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Oral Memoirs
of
Fr. Daniel Walsh, C.S.Sp.

A Series of Interviews

Conducted by

Megan DeFries

April 6-May 2, 2016

Collection: Oral History Initiative

Project: Spiritan

Duquesne University Oral History Initiative

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Interview History

The recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) were processed in the offices of the Oral History Initiative (OHI) and University Archives, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Interviewer: Megan DeFries

Transcriber(s): Megan DeFries
Lauren Eisenhart-Purvis
Verbal Ink

Editor(s): Megan DeFries
Stephanie Walrath

Final Editor: Megan DeFries

Project Detail

The purpose of the Spiritan Oral History Project is to document the lives of Spiritan priests, brothers, and Lay Spiritan Associates in their own words in order to preserve the history of the Spiritan congregation.

Fr. Daniel Walsh, C.S.Sp. [b. 1958] was ordained in 1991. He attended Duquesne University, the University of St. Thomas, and Catholic Theological Union, where he earned a Master of Divinity in 1991. From 1992-96, he was a missionary in Carauari, Amazonas, Brazil, going on to serve in many different roles at universities and dioceses across the United States, including as the University Chaplain and Director for Campus Ministry at Duquesne University from 2013-18. Fr. Walsh is a Parochial Vicar for St. Paul Cathedral Parish in the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh.

Megan DeFries was the oral historian for the OHI.

Fr. Daniel Walsh, C.S.Sp.
Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 3

Interviewed by Megan DeFries
April 22, 2016
Duquesne University
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Collection: Oral History Initiative
Project: Spiritan

DeFries: This is Megan DeFries interviewing Fr. Daniel Walsh. This is our third interview for the Spiritan Oral History Project on Friday, (chapel bells ringing) April 22, 2016 at the Laval House in Pittsburgh [Pennsylvania]. Hello again.

Walsh: Welcome back.

DeFries: Thank you. (laughs) So last time we left off, you had just begun your time in—and I'm going to mispronounce this, or I'll try not to—Carauari [Amazonas, Brazil]?

Walsh: Carauari.

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Carau—(laughs) I'll have you say it.

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) Carauari. Carauari.

DeFries: Carauari.

Walsh: That's it.

DeFries: Amazonas, Brazil, right?

Walsh: Right.

DeFries: Okay. And so you had—and this was about 1992 you had gone—

Walsh: Nineteen ninety-two, yeah.

DeFries: —to do mission work? Okay. So why don't you tell me about your initial—your beginning there and what you were doing there.

[00:00:50]

Walsh: It's interesting. I arrived—I had communicated with everybody having to get the visa and all of the arrangements to get there, and I arrived at night and no one was there to

greet me. It was—you've got your suitcase, you're at the airport. It's steaming hot, even at whatever hour it was, (door closes in background) it was very late and no one was there.

DeFries: And this is a remote area.

Walsh: In a remote area and I don't have—well, no, it was in the Manaus [Amazonas, Brazil], which was a big city, and I'm looking around the airport—and I don't know who's going to come to pick me up, but I had sent all this stuff—and I look around and I see these ladies and they're obviously dressed like nuns. Even though they're not wearing the veil, you can tell they're nuns. So I went up and said, "Do you see any Spiritans here?" "Oh, no, no, no," but they said, "So we're going to our convent, which is right near here. Why don't you come? We'll take you back in our car." So we go back, knock on the door, no one answers. So they said, Okay, you can come to the convent and sleep on the floor, and I said, "Okay, I'll do that," so I slept in their chapel. The next morning I got up and the guy says—and so we call over to the parish and the guy's up by this time. He said, "Oh, I completely forgot." (both laugh) So what a way to begin.

DeFries: Right.

Walsh: So the next day or two—or I had to kind of—I probably had to do something about getting some paperwork done in Manaus. Then went in—I was ready to get started. They were, You should take a chance to look around, and I'm like, "You're going to put me somewhere. I don't really need to see a whole lot. Just send me where I'm supposed to go and I'll start working." And there was another Portuguese guy there—there's some guys, they want to see everything first and then come to their own decision and other guys, "I'm going to work. Just send me where I'm supposed to go to work." So Jose was halfway between there, and I was just, "Tell me where I'm going to be," and so I ended up in this interior Carauari and Jose was from Portugal and wanted a little bit more of a kind of population, so he ended up in Tefé [Amazonas, Brazil]. I went to work with Antonio Jansen, and I was replacing another Dutchman. Jansen was the pastor and he's as old as my father and had been in the Amazon since I was born. The other guy, João Dericks, he was—he would stay up late. He would have his friends in—it was just kind of—he was a night owl and I come and I'm worse than a farmer. When the sun goes down, why stay up? (both laugh) Before the suns up, get up. Why stay in bed all day? Night and day. So Antonio was thinking, Now I'm going to get another guy who's going to be just like João, he's going to stay up all night. And so for all of his priesthood, he was the guy who got up in the morning and made coffee. Well, no longer. I was first up, I'd make the coffee and he's there, like, what a change. What a total drastic change. (phone sound) So we got along very well and I was—I would ask him, "What do you—" because João lived—they were in the same community, but completely different orbits, completely different personalities—I'm asking Antonio, "What do you think I should do in the interior?" "Why are you asking me?" "Because I want to know." "No one ever asks me." So it was divided. He would take care of the town, I would take care of everything else.

