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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 4

Interviewed by Megan DeFries
May 2, 2016
Duquesne University
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Collection: Oral History Initiative
Project: Spiritan

DeFries: This is Megan DeFries interviewing Fr. Daniel Walsh. It is Monday, May 2, 2016 and we are here at the Laval House at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh [Pennsylvania]. Good morning.

Walsh: Good morning. Welcome back.

DeFries: How are you? Thank you. (laughs)

Walsh: So far so good.

DeFries: Good. So last time we left off, right as you were starting out in Chicago [Illinois] in 2002.

Walsh: Okay.

DeFries: So tell me about your time there.

[00:00:27]

Walsh: Well, we had for several years—one of the former provincials wanted to have our seminarians do their theology in Texas and for his own reasons, which he had. Once the guys finished their theology, none of them wanted to go work in the missions and so, a very quick and superficial and accurate description would be that the school didn't prepare them to be religious and the school was a school to prepare people to work in Texas and nowhere else. They gave them the skills and not really the broad vision that religious should have. So the provincial council met and they decided that they were going to move the theology house from Texas and reengage Catholic Theological Union [CTU] in Chicago and so, I was asked to go (chair creaks) because I had studied there, you know. I had (chair creaks) the experience in mission, they wanted me to go. So I was made pastor of St. Mary Magdalene Parish and formation director and we reengaged in the Catholic Theological Union, which is—at the time it was probably thirty different religious communities, many of whom were missionary. So we emphasized cross cultural ministry, preparation for overseas training, and kind of a debriefing once people came back. And it's a place where historically we have been very well received. A place that really did what we asked

the theology school to do—prepare men for cross cultural ministry, to work among the poor and it seemed to work. So I was there for four years as a pastor of St. Mary Magdalene Parish, which was forever struggling, and actually it closed last December, I think, after many years of being kind of on life support system. The school building had been rented to the Chicago public schools and it was a school for adjudicated youth. So it was income for the parish. It was in line with kind of the ministry that we were doing.

DeFries: What part of Chicago was this?

Walsh: In South Chicago.

DeFries: South Chicago.

[00:03:21]

Walsh: While I was there, I was working—we had a convent that one of the previous guys—there was a group that wanted to make housing for AIDS [Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome] patients, and it was kind of a fly by night group. It was church-affiliated, but not Catholic, and they wanted to make housing for AIDS patients. And to be an African American with AIDS, I mean, every door in the world would close. Within the African American community, AIDS was not a disease you want to have; even families would kind of shun them. This group came in and began the demolition, didn't have—really hadn't secured their financing. Lost whatever promise of financing they had, and walked away from the project. So now you're in a very bad neighborhood with very few resources, nobody wants to go there and now you have a building that was at least marketable in some fashion that's been basically destroyed. So I worked with our parish council and we were trying to see how we could use this building because it's a liability. You don't want to have a building that's been kind of destroyed or wrecked in a very violent neighborhood, you'll get people breaking in. So, (clears throat) I started to look and I found an article about the Alexian Brothers and how they had begun their AIDS ministry. So I did a little bit of research and wrote a letter to the director of the Alexian Brothers AIDS Ministry and I'll think of his name—but I said, "We would like to talk to you if you would ever consider coming down to South Chicago, this is the parish." What my vision was—we would bring men over if they were to work with AIDS patients. One of the great needs of our men in Africa is how do you work with people with AIDS? They have plenty of people with the disease, but no resources. If they're going to have an effective AIDS ministry and work with groups that do funding—if we brought a guy over from Africa for six months and gave him an introduction to—this is—these are groups that you can work with—because a lot of times, the missions are left with only the children because both parents get the AIDS virus and die. So they're dealing with orphans, but with no resources as to how to deal with it. So—and the guy's name was just on the tip of my tongue—within a day he called me. He says, "You know, we were thinking, how could we expand this ministry to South Chicago?" So immediately it started. Well, he—he eventually left the Alexian Brothers and before it came to fruition, I was transferred, but we started—(clears throat) and many years later, the Alexian Brothers did come. The pastor really didn't have the vision and really kind of the drive to get it done and it got established, but kind of the Spiritan end of it wasn't tied up to where we could bring men from Africa. Even if they came in on a tourist visa, to learn a little bit, to be introduced to what possibilities you

could have, but the Alexian Brothers did come and they—it's not Bettendorf—something like that house [ed. note: Bettendorf Place]. (clears throat) They come with kind of—it's—these are people who because of drug abuse, because of many other issues, are not going to be employable, but they still offer occupational therapy, things like that, to give them hope that they could eventually get a job.

DeFries: Okay.

Walsh: So it's a nice model; one to be introduced to—but it was—

DeFries: I know you said the Spiritan end wasn't tied up into it ultimately, but do—were the people in theology able to work with this group, to learn more?

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) Well it—by the time I got finished there, we're no longer in the parish.

DeFries: Okay.

Walsh: By the time I left, the new guy, he didn't—he didn't really see this as a component of education. We moved the residence into Hyde Park to be closer to the school. So that part never—

DeFries: Okay.

Walsh: —never reached its potential.

DeFries: That's too bad.

Walsh: Yeah, but you try stuff and hopefully think beyond what the—kind of the real local need was. [Receives phone call]

DeFries: Do you need to take that?

