. We had people in real-estate... A lot of these parishioners did very well, and a lot of parishioners had jobs with the federal government too. But that takes time and things change... The last wave of refugees was after Solidarnosc. I remember we had one of the- the organist when I was there between '78 and '83, all of a sudden she comes: I have to say goodbye. And I say: Okay, goodbye- for what? I'm leaving right away for Chicago, she says, INS is after me. Well, I didn't know that she didn't have any papers. She was the organist, you know. I didn't know. Of course, I wasn't the pastor. But when I was the pastor, the bishop told us if we hire anybody without a green card, *we* will be responsible for the fines to the federal government, not the parish or the diocese, so I didn't want to step over the line. Why lose everything you have because someone wants a job here in the school. But I did help a couple of people to get their papers, but even that is a pain. You know, if somebody wants to get citizenship it's going to take at least two years. They work their blocks off with a lawyer for one year, and then they apply and they'll be refused. They have to pay, I don't know, seven hundred dollars for that to the government? But then they come back on another year, and then they'll pass. That's my experience—they make them wait one year after they were refused. But I would say that the majority of the people have citizenship here. I know even the priests do because he told me when he got it—citizenship. But anyway, you need to check into the organizations, because some were for insurance, some were for citizenship, and most of them had a barroom for socializing as well. You know, you've got to make a study of that someday too. Because these guys that hung around for beer in these clubs like that, you've got to check

out what their home situation was, because in a home a lot of them...  
remember Benny, Tom?

TOM: 1:31:29 Yes.

PRIEST: He couldn't stay at home all day with the wife. She'd henpeck him to death—the guy would have been dead two years before his time. [laughs] He used to hang around in the barroom. He didn't get drunk either—I never saw him drunk. But that's life, life in the raw. But it's a good place to live, it's a good parish, it's a good section of the city, believe me. I know there's a lot of violence there. But so isn't there a lot of violence if you listen to the news now. You can get killed on a London bridge, you can get killed in New York City right in the center of the city, you can get killed in an airport, you know, there's all kinds of places that we can be concerned about. So, as far as around Green Street and Ward Street, Dorchester and so forth, it's a lovely place to live. We have a lot of good, good nice people. That parish has got some wonderful people. It's like I told you, when the Polish priest came and he's going to be the pastor, it was like putting the lights on for them. They all brightened up and they all got behind him one hundred percent. See, before I had a little difficulty but I support him as well. I think he's done a great job. And the bishop knows that he's been doing a great job as well. But anyway, it wouldn't be a bad idea to look around and see what some of the successes are. We've had a lot of vocations to the priesthood, had vocations to religious life. Even like I told you, John LaRochelle is even now in the seminary but since I left that parish, his parents moved to St. John's Parish. I told you they moved there in the first place because of the pro-life. But, when he wanted to go to the seminary he came to me to be his like sponsor and I said good enough. And since I'm there we've had a couple of priests come out of the parish too. The parish—I couldn't tell you how many but quite a few priests have come out of that parish, quite a few nuns. But I don't know of any nuns recently. For some reason or another, vocations to the religious life are drying up. I pray that things change. But nothing is part of the rottenness that came out of the 60s after Vatican II. It did a lot of harm, did a lot of good, but did a lot of harm too.

BRETT: 1:34:35 But actually, I do want to ask one quick question now that you mentioned Vatican II. What were the reactions in Polish communities from what you could tell?

PRIEST: Not much of any.

BRETT: Not really? Okay.

PRIEST: No.

BRETT: I imagine there was much more talk about it from someone who was in the priesthood.

PRIEST: For instance I was in Webster and the altar rail was still there and the altar was still there and I left it there for the priest that came after me. He was from Poland. He wiped out the altar rail and changed the church all around. But that was his prerogative. I came to Worcester, Father Janczukowicz already wiped out the altar rail and put the altar facing the