DeFries: Okay.

Walsh: Which was just—

DeFries: What does that mean, take care of everything else?

[00:04:57]

Walsh: Well, I would live on the boat. I would do the—all the pastoral visits to the interior and he would take care of the Masses and the town and kind of—and he was very good and it was a great division of tasks. He says, “You know, I’m done with living on a boat. I’ve been here long enough, been here done that. If I never get on another boat that will be fine.” (truck noise outside) So—but we got along very, very, very well, but it was when the sun would go down, I would go to bed and I would be up before dawn. So the one time there was a total eclipse of the sun and they had bets that I would go to my hammock. (DeFries laughs) But in the—it was very interesting, I lived—getting to travel to the interior. The boat had no—and I wouldn’t—I didn’t even buy an electric starter. We started a diesel engine with a hand crank, like old cars, which was really a challenge. When it got cold, it was really a challenge to start the engine and after I left, they bought an electric starter, which—

DeFries: Of course. (laughs)

Walsh: Yeah, but it was trying to keep the boat—I would try to find the money for the maintenance of the boat and all the trips to the interior. A collection might be a chicken, a duck, a huge turtle, or a couple of eggs. There was no money, no money ever. The people didn’t have it, there were no stores. There was nothing that they could—we worked with them and tried to help them and it was João before me in the Spiritans. The rubber tappers were basically economic slaves.

DeFries: Okay.

[00:07:03]

Walsh: They would work for the plantation owner. They would have to sell all of the rubber that they—they collected to him. He would give them pennies on the dollar for what they produced, but they had to buy all of their supplies from him and he would jack up the prices for sugar, for a pot, for whatever it was that he was selling. It was very, very expensive.

DeFries: Almost like the American sharecropping system.

Walsh: Yeah.

DeFries: Almost like that.

Walsh: So you were always in debt, and because of that debt, you were not allowed to move. And because of the nature of it, they had tried to have plantations where you would have the trees all in a row. It never—they were never able to do that in the Amazon. They were able to do it with Southeast Asia, but not in the Amazon. And there’s couple of the—a couple of the plantations where you can see where they had tried it, but it didn’t work. So what they would do is they would allow—or put the rubber tappers at the entrance of the path that they would run—and would have to run from tree to tree and it could be a few miles because they weren’t together. And then they

would have to come home and smoke the rubber so that it would congeal. And they did this every day. It's a very rough life. And if they lived nearby each other, they would begin to complain about how hard their life was. So the only escape was when the rubber—price of natural rubber just disappeared. Those who owned the plantations went to Manaus and went to other parts of Brazil, and these people were abandoned. So we tried to get them to move into communities on high ground. The entire forest would flood. There was a wonderful National Geographic series done on the Amazon and it was called Flood Forest ["Amazon: Land of the Flooded Forest"]. Fascinating. I mean, this building would be completely underwater.

DeFries: Wow.

Walsh: And it's the snow melting in the Andes [Mountains] and then just the torrential rains. So when the—in the dry season, which would correspond to our summer, it would be the time when we could travel because there would actually be a river. When everything's flooded, you can't see down below and you could hit a tree and rip open your hull and then—that's not a good thing.

DeFries: No.

[00:09:47]

Walsh: So we would travel mostly in the summer, beginning about now, after Easter and travel regularly and people would have Mass once a year. I would probably started in Lent because I would always get back for Easter and Holy Week and I would also come back for Christmas, but we tried to get the people to live in communities and since they—no one was buying rubber, we tried to encourage them to get involved in agriculture. If they would get involved in agriculture—it was a big boat. I would carry all of their production back to the town and they could sell it and immediately turn around and buy the supplies that they needed and we wouldn't collect a penny. And so in the—if they were together, the boat could go to pick up their production. We could train one adult to read and they could go back and teach their children. We could provide many, many more services. We could drill for fresh water (sniffs) and in the communities where this happened, having access to fresh, clean water, the kids weren't so sick. Having the ability to sell bananas, cassava flour, whatever it was that they were producing, they had money and you could see that there were actually shoes. People would take off their shoes going into a house or wherever you were having Mass, (DeFries clears throat) I mean—and you would have to go outside and see all the, all the shoes there, which was really, really cool.