Walsh: Yeah. Could I—

DeFries: Okay, sure, I'll pause this.

Walsh: [Answers phone] Hello.

pause in recording

Walsh: You do your best to, I think, care for the people, but an awareness of if you are involved or engaged in an activity, how to benefit others? Particularly situations that are as hopeless—when you hear of our men who are working in some really tough missions where AIDS is so prevalent and the parents are dying, being brought up with—their children are being brought either by the mission or by their grandparents who don't have the—if you begin to learn a skill and it could be transferrable, without going into making a major complex organization, but if you can get in touch with some skills and bring people over, it may be an opportunity to share some knowledge. Who knows if that would ever develop? But the Alexian Brothers, in the conversations that I had with them, they were 100 percent. I mean, just good men.

When the AIDS crisis—it's Merrill Kenna—is the guy's name with the Alexian brothers. When AIDS first happened and everybody was so afraid, I mean, the brothers brought the men with AIDS, the gay men, and cared for them in their home because they weren't welcomed anywhere else. These are some good guys, some really, really good men, and because they're on the—kind of the—not the cutting edge, but because they have responded so well, there is an authority that they speak with and it's recognized by others, (chapel bells ringing) and they have developed a very, very good structure for this and could we learn and apply it in a place where developing countries might be able to gain some knowledge or (phone sound) be conduits to introduce people to resources. I think they're both very important. So who knows? Maybe in another opportunity we could find—find something.

DeFries: What were some of the other programs that you had while you were the formation director to prepare the people in theology for life in the missions?

[00:12:07]

Walsh: Well, we—we depended a lot on CTU and the classes, the programs, they were all very well developed. So, there were classes to prepare men to go overseas. There were other classes to kind of work with them as they came back. I just ran into of our guys here who works on the grounds and he spent six months in Nepal after. He just wanted to go help. Now he's come back and his family wants—he looks the same, same accent, same height, lost a couple pounds—they want to see the pictures, but they want him to be exactly the way he was when he left. He's been changed. A lot of things have been reordered. I said, "Have you gone into a grocery store?" which he has and he just stopped. Being Americans and going into a grocery store is one thing. When you come back from third world countries, do you really need seventeen different types of toothpaste? Forty different boxes of cereal? It—it stops you. You say, There is just such an abundance and it is so readily available. They will always have forty boxes of different cereal. All you have to do is decide which one. Hunger is not an issue here. So helping students as they prepare that they will see things that are very different. Then coming back and the whole thing that you will be changed by your experience, your family wants you to be the same person you were when you left. They're your family. Love them, they love you, but where are you going to find that connection for somebody to talk to because you have changed. So, this is where the religious community, the formation program really has to be well prepared. So we did it. We got back there, we got everything reconnected. The guys now, we have guys working in foreign countries and well adjusted, making good contributions.

[00:14:47]

So I was there for four years. One of the nice things was that there was a group of formation directors that got together every month. And we would invite—we would kind of do our own formation. If you were seeing something, you had other peers to interact with. It was very, very good. So that was, that was something that I found to be personally very beneficial. Having—you want guys to have kind of the connection—and we had Vietnamese students. In Chicago, there's not a very large Vietnamese community, and Vietnamese—their lunar new year is very important in their culture. Well, if you only have a few guys, how do you do this? Well, we only had a few Vietnamese, the SVDs, [*Societas Verbi Divini*, Society of the Divine Word] they probably had thirty, they could do whatever they want. We had four or

five, but there were Maryknoll and Sacred Hearts [Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary], each who had one. Well, we brought our communities to have a Vietnamese New Year celebration—I mean, making egg rolls. I was treasurer at the time, and I would have to go down every few months, couple months, to do what I needed to do at the headquarters at Houston [Texas] and the Vietnamese seminarians' mothers would meet me at the airport—all of the food, so I would carry a small backpack. I would come back with bags of stuff. (DeFries laughs) All the noodles, all the seasoning, so it was always a lot of fun. And to make these little connections—if we're all going to be small, then we can work together and do it effectively. So we did—we did well. While I was there—and you're trying to deal with a multicultural parish. It was—the largest group was the Hispanics. Then we had Polish, Haitian, and African American. It was—every four—the Stations of the Cross, we would do it in four languages. Whoever showed up, the Polish would do it—English and Polish, they would have to find a leader, the Haitians would have to find the leader. So it was really, really nice and this community really showed me a lot. For Our Lady of Guadalupe, which is extremely important for the Hispanics, the Haitian ladies would come for the Mañanitas. Before the sun comes up, you go into the church, and they sing so that they awaken the Virgin on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and traditional songs, traditional things, but the Haitian ladies would come. At a certain point, they would say, “Now can we sing our song for you?” and it was just—you couldn't have written a book describing what the goal of working as a community would be. They did it. So we kind of got—made sure that we got out of the way so that this could happen. It was rewarding. The people were very, very good. Welcomed the Spiritans, formation community. It was a good, good experience.