people. So I mean, that's not a big a deal. That was kind of hard in the beginning, and having mass in English was hard too. In mean, I started off in the first couple of years in Latin.... you get comfortable with it, and you know, there's only one canon and there wasn't a choice of four. So you knew it, you know it, and it's very simple. You know what the words are, you don't have to be a linguist to understand it. But then they started to change the mass by *sanctus, sanctus, sanctus --- holy, holy, holy* and put it in English. And *Lamb of God*, you know, *agnus dei*, they put that in English. So that happened in the Polish parishes too. So the Polish parishes turned to English and Polish. I don't know what to tell you. I like the English in mass now. The Polish people are nuts about the Polish. I like the Polish in mass too. You know, I have an advantage over you or somebody else when it came to be a pastor. Because I can speak Polish and English, and I gave a sermon in English and could give another sermon in Polish. In other words, I never got bored. When you have to give sermons only in English, and you have to give four of them because you're having four masses...in other words, you have two on Saturday night and you have a couple on Sunday morning, that's four. If they're all in English, they're all the same. You know, I mean, you don't do the variations because you're not following a written sermon—I always made up... instead of a written sermon I made a beginning, middle, and end, and that would serve me very well. You had to prepare, I mean, but then I was able to talk to the people instead of reading to them. In Polish I read to them a lot but I talked to them a lot as well. But having two languages is a breath of fresh air. It gives you a break. Not only that, people from Poland in many ways are a little different than people born in America. You know, I think that you would understand that too. It's just the way it is. I mean, there's a different character. So it's been wonderful for me to be Polish-American. Wonderful! Wouldn't change it. I thank God for my vocation. I thank God for the places I've been. I've had some pretty rough times, though, but I love it. God always carried me through. But anyway, you've got to look up important, successful parishioners. I don't know all of them but somehow or other if you talk to people in the organizations they'll tell you about this one or that one that became famous, you know? Because I never hit it off too much with very wealthy people. Having a very common background, people used to think of me as a farmer. And I'm happy with that, I don't mind that. But I never played golf, you know? And nowadays if you don't play golf it's like as if you don't have kidneys or something, you know? Why, that's odd—he doesn't have any kidneys! No, I don't play golf, never did. I was always busy, I was always working and when I say I was always working... Did I ever take a vacation and go to Europe? No. Did I ever buy a brand new car? No. I was always working. I enjoyed it when I had a vacation I always came home to here when my mother and father were alive. When my mother was sick I had to come home here. When my father was left with Tom, I'd come here on vacations. And now we're old [laughs] so we're on a permanent vacation.

No schedules, no nothing. But I do go to Czestochowa on Sundays for 9:30 mass. And the deacon's been giving the sermons most of the time, not always. And I always prepare because I don't know if he's going to be there. But I have a problem in standing, I can't stand very well. I can walk if you give me time to go out to the door and come back, things like that... The legs don't work. The feet kill me; I've got rocks in my feet. Strange thing because you lose your balance, and instead of having balance from your feet, you have pain. [laughs] Oh, god, but I am eighty one, I can't complain. God has been good to me. But I'm sure that if you look into it you'll find outstanding priests. Chwalek was outstanding. Nobody matches Bojanowski. I liked Kasanowicz I think he was outstanding. But he was really pro-life, really... The bishop wanted him to take a parish. The bishop asked him: What would be your first priority in a parish? The answer was: to care for the needs of the parishioners. He said: pro-life. The bishop says: You mean take care of the parishioners? Nope, pro-life. At first the bishop didn't give him the parish. He did not give him a parish. He came home and he was steaming. Poor guy. I would have given him a parish, he would have done well. But he didn't get a parish. He's in the military now, he's a chaplain in the army. And he's been in for about fourteen years now, fifteen years...

TOM: He's a major or something...

PRIEST: Ya, he's a major—he's doing well. But anyway, a lot of changes took place. 1:42:16 The church is not what it was used to be when we were kids. School isn't either. But the school is doing well. The nuns are gone. The last one—there's only one alive that I know of that worked in the school, Roberta. She's out at another house in Munroe, Connecticut. I hated to see them go, but there was only three of them anyway. As old as I am now, they were in their eighties, so they had to go. But the parish did well without the nuns. A lot of them were good, dedicated people that work for small pay, they work hard too. They do a good job. They didn't work bread and water, I mean, they don't get what a public school does either. But I appreciated their service and I know that a lot of them were dedicated...dedicated. We have one in the school right now that they call her dean of the elementary school. She's been there for five years or four years. She's a retired principal from the school system in Spencer. She works for free. She comes to school every day. She just wanted to stay in teaching, she wanted to stay. But she's getting a pension, she says she doesn't need any money. Well, if she had a husband and kids she'd probably say she wanted to leave it for her husband and kids or something, but she works for free. She works for free. I think that's marvelous. She says she loves the school. In the school there is also a Polish school, on Saturdays they teach in that school to youngsters. It's well attended too. It's been successful, in other words. And they have Polish scouts. You know how our parish has girl scouts and boy scouts? We have Polish scouts. And when I say Polish scouts, they got their uniforms from Poland. They dress in uniforms, they have hats and pants and shirts and skirts. And

they meet on a regular basis, and they go to camp and they call it-- They go and camp out in ah... There's a Polish campsite in Three Rivers, I think it is, ya, bottom of Springfield, they go until the end of summertime. They've got everything you know, they've got choirs, choir for the kids, choir for the Polish kids separate from the regular choir from the kids from school, and an adult choir. That means three choirs. Nice. There's still a lot going on in that parish and I wish it well and...but it's not the same when I was young. As I told you when I was young there was a lot of going to different parishes for Forty Hours' and if they needed you you'd go help with confessions. So I've gone as far as Housatonic—it's right on the New York border, to help with confessions at New York Parish. We used to go there also for Forty Hours'. But the trip wasn't bad, you'd go out on the turnpike, you'd get off at the end of the turnpike and find your way to it. Anyway... You want a Pepsi before you go home?