[00:11:29]

And when I would say Mass in the winter, when everything was flooded, the parking lot was a bunch of canoes, just canoe after canoe tied up to each other and people—in the flooded season, you would sit there and they're caimans—they're not alligators and they're not crocodiles—but you could call them and they would swim under the house. The mating call that they had, it was just—and lots of piranha, lots of snakes, lots of stuff.

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) How did you avoid all of these dangerous wildlife?
(laughs)

Walsh: You just did—I think that the piranha would attack if they knew that you were panicking, but I would swim in the water without any issue. There were tons of tons of these caimans.

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Oh my goodness.

Walsh: But they didn't come close. At least, every once in a while you'd get a report of somebody getting bitten by one of them and that was not good.

DeFries: Yeah.

Walsh: Because they're huge, huge, huge beasts. The head could be like this.

DeFries: Of a piranha?

Walsh: No—

DeFries: Of a caiman—

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) No, of a caiman.

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Caiman, okay. I was going to say, I don't remember piranhas being that big. (laughs)

Walsh: And there are over three hundred species of piranha. (phone sound) Some are very small, some are rather big. Not huge, but they're just plain ugly. Ugly, ugly fish.

DeFries: Are you able to imitate the call of the caiman now or no?

Walsh: It's kind of like (makes throat noises) and you could—and if you had a flashlight, you could see their eyes and they would just—

DeFries: And they would come over?

Walsh: Come over.

DeFries: Wow.

Walsh: Yeah.

DeFries: So were you mainly on the actual Amazon River? Were you going on the tributaries?

[00:13:15]

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) No. I was on the tributary called the Jurua—J-U-R-U-A—and it's probably one of the top—it's in the top ten or top fifteen in terms of length, in the world.

DeFries: Wow. So you went up and down this tributary?

Walsh: Yep, and I took care of all of the parishes of Carauari and half of Fonte Boa [Amazonas, Brazil], which that—not Fonte Boa—Caitaú [Amazonas, Brazil], half of Caitaú, and people would have Mass once a year. So it would take me three days of driving fourteen hours a day to reach the upper end of the parish. And coming down, you could do it going full—full out in twenty hours maybe, in the middle of the river, as fast as you could go. And it would be about a three day climb, if you went down to the bottom of the parish, to where I would take care of, and then come back up, it would be another three weeks—three days, fourteen hours a day. So—

DeFries: Long trip.

Walsh: Long trips, but good people; very, very humble.

DeFries: Were most of these people—had they—they've—have experience with missionaries before—their families had? So these were not indigenous people you were contacting?

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) The Spiritans were there about the same time, maybe a little before, Duquesne [University] was founded.

DeFries: Okay.

Walsh: And in the old days, when our men would go out it was in a canoe and when they went out, you never knew if they were ever coming back—disease, accidents. So the gathering together was always something important for the guys, (chapel bells ringing) to come together again. We had [what] we thought was the tip of a finger of one our guys who was eaten by a piranha in formaldehyde in the safe. No one came to claim it, so after—well, it was still there when I left, but I don't think we were going to hold onto it. He had been dead for a year—for a long time. Dutch guy. His boat got—and he was in Itamaratay. He had adopted a couple of orphan girls and so he came up to Carauari on his way back—he was a very capable guy—but hit a sand bank. So the girls were still small. He put the boat in reverse, jumped out, and tried to shake it loose. I don't know if he hit his head, but he fell in the water and by the time the girls got help—they called for the guys in the local fishing villages to come with their nets to try to see if they could find the body and they—the only they could find—they caught a couple fish and cut open a piranha and thought it was the end of his finger.

DeFries: Oh my gosh.

Walsh: So—

DeFries: Wow.

Walsh: Yeah, tough situation.

DeFries: Yes. So the people there, though, were—were experienced with Spiritans?

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) Oh yeah.

DeFries: They had a relationship—they were already Christians?

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) Yep.

DeFries: So it wasn't a matter of—not evangelizing, but a matter of conversion or—

[00:16:41]

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) No, it was—it was—and some of them, their contact with the church, with missionaries, was maybe a couple times in their life. The—life is tough. To get from (phone sound) here to where Mass is, to get your whole family into a canoe and row all that way would present its own challenges. So I would spend most nights just teaching adults to pray the Our Father and the Hail Mary.

DeFries: How long were your stays with them?

Walsh: Usually twenty-four hours.