[00:18:38]

After about—I think I was there four years, maybe five—I was elected provincial. So I had to move to Houston. We—the decision was made that we were going to merge, it was one of the—this chapter was remarkable. Joe Gaglione—we had a provincial who had to resign from office. The first assistant took over, the headquarters in Rome [Italy] said that within a year, we had to have an election. So the guy who was acting provincial, at the retreat, he would—the provincial would always give a report and he wrote it out, said, “Here's the report, you guys can read it. Why don't we talk?” So, the talk started a conversation among the men and very quickly, it came to the topic of reuniting the two American provinces and there was consensus and the other provincial was there with us. And it was remarkable. It naturally—it wasn't on the agenda, it came up in conversation and it was unanimous. It was consensus. So—

DeFries: So there was USA West and East—East and West, is that—

Walsh: Yeah, because at the time there were East and West.

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Okay.

[00:20:07]

Walsh: And this was a retreat and conversation in the West. We had the election and I was elected and with marching orders, “This is what we want.” The East was going to have their retreat later that year and they picked up the conversation and they were in agreement. So basically as—starting off as a provincial, you were given, “This is

what we want you to do, put an end to a province,” (laughs) and it was—it was (clears throat) a really interesting thing. I mean, to have a game plan as clear as that was really, really good. So as I started, the whole thing was to get this done. So the administration of the East and the administration of the West, we met. It was, how do we get this done? There were a lot of different communities that were going through it and we began to learn that there were many different ways. In some it was, let’s say, the general headquarters in Rome said, “This is what we want you to do, we want you to merge these provinces.” In women’s communities, it was through attrition; they had no choice but to merge. In others, there were all these different configurations. And what we began to learn was that we had a common—most of our men, at some point, did formation together. Whether it be the novitiate or the theology, but we knew each other, we had a common founder, we had similar works, we knew each other and most importantly, the impetus for the reconfiguration came from the men. There were going to be no road blocks, there were going to be no objections. It was going to be, you were empowered to this; that’s your job, get it done. In others, you know, there were really nothing in common. They had different purposes, different missions. One group was rich and the other was poor, one was working in this type of work and the other was in something else, and you heard of the contentiousness and difficulty to find a common language. The men didn’t want to hear what was going on, they just wanted to know when it was done.

It was the easiest task, I think. And when I describe this to other communities who are going through it, they just are amazed that this is what—and I think one of the descriptions that comes to me is that our men are about mission. We’re not politically—now you’ve got to be politically astute. You’ve got to be aware and recognize that if you don’t attend to that, it can be—it can create something very ugly, but if you give attention to that, it can be—work very, very well. Women’s communities, they may be Sisters of St. Joseph, but with different founders, different spiritualities, different mother houses, and when you try to put these together, which one is going to be favored? “Do we keep this retirement home?” “But that was our mother house, you can’t sell that.” For us, that wasn’t the case. The West, we moved around a lot; we had provincial houses and headquarters in Houston at one time, San Antonio [Texas], Denver [Colorado], all over. We were not tied to institutions. (clears throat) So it was—it was kind of an interesting history.

DeFries: Was it just seen as unnecessary, anymore, to have the two provinces? Like, it just—

Walsh: Yeah.

DeFries: —just wanted to bring the two together.

[00:24:32]

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) Yeah and it wasn’t that we were administratively heavy, but the men just thought that it was time. We were less—we were about a hundred men between the two provinces. Why have two separate structures? We already collaborate on a number of different things. It was just seen as this is the time and you could—you could ask a number of different men, but that would be kind of my take on it. It’s time. There is no need to have separate structures. Now within the kind of the constellation of Spiritan world, in Africa, they had tried to bring different groups together and they were splitting up because of tribe, which I don’t understand

at all, but it is something that speaks very deeply to Africans. They are a different tribe, how can we get along with them? So East Africa, which was Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, which was a province, broke up. Nigeria with different ethnic groups—they were one, they're now four. So it was a very interesting dynamic, how one group is saying, we don't want to be—"We can be one group," and others are saying, "We cannot survive together. The people from this tribe are being favored." So you take a look at underneath, what's the dynamic? And if it's about mission, (chapel bells ringing) I think we have a purpose, but if it becomes about, "What am I getting?" you're never going to find a solution to that.

DeFries: So it was a relatively easy process for you as the provincial?

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) It was and—so we had a lot to learn because it is a decision. You had—every man had to opt in. If they opted out, they were given choices. No one opted out, but if you opted out, you still had to go in to work for a transfer either to become a diocesan priest, to become—to move to another religious community, to exit, or to become a hermit. (both laugh) You could become a hermit in all of this, that was one of your options, but everybody opted in, which was interesting, but we had to—administratively—to move assets into a new corporation. Construct a new corporation, empower it juridically. You had to move assets and reclassify things. So it was a big administrative conundrum.

DeFries: So were you officially the last formation—or not formation director, provincial superior for Spiritans West?

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) For the West, yeah.

DeFries: And it's located now at Duquesne?

Walsh: At Bethel Park [Pennsylvania].

DeFries: Bethel Park, okay.

Walsh: Yeah.

DeFries: Okay.

Walsh: There is only one province, it's the US—Province of the USA. No more USA East, no more USA West. They have been suppressed. (DeFries laughs) Yeah, there's a whole bunch of terminology that goes along with that, but—

DeFries: So did it take until 2011, all four years that you were there, to accomplish—

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) Yeah, it—to move it forward and at the time, I was also the director of campus ministry at the University of Houston and Texas Southern University, which was good. We weren't that big of a province. Probably not the—I didn't get much rest. I wanted to work part-time, but it was only possible to work full-time. But I put in so many extra hours that in the summer, I would just do the minimum at the universities and take care of the traveling that I needed to do and the administrative tasks that I needed to take care of. We weren't a very big shop, which was good.

DeFries: What kind of things were you doing as the director of campus ministry between the two universities?

[00:29:08]

Walsh: Well, this is a Catholic university, so kind of there are more resources, but I ran two centers, two Newman Centers, one which was well used, the University of Houston, Texas—the other was a historically black college and most of them were not Catholic. The retention rate was less than 15 percent, so you were constantly welcoming and then saying goodbye. For financial reasons, most of them had no—there was no entrance—I don't want to say entrance exam, but you didn't have to take the SAT's [formerly Scholastic Assessment Test], you didn't have to do all this. And most of the kids, they had to be accepted, but they weren't prepared, so they would flunk out. There would be trouble in the family, "Oh, I'll leave school to take care of this." It was a constant, constant—you were always rebuilding. One of the—my predecessors was Fr. John Walsh, who was just an absolutely wonderful guy, kind of took a look at the nature of what Texas Southern was about. These are poor kids, they're hungry. They need a welcoming, safe place. So he fashioned it that there was a hot lunch every day. Kids had to pay two dollars. He went out and he raised the funds and most of it was his own salary that he funded these lunches, but it was a place for these kids, who will never forget Father John Walsh. Well, they got a couple of people, "Ministry is about sacraments. You have to baptize, you have to confirm, you got to give First Communions, you've got to do this." [The program] headed somewhere that it shouldn't be and so they moved him out and got rid of lunch program and got rid of the students as well. They didn't understand what ministry was in this context. So I was—it was just one failure after another and then I was brought on and told, "You can't do that." Well, it was—we never made traction. We had a couple of students and they were law students who came for a safe, quiet place to study, but you couldn't welcome the undergraduates because the turnover was huge. You couldn't meet their needs, you had to provide what the dioceses said you had to provide.

[00:31:44]

So over at the University of Houston it was a much—these were students in good academic programs. It was kind of run more as a center than a sacramental factory. I wanted to create an atmosphere where kids felt that they were welcomed and then we'll figure out what ministry they want. I work with a guy who's actually working on staff here, Giovan Cuchapin, one of the best campus ministers that I can think of, (clears throat) and there was a little Vietnamese sister, Sister Kim Tran, and our secretary was Dolores Perez. And programs are nice, but who cares? Kids are a mystery. I don't know where they come from, I don't know what they're going to be, but while they're at the university, you care for them. And I don't have the solution, I don't know what their problems are or what their needs are, but you create that atmosphere and they're going to come. If they know that they're welcome, they will come. When I arrived, there might have been two kids who would go to daily Mass. When I left, almost four years—three and a half years later, if we went under thirty, what happened? If there was a whiff of food, it'd be fifty to sixty. With no real effort, other than giving attention to the welcome and creating that atmosphere where they could be themselves. Kids would attract and call their friends to the point where they

were just all over the place. So it was—I enjoyed campus ministry, it kept me sane because you're running all over the place doing a bunch of different things, but it was—it was very enjoyable. We reestablished it as probably (front door opens) one of the best ministries, at least for campus ministry in the dioceses. There were—

DeFries: [Student arrives] There's Dan.

pause in recording

[00:33:57]

Walsh: Okay, but it was very enjoyable. I was brought up to Pittsburgh after that (floor creaking) to work over in Hazelwood [ed. note: Neighborhood of Pittsburgh]. With the new merger, they wanted to have one formation house. We wanted to favor Duquesne University because of the historical roots, an introduction to the students to another facet of ministry. Challenging in that most of us—the attraction to us was from Texas. Now students would have to travel up here, but a sacrifice for, perhaps, the good of the community. So we moved and I liked the apprentice model. We're not going to have hundreds of students, you don't need an institution. So I asked if we could be located in a parish and at the time, we were running Sacred Heart [Church] over in Emsworth [Pennsylvania] and one of the—to make a long story short, we gave up Emsworth and the diocese invited us to go to Hazelwood, which is a tough neighborhood, tough ministry, but it was probably the time, ministerially, when I was really—I was really happy at the University of Houston, but I loved Hazelwood. If it failed, it was not for lack of effort.

DeFries: What did you love about it?

[00:35:29]

Walsh: It was among the poor. Everything that we could try was going to be an effort to keep it alive. I liked that we had no resources. I shoveled snow, I raked leaves, I cut grass, I fixed roofs. The people were very appreciative, they loved the parish, but there were just no resources. We began to work among the churches, there was no grocery store. The poor had to take a bus all the way over to the Waterfront or take two buses to get over to Greenfield [ed. note: Neighborhood in Pittsburgh], which was much closer. They could take a jitney [ed. note: an unlicensed taxi], which might cost fifteen dollars. How the heck are you going to carry all your groceries back if you're old and infirm? So we started this buying club because the poor and the hungry, they don't need us to be territorial. They need us to help them to find a solution. So we started a buying club, a Fishes and Loaves Cooperative [Ministries] among Hazelwood Initiative, the Baptist church, St. Stephen's [Catholic Church], and later the Christian church. So twice a month, we'd go down to Wholey's [Market], people would order off of an order form what they wanted—fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, fresh meat, fresh fish, and a couple of pantry items, but there was a food bank and if you're on medication and it's low sodium, if you get canned food, forget your diet. So we—but we wouldn't sell anything that they could buy locally. So if you could go over to the store and get milk or if they had milk at Rite Aid, we're not going to sell milk. So—and we didn't want anything taxable, no diapers and things like that.