DeFries: Just a couple—

Walsh: A little less because I would travel then to the next—on the way out, I would stop in the villages and say, “I’ll be back in a week and a half.” “I’ll be back in a week.” “I’ll be back in two weeks and on this day we’ll gather for Mass.” So the night before, we would call the novena, or the vigil, and we’d be collecting the names of the kids to be baptized and finding out about the community, encouraging people to pray and teaching Our Father, Hail Mary, just whatever we could do. There’s an innate religiosity in faith. Leaving a book—they didn’t know how to read or write, so—and they have an expression down there, “If you don’t have a dog, you hunt with a cat.” We’re not going to make them into theologians and they don’t need to be.

They have a great devotion to saints. Saint Sebastian was the guy who caught all the arrows. Life is tough. He caught a bunch of arrows, he’s just like us. Saint Lazarus, there is no Saint Lazarus, but they have these images of Lazarus, who sat at the table of the rich man dressed in purple and he was covered in sores and the dogs would lick his wounds. This river is the second highest incidence of new leprosy cases in the world. People get leprosy. When you get leprosy—they now have a cure—but you would have to get in a canoe and leave and never to be seen again, in a very unforgiving place where everything wants to eat you. So a devotion to Saint Lazarus was one that they took very seriously and Saint Lucy, the patron saint of eyes and light. There’s river blindness, when you’re smoking rubber latex and the smoke gets in your eyes—to be blind in the Amazon is not a situation that you want. With onças, which would be leopards, snakes, with caimans, with electric eels, with everything that could eat you, being blind is not a good thing. Being a leper and having to live on your own—although now the lepers don’t have to leave the community, but up until thirty years ago, they did. So that would be their Catholicism. They’re aware of Holy Week, they had no idea what Christmas was. Christmas was—so they—

DeFries: Did they understand it even as the birth of Jesus or—

Walsh: Yeah, but why celebrate that?

DeFries: Okay.

Walsh: The cross meant a lot throughout Latin America. The Passion, Good Friday is more celebrated than Easter Sunday. Life is tough, what do we associate with? How do we connect? Do we have many resurrections? Perhaps here we do, but when you're poor—

DeFries: They took comfort in the idea that here is the Savior and he suffered as we suffered.

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) Suffered. As we suffer, so did our Savior. And Good Friday was also the day that you could go and steal parrots, (DeFries laughs) baby parrots. You could climb the tree and that was the day you're allowed to steal baby parrots.

DeFries: They just built that into the holiday? (laughs)

Walsh: Yeah, that was just what they did.

DeFries: What was their way of life like, in terms of the village life? Like what kind of homes did they live in? How did they live as a village?

[00:21:19]

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) I can show you pictures. They were—many of the homes didn't have walls. They would have a thatched roof, a floor made out of bark, very thin, but very sturdy. Some would have walls, a lot of them didn't, built up on stilts so that when the floodwaters would come up—even on high ground, they were built up on stilts. (clears throat) The—if it was just an individual home, it wouldn't be on high ground. So it would be down near the banks of the river, high enough—and so in every little port the—depending on what—I would travel, if it was like in the summer, they would fell trees so that you could walk on them. You would literally have to walk up the side of a tree that would be down and then you jump over to another one, which would get you up to the house.

DeFries: Wow.

Walsh: Or if it was in the flooded season, you could lash your boat right to near the front door. (sniffs) You had to be very agile because you're literally walking on trees, so— or off of a plank off your boat and you had to be able to carry whatever you needed to carry without seeing where your feet are and feeling—

DeFries: Right.

Walsh: So you get to be pretty agile. The folks were always—no one went to the interior. Some politicians and the political season might come around and they would try to buy you with a t-shirt, actually literally bringing dentures of dead people and people would—(laughs) because people lost all their teeth [imitates taking dentures in and out of his mouth]—put dentures in, doesn't fit. Put it back, grab another. (laughs)

DeFries: Wow. (laughs)

[00:23:29]

Walsh: Really, really, really disgusting, but that's—and so the first part of any visit, there were obviously a lot of bug bites and infections and people had no medicine, no bandages. So the first part of any visit would be to clean wounds and I would carry antibiotics and give them antibiotics and that's how I got hepatitis the first time. I wouldn't wear gloves, so I probably came into contact with contaminated blood and had to leave the Amazon for about three months. I came back to Texas.

DeFries: Okay.