So it was a chance for the community—or for the church communities to come together and there was—there’s a pretext to this. They had tried to start a cooperative, but with very difficult people. “I will participate in the cooperative, but you have to rent my building, I will be the contractor to fix it up so that you can use it.” It became—no one wanted to work with these people. So the cooperative came in the back door and approached St. Stephen’s and said, “Would you be willing to help?” and so I said, “Yeah.” So there was also Rev. Les [Leslie] Boone from the Baptist church and so we started it and it was absolutely wonderful. And when we put together the charter, it was, “We don’t want to be in this business. We don’t want to be the grocery. If a grocery comes, we’ll shut it down. We want to respond to the needs of the poor,” but we chartered it in such a way that now there’s a little bakery that come under our umbrella. There is a little barbecue—African American family wants to do barbecue—that they come under our umbrella. So if you ever want to buy doughnuts for the people, I’ll give you an order form for the best doughnuts. Bacon—maple covered bacon doughnuts.

DeFries: Oh my gosh.

Walsh: Or something like that. They’re doughnuts covered in maple with bacon bits.

DeFries: I would have to try that.

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) Fresh bacon.

DeFries: Okay. (laughs)

Walsh: And all sorts of cakes and cookies. Like when we do something here and we want cookies, if you’re under a certain dollar amount, you don’t have to use Parkhurst.

DeFries: Okay.

Walsh: And they’ll deliver. I mean—and it’s favoring this little family who wants to have their own business. They don’t want to get food stamps. They don’t want to be poor, they want to make an effort. So we—or this group has opened up the kitchen at St. Stephen’s and the people can come and do their cooking. So I mean, it’s one of those really creative—you have to listen to the people you serve and you have to be aware of their needs. And it’s—you know, we’ve gotten some good people. Deacon Tom Berna over at St. Stephen’s is absolutely wonderful, Spiritan Lay Associate, but doing some really, really good stuff. I love the parish. I was only there, unfortunately, for two years and then the community wanted the seminarians to be on campus, so came here to Laval House, started working in campus ministry, and really we’ve renovated this house. It was really in need of a lot of attention. This place was a dump. Ugly, filthy dirty, everything was broken, so—

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Was it empty when you came?

[00:40:44]

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) No, it was, it was members of our community and these guys, God forbid that they would push the sweeper, clean something, repair something. So it was kind of the house for unwanted, broken furniture, you know? So

it took a couple years of hard work and we've renovated the thing. The university was wonderful and before I came they updated the electric. We've redone all of the bathrooms, which were really, really bad. Painted all the rooms, (chapel bells ringing) I painted everything. The only things that they painted were bathrooms, put in new carpets. It was just a major, major effort. Now—

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) The house looks very nice now. (laughs)

Walsh: —this summer, the university's going to go after this front porch and I can't wait to see it. It's a very, very, very nice idea.

DeFries: They're going to build an actual porch on the front?

Walsh: No, they're going—they're going—and this is just between you and me and the recorder—they're going to knock it out, but then put in new steps and little planters and nice stone so that it's—because you can put another skim coat of this cement and by the fall it's going to crack. So it needs to be addressed, so it's that time and they're going—I don't know if they're going to sandblast and repaint this railing, but the way it's looking, it's going to—they're going to have little flower beds or planters with a bench.

DeFries: That'll be nice.

Walsh: Which will be nice because I like to sit out there in the evening and listen to the [Pittsburgh] Pirate game and eat peanuts and harass students. (DeFries laughs) What's your name? Where are you from? Want a peanut? I make a lot of friends out there. (DeFries laughs)

[00:42:45]

And having the seminarians who are with me over at St. Stephen's, the apprenticeship model, I think, is very valid, but maybe not at this level to where theology in these classrooms, it's a bunch of phooey. Who cares what a dead saint said? I'm exaggerating, but how about listening to what people need? When you hear that Mrs. Murphy's husband is sick and she comes to morning Mass and prays for him, so and so needs a job that had better catch your attention. It's nice to know what saints taught, but even more important to be with people. Over at St. Stephen's, the seminarians would go to daily Mass, they got to know people. It was a great source of consolation for the people to see seminarians and for the seminarians to know that people cared about them, but they weren't getting kind of—if you're discerning a vocation, you have to weigh this is—by following this path, but a choice comes when you are exposed to different things. So here on campus, to know what their peers are living and what it is their peers are pursuing, is an important part. If you have no social life and no friends on campus because you're a commuter and you have to be back for evening prayer and not engaged, are you getting the fullness of discernment? So having the students on campus, it's at the other extreme. They're involved in ministry, but it's kind of a narrow window of what is offered on campus. It's reality and reality can be our friend, but they're not in vows at this point. Eventually they will be and eventually being involved in a parish like St. Stephen's would be very, very practical and very good. We started a vocation discernment group here and there's a video on the Duquesne website for campus ministry. You know, as I

describe—students are a mystery. I don't know who they are, I don't know where they've come from, I don't know what they're going to be, but it's hard being young. Who are these people? What are their talents and what are they going to do? If we create that atmosphere, where they can prayerfully consider their lives, they will have the options. So we created a vocation discernment group, which has been very successful for the students. For vocations we've gotten a couple, we'd like to have more, but it's a challenging place where students can see that a lot of them are considering what their vocation is and in doing that, they support one another. If—and I'm a firm believer that the Holy Spirit is working all the time. We have to get out of the way, we have to create programs where they can come and be themselves.

DeFries: So this is allowing students from all walks of life, religious or not, to figure what their true calling would be, what their vocation would be?

Walsh: Exactly, and some, there may be a 5 percent chance for a religious vocation and they come and they say, "That's not for me. Can I still come?" Yes, it's for discernment.

DeFries: How do you go about the discernment? What—what things do you do to help them with that? (laughs)

[00:46:28]

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) Well, we meet weekly. We begin with evening prayer, followed by a simple meal and then a sharing and the students determine what the topic is going to be. We will suggest some and for some of them, I think it should be a priest or a sister, like human sexuality, intimacy, things like that. I want not only good information, but I want it to be reliable from somebody, but for the other things, they can talk about whatever they want. The group is for them; because it's for them, we say, Tell your friends about this, bring your friends. If they know that it's a safe place, that it's effective, that it's responding to a need that they know that they have, they're the best recruiters. We will put out brochures. There's one young lady who decided to come to Duquesne specifically because we have this program. She wants to really prayerfully think about who she is, what are her gifts, and what she's going to do with her life. So we work very, very hard to—and I want to get the process right and I want to have the atmosphere conducive to what it is that we want to do, but the results are not for me to determine. If a student comes out of here knowing that they were able to come and that they received support of their peers in their discernment, we have done a spectacular job.

DeFries: How many students have you had participating so far?

Walsh: In the four years, probably fifty. Some are consistent, but yeah we'll have about fifteen here a night and because of class conflict, because of overseas or they're going to the classes in Rome or Ireland, they can't come, but it's been a very, very good group. And students who have graduated want to come back. If we put out the call we're going to have something, they readily come.

DeFries: It sounds like a very interesting group and an approach that, I guess, you would think a Catholic university would have, but it's not one I've heard of before. (laughs)

[00:48:57]

Walsh: And you're exactly right and because there is no pattern, well how can I do it? I don't know what I'm doing most of the time. I really don't, but it doesn't stop [me] from trying. Getting ministry to poor indigent AIDS patients who are black, I don't know what to do, but you try to go and do something. A food co-op in a poor neighborhood that doesn't have a grocery store, I don't know what I'm doing, but let's try something. The vocation discernment group—if there's no pattern, just start something and eventually if you invite people and the right people, you might be able to get something off the ground. I'm very proud of each of these ministries. The seamen center out—the seafarers center out in California, if you can't build a building doesn't mean that you can't have a building. Just try to creatively think about what can be done.

DeFries: Make the space, make the opportunity—

Walsh: That's right.

DeFries: —and let it take it where it's going to go.

Walsh: And let it—let it evolve and find partners, find people who are interested, people who can be of assistance and give them a chance to do something.

DeFries: Is that your approach with—well yeah, is that your approach with campus ministry as well here?

[00:50:48]

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) It is. I don't like—I like programs, but it's not about programs. Programs are a vehicle to encounter people. I come from a Brazilian, Latin American—it's process, it's listening. I think many times in institutions you can find that it is—oh—[Someone arrives at the front door]

pause in recording

Walsh: And I think that to me, the process is just essential. As I sit back, everybody will have a critical eye, and you need one, but sometimes I think that religious life and the church presents itself as the answer looking for a question. We've got it all figured out. (chapel bells ringing) We have the answer, all you have to do is come and ask. That's not the gospel. It's not a class, it's not an academic exercise. I take a look in my interactions with people. They don't even know what to ask and sometimes they're—we don't listen to their needs. And this is where I think Pope Francis is absolutely wonderful. I think he has a great sensitivity that people are at a different place, that it is not some philosophical thing. The plight of the divorced and the remarried—what—he talks about the church as being a field hospital, where if you're broken, this is the place to come, not be excluded because of something. So it's an interesting—and I think the way that he's going about it, I think he's finally getting people's attention. I think that religious life, like the Spiritans and other groups, because we are so close to the people who get injured or have been excluded, have a lot to offer, but we have to be the ones to be aware first of what some of the limitations are. We have to get the process right because if you're dealing with

people who are broken where the system is unforgiving and excludes, if that's the way that we present faith, church, life, they're never going to win.

DeFries: You have to be able to meet people where they are.

Walsh: Exactly, and to do that, you have to listen. And we learn some really good theology. If you can neither read nor write, who cares what theological mumbo jumbo people come up with? If you're hungry—

DeFries: And you're trying to survive—

Walsh: Yeah. Let that be kind of your entry and not coming with programs. Programs are important, absolutely, but even more important is the encounter.

DeFries: It seems to—as we've been talking now for a few sessions, it seems to always come back to relationships with you.

[00:54:50]

Walsh: You know and I'm—tomorrow we're going to do our evaluation, kind of as a staff and so I was talking to one of the younger members of the staff and, "Let's do an evaluation of what we've done. Areas where we have succeeded, areas where we're not being too successful," so that kind of across the board we're going to hear—and I think what we're going hear is when we include and when we empower students, it's going to be successful. When we run programs, we're going to be very lonely.