Walsh: And as it looked like it was resolving, which is I guess is the medical term—that your liver can cure itself, at least can get rid of the virus. And the doctor thought I was going to go to the point where it would be resolved, but it didn't. So I had active hepatitis and it was chronic at that point. And the second time, every time I went out I had doctors from the UN [United Nations]. They treated everybody. They were doing tests for leprosy. They were treating everybody and I got hepatitis D, which is—you have to have chronic or active hepatitis B. It's just a complication and so they said, Get out of the Amazon again, and when I came back the only place that was testing for this that I—where my doctor sent this stuff was to the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota and they called. It's very rare in the United States, in only a small section of (train whistle) Mediterranean Europe and in the Amazon. You can't get it in Asia, you can't get it in Africa. So they did the test, it showed hepatitis B. They sent a letter to my—or called my doctor and said, Who is this guy and where has he been? (laughter outside) So I was knocked out at that point. Third time, you're not going to survive. And there's another type of hepatitis called fulminant and that will get you within hours. You get it and you're—you better be ready because you're not going to survive. So I was lucky that it wasn't the fulminant type, but I've been left with scarring and cirrhosis because of it, but the liver functions well, so—

DeFries: But you couldn't go—could not return to the Amazon.

Walsh: No, that wouldn't be—

DeFries: How did you feel about having to leave and not being able to maybe (train whistle) tie up things up and say goodbye?

[00:26:11]

Walsh: I didn't think that I was going to be there for twenty-five years. I was hoping for a lot longer than I was. Our province has—it was the USA West at the time, had a lot of needs and I didn't think that I would be there forever, but I wanted to be there for a good long time. It was hard leaving, but Europeans are not made to live in the Amazon. It's a very unforgiving place. We just don't resist the diseases and the harsh and hard conditions. It's a really, really rough place, but it's also a lot of fun, a lot of wonderful people, a lot of great, great work.

DeFries: What did you learn from your time there? What were your—what did you take away from it?

[00:27:16]

Walsh: I loved working with the poor. You go at the pace of the river. We tried to grow vegetables in greenhouses in the winter. What the hell are you doing? There's going to be a time to grow things and I do it here too.

DeFries: Um-hm.

Walsh: If there's going to be a frost, I would bring some of the vegetables in, but in—to go at the pace of nature. When you're on a boat, you're not going to get there quickly. Take your time. When you're working among people who can neither read nor write, go at their pace. I'm a much—I'm a very patient person. I'm in no hurry and I don't—a lot of the theology stuff is just phooey, in the sense that, what are we trying to do? Are we talking to ourselves? Yeah. Do we talk to the people? Not a whole lot, not a whole lot. We come up with this theory and that theory. Most of the people aren't where we are and we're not smart enough to realize that.

DeFries: So living more in relationship with people and meeting them where they're at is—

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) Where they are, where they are.

DeFries: Right, yeah.

Walsh: Where they are and not to have unreasonable expectations. Leadership is challenging, but leadership has to be directed at where the people are and I—like working here. The hardest thing to do is to get your staff to listen to young people. We've got all the answers. We've figured it out and we'll pass that on to them very happily.

DeFries: Doesn't usually work that way though.

Walsh: No. (DeFries laughs) They've got their own thoughts, their own questions, their own interests. So (phone sound) it's interesting because I—I did the first and only survey of students through campus ministry and I also ask—and we put a lot of time into (chapel bells ringing) working on the website. They don't look at it. They don't. We—

DeFries: What do you take that to mean? What do you—how do you readjust when you do a survey? (laughs)

[00:30:24]

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) We don't listen, we don't listen. You—so you gather the kids, what do you—kind of, what do you want to do? In the way that I—being introduced to ministry in Latin America, it's much different than Africa. So in Africa, you're the chief, you get to dress up, you get to show that you have authority, but it doesn't work in Latin America. In Latin America, you sit among the people and have a conversation. What are we going to do? Who are we? What are we going to do? And you kind of empower and pass on to them, but the kind of the—you take a look at what method or model is operative. Is it about confirming the power of the powerful? Or is it about listening and uncovering the needs and wants of people and then working to that? That's the kind of style of—of managerial style that I have.

So I like to listen to kids and like in Houston, we had kids who wanted to have [Eucharistic] adoration. Well, first, they wanted me to have Mass in Latin. “Okay, do any of you speak Latin?” “No.” “Okay. Do any of you speak Portuguese?” “No.” “Why don’t we do Mass in Portuguese? I don’t speak Latin. You’re going to understand the exact same thing. So, what do you want, kid? (DeFries laughs) You want to go to Mass? We’ll do it where I’ll talk to you, you can get engaged.” “Okay.” They see these things and it’s kind of interesting but then, the whole idea is to get them to participate. So they came and they wanted to do adoration. Great. (DeFries laughs) “Well, what is it?” “Well, I don’t know.” “Go into the chapel and get the books and bring the books.” “Okay.” “Open the last page.” “It says, okay, you start off with this song, ‘Tantum Ergo.’” “Do you know it?” “No.” I said, “Okay, what else does it say?” “It says, ‘Or some other appropriate Eucharistic song.’” “Do you know any?” “Yeah, I know this one.” “Write it down.” “Okay.” “And then the next song, ‘O Salutaris Hostia.’ Do you know that?” “No.” “What else does it say?” “Or some other appropriate song.” “What other song do you know?” “Yeah, we know this one.” “Okay, now who’s going to play?” “We’ll get Bob and Juan and Jose and Quoc.” “Okay. Get them, they can play those things. Now what does it say?” (laughs) “And you can have a reading, you can have the rosary, you can this—” “Well, what are we going to do?” “How about if we do this?” “All right, well who’s going to do that?” I said, “I’m going to do the part for the priest, but if you guys want to do it, you’re perfectly capable of doing those things.” So it’s—the other way would be the priest is kind of going to be kind of the—do everything and they’ll consume. Do we ever get anywhere when we turn people into consumers? Probably not. So the kids came here, “We want adoration.” Great, and I’ve already done this, (laughs) so it was basically the same thing. Talking to them, to kind of our staff, “Oh, you’re not going to get anybody, you might get ten.” I said, “Ah, we’ll see.” So, they had to plan the adoration and they had to invite their friends. We would get eighty because they’re the ones who are going out and inviting their friends. I take a very—from the bottom up. This is going to be their community.

DeFries: So you involve the people that you’re speaking to, that you are trying to teach about these things, involve them, and make them part of it. Make it their—take it on—

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) Yeah, it’s theirs and we come along with our experience and with our education, but it’s not about our education or our experience. It’s passing it on. There’s a word, to be generative. Not to hold onto things for me, but to pass it on. But to hopefully engage people in a way that they feel that they are very meaningfully being used. So that’s kind of what I’m doing here and what we tried to do in Brazil. When you only have Mass once a year, somebody has to be there and it’s not frequent and you can’t expect of these very poor people that it’s going to be a well-run organization or institution. It’s going to be faith. Faith is—can be lived in a very inhospitable environment, but with their natural gifts and their natural goodness—

DeFries: It was possible to—

Walsh: Yeah.

DeFries: —to do.

Walsh: And at their pace.

DeFries: That's really interesting. It's neat—it's nice to have a different perspective.

[00:35:49]

Walsh: Yeah, and I think—and here at Duquesne in what is and was the USA East, they are all about Africa (sniffs) and the Spiritan world is much larger and kind of the church is very different from one continent to the next, from one culture to the next. We—we live in the United States, (truck passing by outside) where the church is an institution and that's wonderful, but it is also a challenge. We have great institutions with an authority and a presence, it sometimes can—are we trying to maintain and protect an institution, or are we really at the service of the kingdom? There's a wonderful book by Tom Fox, *Pentecost in Asia [A New Way of Being Church]* and he looks to Asia, where Catholics are less than 1 percent of the population. In some countries, in the Philippines, it's the majority. In Vietnam, there might be about 20 percent. And he says, the church, where you don't have the institutional footprint and presence, does not look to the US, to Europe, and Rome [Italy] for any type of—

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Guidance?

Walsh: Because they'll never—they're insignificant. Nobody cares what the church thinks. So they look to Latin America—

DeFries: Really?

Walsh: —where the church is trying to be on the side of the poor. It's that way that they can be heard. It's in being close to the poor that they will—living the gospel is a code word for that. That they will be able to gather people to listen to what the gospel is all about, but they're not going to come to a pretty building or to all the other things that we occupy—occupy a lot of our attention.

DeFries: It seems almost like an—yeah, an interesting paradox or irony, that here's a religion that was in part was founded on, you know, the poor and love of the poor and all that, and they see it almost—the more established areas where the church is—is more—is kind of alienating, like it's not about them and their needs. It's an interesting—

Walsh: Yeah, yeah and, I mean, like here in the United States, on this issue or that issue the church wants her opinion to be heard. It's important, but in Asia, in countries where there is no institutional presence, it's irrelevant.

DeFries: That's really interesting. That really is. I had never heard that perspective before.

Walsh: Okay.

DeFries: No, that's interesting to see that they look to Latin America to see how they are doing things.

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) They do. They do because they have decided that they are going to be on the side of the poor and how you do that is really, really important. The way that you become church is a marked difference.

DeFries: And that's something that, obviously, you've taken from your time there and it carries through.

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) Yeah, and—and carries through. The way—from my overseas training as a seminarian through the whole decision of the church, this is how we are going to be. So it's very, very, very interesting and wonderful. Its very life giving.

DeFries: That is where you find your sense of purpose.

Walsh: Um-hm.

DeFries: As a religious—

Walsh: Yeah.

DeFries: I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, (laughs) I'm—I'm just questioning.