DeFries: So start from the students' perspective, what do we need, what do we want, and let them sort of bring it to you rather than the other way around.

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) Yeah, let them and let them develop their leadership skills. There's a word that I think that I absolutely love is to be generative. I don't need to prove anything to anybody. If I can pass on some skills and give people a chance and an opportunity, they're going to be better and so will I. I mean, I've lived long enough, I've had enough experiences that I'll die a happy man. I don't need to do anything to prove my worth or that I can do something, but to give the opportunity for some young person to explore and make strong their faith, great. And the way that we go about ministry—we started this group, Alive, here and the kids came—and in Houston, Texas too, "We want you to do [Eucharistic] adoration for us." Some kids came, "We want you to do Mass in Latin for us." "Oh, great, great. Do you speak Latin?" "No." "Oh. You don't speak Latin and you want Mass in—" yeah, I said, "Okay. Do you speak Portuguese?" "No." "How about if I do Mass in Portuguese because you're not going to understand that either and it's a lot easier for me." They want to have this kind of experience of the sacred. "Okay, well—then we want adoration." "Okay, who's going to sing?" "Oh, we don't have anybody." "Okay, do you have a kid with a guitar?" "Yeah, we got a kid with a guitar." "Okay, does he know this song? Well, get the book. Let's get the book so you find what the structure of adoration is and you start off with 'Tantum Ergo'. Do you know that?" "No." "Well, read what it says." "It says you can play 'Tantum Ergo' or some other appropriate song." "What other song might you want to sing if we're going to do that?" "How about we sing this?" "Great, write it down." Then you kind of go through and then the next thing is you have exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and

you can have a reading from scripture, you can have a homily, you can have the rosary, you can have a fervorino, you can have whatever you want. “Which one of those sounds good?” “How about if we do this?” “Good, write it down.” And so you go through it and the elements that they don’t know, there’s always something else, something that they know and then they can be the leaders and so, it’s kind of like passing it on to them.

So the students here wanted to have that and so I did the same thing. “Do you know this?” “No.” “Well, write it down. Who’s going to play?” “Well, we can have all of these people to play.” “Great, invite them.” And then for this—and each month we’ll do something different. One week—one month it’ll be the rosary, another a witness talk, another a reflection by one of the Spiritans, but it will be different every week and once we’ve gone through everything, we’ll see which ones we liked the best. Okay, who’s going to come? Well, if it was an old priest inviting people to adoration, we’d have three people, but if it’s the students who now are the leaders, we’ll get eighty. They go out and they invite their friends. They have a stake in this, they are the leaders. Kids will come from Pitt [University of Pittsburgh], kids will come from Robert Morris [University] because they’re the leaders. So you know, it’s kind of—it’s nice to be a campus minister and a leader, but we can do small programs because that’s what we do or we can step back and say, Oh, maybe we’re about empowering young people to do something. So when we do our evaluation tomorrow, we’ve got another year’s of experience, we’ve tried a couple of new things. Hopefully we’re going to all begin to read our life and come to some important conclusions. There’s going to be a role for us, no question about it, but what that role is going to be depends on what we read.

DeFries: So you readjust with the evaluations, what the students say they want or need?

Walsh: Yeah, and try to learn that some things can be more effective if we step back.

DeFries: What have been some of the more successful programs with campus ministry, that you’ve had the most student involvement or most excitement around from the students?

Walsh: You know, we’re going to evaluate this, some of the biggest programs that we run is spring clean-up, but (chair creaking) students have had to do service hours; they no longer are required. So we’ve got to kind of evaluate what happened. Our numbers were down, but they were still high. Why? What are we learning? What are we learning? So that as we roll it out again next year, we do it well.

DeFries: Why do you think the numbers are still high?

[01:01:45]

Walsh: I think it’s kind of engrained that it’s an opportunity for socialization. Students are truly interested in serving, but we need to be good on communication and we need to be good about—one of the things is, if you get a group, one person in a fraternity or two people, you’re going to be the leaders in your group. They’re going to draw their friends. So it’s—you have the experience, but what do you learn? So I kind of want our staff to begin thinking in that way, so that we involve people appropriately. The vocation discernment group is going along well, I’m very pleased with it. I think the

Bible study—and with students, there’s an ebb and flow and not everything is going to be—you can have the perfect program and the perfect approach and kids just might not be interested this week. So you don’t always evaluate the effectiveness of the parish based on the number of cars in the parking lot on Easter Sunday. No. (laughs) Sometimes there’s going to be shrinkage and there’s going to be loss and it’s beyond your control, but to kind of be able sit down and listen to what’s going on across the board and to support each other. There are going to be some groups that are not going to be big. Kids who are involved in social justice, they may be very small this year, but we do it. Next year, it may be very small in the devotional type of thing for adoration, but you still offer it. So not to—make sure—I got to be careful with staff, that they’re not overworked or overstressed, but we listen to each other and kind of—it’s—it’s tough because I’ve worked in Latin America. There is a style of working that people from Africa, they don’t have a clue and Americans don’t have a clue. So you have to revisit and revisit and revisit and invite conversation and invite people to listen, model things well, but not to—(woman saying hello in background) not to be so set. You’ll learn things piece by piece, but as you do have success, to be able to uncover that and people—I think everybody wants to be successful. Everybody wants to be happy, but this is the tool. This is how you use it, this is how you develop it kind of as one of the tasks for leaders, to be able to listen and encourage and empower. (front door slams)

DeFries: So from all your past experiences, from being the campus ministry director now and the university chaplain and all the roles that you currently have, to your past experiences, what stands out to you? What experiences stand out? What thoughts stand out to you?