Walsh: No, but it really is. I mean, I could care less. I shouldn't say that. Getting and keeping power just to have power doesn't have any meaning for me. (train whistle) To have power to use it to empower others, that's what it's about, and sometimes you have to question, what is the operative dynamic here? Is it to have power simply to keep it and control it, or is it so that you can share it?

DeFries: That's really—that's an interesting perspective. It's good to hear. (laughs)

Walsh: Yeah.

DeFries: Not to—well obviously, we'll talk more about that as we go on, but to kind of come back to when you left—

Walsh: Carauari.

DeFries: Carauari. (laughs)

Walsh: Yeah.

DeFries: You were in Houston [Texas] after that?

[00:41:15]

Walsh: I was, yeah. I came back to Houston and I was under the care of a new set of doctors and they were—it's probably the finest, at the time, liver transplant and liver care in the world was in Houston and so, I had gone beyond kind of the internal medicine guy in San Antonio [Texas] and he said, "You better go to Houston." So (train whistle) that's where I ended up. And so I was staying at one of our communities, they made me vocation director and in a few months, I was able to recruit seven guys, which is really a lot and so I was also formation director and I did it (phone sound) for a year. I was good at it, but when you're literally living on a boat and hunting for your meals, then to go to a place that's air conditioned and your work is

within four walls, it just wasn't for me. So I did it for a year. I really liked the guys, but I was—it just wasn't doing anything for me.

DeFries: What was the name of the place you were at?

Walsh: Holy Ghost Hall.

DeFries: Holy Ghost Hall.

Walsh: And it was our formation house in Houston. So most—most of the guys were Vietnamese and going to visit with them and their families—there was one, his name was Duy, and Duy—his father worked laying tile and he didn't speak English. So he worked for someone else and he basically got about minimum wage. And the dream of this family of six was to move into a two bedroom apartment. Loving, loving, beautiful family, but because he couldn't speak English, he couldn't go out and get his own jobs. If this guy—and I mean he was very, very good, if he would've been able to speak English, he could've bid his own jobs.

DeFries: Been in control of his own work and money.

Walsh: And—yeah. So I thought, How about if I go to Vietnam, and I'll learn the Vietnamese language, and I'll come back and I'll work with the refugees, with the very poor. Teach them English, get these structures so that they can move ahead. It's not for lack of work that these poor people are poor. It's lack of opportunity.

DeFries: Right.

[00:43:47]

Walsh: So I got permission from the doctor. I was—I didn't need to start any treatment. It looked like it was moving in the right direction and then all of a sudden, the numbers started to go in the other direction. They said, Vietnam is out. So one of our priests, one of my best friends—and I hope that didn't record, because I don't like the guy at all—Mike White, you're a terrible, terrible person—kept bugging me. He says, "There's a Portuguese parish out here in San Diego [California]." I said, "Mike, first of all, you're a pain in the neck. Second, if it's a Portuguese parish they must have a priest who speaks Portuguese. I'm not coming," and he was bugging me all the time. So finally, I said, "I'll relent," and most likely I was going to be sent to Our Lady of the Valley in Hemet, California, which is one of the parishes and to have a younger guy out there would've been helpful, but I went out and kind of under the radar, we met with the pastor, Nick Dempsey, who is an absolutely wonderful guy and he said, "Dan, I fly in a priest in from Portugal at Christmas and at Pentecost. That's the only time they have Mass in Portuguese and the only time the old people have their confessions heard. I could really use some help," (chapel bells ringing) and I thought, Sounds interesting, but I'm having trouble with being in a house, just in a parish might be a little too small. I said, "Do you need help in the prisons or in jails? You know, something that would be fun." (both laugh) So he talked to the dioceses and they said they need a chaplain for the port. I thought, I never heard of that. They said with all these ocean going vessels, the guys, they don't have a chance to go to Mass and so, putting the two together, I could have kind of the missionary stuff and then a place to really be of assistance. It was wonderful. Nick Dempsey was one of the

nicest priests I've ever met. Mike White was around, so we were always going to baseball games and bugging each other. I knew his friends, he knew mine, and it was—it was good. So I was there for five years. (Phone sound) Got to see a lot of baseball games. I got a baseball trip in there, (phone sound) then—

DeFries: This is the Apostleship of the Sea?

Walsh: Apostleship of the Sea.

[00:46:23]

DeFries: Okay.

Walsh: And I was able to build a seafarer center. In some of the bigger ports, they have a place where the guys can get off the ship and go and make a telephone call. They're on a nine month contract usually with—never would get home.

DeFries: These are commercial seafaring vessels?

Walsh: They're commercial freighters, fishing vessels, cruise ships. (clears throat) I was in—and San Diego has a very large naval (clears throat) base, but this would only be for the commercial (coughs) vessels. (clears throat) So we were doing some good stuff and I got to know all the people in the port and there would be guys—they didn't have a union representative, he was up in Long Beach [California]—but there were times when guys weren't paid—abusive captain, really bad ship owners—and there would be a fight and so, I was kind of the guy who stuck up for the seafarers and I would marshal all of the unions up in Long Beach, the Seafarers [International] Union, to work with them, but I would have to be the guy to do all of the intermediary stuff, and this is back before cell phones. So we never lost a fight. Every time a ship came in and the men had not been paid, they were paid. Every time there was a complaint about abusive (phone sound) conditions, it was resolved. We never lost a fight, which was a—interesting, stressful, but interesting.

DeFries: What do you attribute to being so successful at fighting on the side of the seafarers?

Walsh: You know, strike.

DeFries: Okay. (laughs)

Walsh: When you're paying 15,000 dollars a day to have your ship parked there and somebody's going to go on strike and say, "We're not going to unload your—"

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Paid pretty quick.

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) "—silly ass ship until you pay these boys," they get paid. And it was interesting and rewarding, but some really angry, angry people. But it was interesting. And we weren't allowed—so I would watch these guys and they had no recreation. So I started talking to some—if a guy died at sea, I would jump on a boat and go out and jump on about a mile out at sea and then come in. That was—that was also interesting. So I got to know a lot of people and I said, "You know, let's get a basketball court, give these guys a place to run around," and then I said, "Let's go a

little bit bigger. Let's get a seamen's center." "Oh, you can't." "Why not?" "Well, you can't have a piece of property." "Could I use a section of this that you're not using?" "Well, why not?" So we designed getting a couple of mobile homes—mobile, you know these—when you go around and see construction sites, these big trailers; got a couple of them donated. Put them in an L with a big forty foot deck. We covered it with, like, a trellis and they said, You'll never have to move it. So one was a chapel, the other was a place with telephones and a microwave and refrigerator. They could buy a hamburger or a pizza and just get off the ship for a while. As many books and magazines as they could carry in a suit—in a thing. We made lots of relationships with people and they would donate books and magazines. So we would always take a couple sacks of magazines onto a ship and so that was really fun and I had no idea how to pay for it. The Portuguese people were absolutely wonderful and knowing that I was going to help the seafarers and fisherman, we had a spaghetti dinner. I don't know how many thousands (phone sound) of dollars we raised, thousands. I built the center and put enough money in the bank that they would never have to do a fundraiser. There was—the only thing we had to pay for was the electric. There was no rent. They gave us the water. We had to pay for the phones, we sold phone cards. They would never have to raise money again. (claps hands)

DeFries: That is great.

Walsh: Yeah.

DeFries: And this is all from Our Lady of the Valley Parish?

Walsh: No, this was all from Saint Agnes.

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Saint Agnes.

Walsh: The Portuguese parish in Point Loma [California].

DeFries: Okay.

[00:51:11]

Walsh: And so it was really rewarding having the two. The Portuguese parish was a wonderful place where I knew people and I was known. Doing good work with—in the parish, it was—the parish was the parish and they had their Portuguese traditions and you just kind of settled in with them and were their priest, but in the port, it was a wonderful thing to be kind of the church that welcomes people from all over the world, in their joys and their sorrows, to be able to work with them. It was really, really good.

I was there for five years and then went to Chicago [Illinois]. We had a formation house. The guys who originally went, who I recruited and they went on to theology and they studied in Houston, but then it came time for their overseas training and they didn't want to go. Well, we're Spiritans and we work overseas and we learn to live among other people and the provincial at the time, that wasn't his—he wanted to keep them and he had his own reasons, but it's—

DeFries: It was the provincial who didn't want them to go or the actual—

Walsh: Both, and it's kind of—

DeFries: Okay.

Walsh: So it wasn't real—real good. So when these guys—none of them had that desire to go overseas, they decided that we were going to move away from the seminary in Houston, which was a diocesan seminary. It would be wonderful if you're going to work in Texas. It would be absolutely wonderful, but we don't. (phone rings) Excuse me, this is my—

DeFries: We can pause this.

Walsh: Hello?

pause in recording

DeFries: Okay, so you're ready to end the meeting today?

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) Yeah, I—

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Okay. (laughs)

Walsh: There are a couple meetings that I've got to—

DeFries: Okay.

Walsh: —find out about.

DeFries: Okay. Well, thank you for your time today.

Walsh: Very good.

DeFries: And we can meet up again next time.

Walsh: I hope.

DeFries: Okay.

Walsh: Thank you.

DeFries: Thank you Father.

end of interview