[01:05:41]

Walsh: I just like the variety. I didn’t really envision when I was in formation or thinking about a vocation—I didn’t envision the breadth of possibilities for missionary work in Brazil to port ministry, Apostleship of the Sea in San Diego [California]. I never would’ve seen that. Living on a boat, trying to address or respond to different needs that weren’t necessarily part of the parish. It would benefit the parish to get an unused property developed and off the books, but the needs of AIDS patients and particularly African Americans in the community where they’re not accepted. Responding in Hazelwood to the issues of food insecurity (chapel bells ringing) or the need for fresh food, good choices, healthy things. I think the variety is the thing that I didn’t anticipate and the opportunity to make a difference in important areas with people who oftentimes are overlooked.

DeFries: How does that inform your experiences as a priest or the way that you—in your relationships with people?

[01:07:24]

Walsh: You know, to me it’s—I’m attentive to who are the poor. You’re on campus, I got Giovan, who’s a good friend and one of the best campus ministers that I know, he has the ability to listen. You’re on campus, we do programs, we do things, but we’ve always done it because that’s what we do. Who are you listening to? And as Spiritans—this is a school for rich white people. Who are the poor among us? So one of the most precarious schools is the school of liberal arts. If you come in to

pharmacy, you're going to be going for the next six years with the same group, physical therapy, occupational therapy. In the school of music it's a little bit different, but there's kind of a natural community. In the business school—but the school of liberal arts, you take a look, you've got English majors, history majors, political science; they're all over the board, but do they have community? So one of—and they're the precarious ones. They're the ones who are—it's a hard school. So I've asked Giovan to work with the administration to try to find how they can build community in that school—they're the poor—and listen to what their needs are. (chair creaks) So it takes a while, but you find student leaders, you sit down and talk with them. What are your needs? And as a school you situate yourself between administration, faculty, and students and listen. Let them know that somebody—we had Fr. Naos McCool over in the school of education. Naos was that kind of person who could help them to create community and naturally they do it, but it was another assist. So in the school of liberal arts, Gio can go in there and kind of listen and be and explore and come up with something. (phone sound)

DeFries: What has come out of that?

Walsh: Well, they've developed—it had started already pursuing purpose, but it was in fits and starts. Now he's over there regularly. They've gathered student leaders. (clears throat) Any program that is going on, they want us to be part of it. We're going to try to do a program between Duquesne, Carlow [University], and La Roche [University] in the fall about mercy and it would be largely through the school of liberal arts. How is mercy lived? And we're still trying to develop this, but we would like to have each of the colleges do an activity around mercy and then come together in the fall and have a pilgrimage from—down to the cathedral. Maybe walking from Duquesne, which would be a short hop. Carlow, it's three blocks to the cathedral, (both laugh) so maybe a little more challenging. It would be an hour's walk from here.

DeFries: Um-hm.

Walsh: But to have some sort of an exercise where we could work together, but it's—more importantly, it's listening and not being tied to this program, but kind of listening to what the needs of the group would be. (chair creaks)

DeFries: That sounds really interesting. Interesting way to bring in the school of liberal arts and—

Walsh: —because—and I would like for them to have something that would be a great success. You want the little guy to stand up and beat their chest and say, “This is what I did,” and the dean is very, very interested, very supportive. Some of the other programs, I mean, they're not going to have—they're not having a problem, they're not going to have a problem. So let's focus on—give this group a chance to—we'll be the support, come with kind of our skills, but let them have the victory dance and skate around the ice. (DeFries laughs)

DeFries: What changes have you seen from the time you were at Duquesne to now? In the student body, on the campus, what are some of the biggest changes that you've seen?

[01:12:37]

Walsh: I think it's a much more rigorous academic program. I think expectations—kids are in grade school trying to put together a resume to get into high school. Phooey on that. Give them a ball, let them go out and play. (laughs) Keep—let kids be kids. In college the—you're always angling for the next place to land. Have fun, make friends. The kids now, I mean, they can go to this campus, that campus—to Rome. It's—there's a lot—and schools are so competitive. I mean, to attract students, you're constantly that little gerbil on the wheel. You're churning. I don't—I don't know if it's necessarily we're being very healthy. We could—we worked hard, but we also played sports all the time, had your buddies, you had your fun, but, yeah, it just seems it's a different pace.

DeFries: What—what changes or challenges do you see within the Spiritan order since you are the vocation director here?

Walsh: (speaking at the same time) Formation, yes.

DeFries: (speaking at the same time) Formation director, excuse me.

[01:14:29]

Walsh: And I do—I do—I think it's—I think one of the challenges is to listen and we don't do it. (birds chirping) Priests and religious talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. They're incapable of listening. We are the answer to looking for the question. It's stupid. Out West, we had worked very, very, very hard to attract African American vocations. We were a complete—we had no success. As the Vietnamese came, our men out West were wise enough to say, If we are going to die as a group of white, male, religious, so be it. If from this will come an Asian church or our response to the church in Asia, so be it. The wisest bunch of knuckleheads you ever met. None of us were proud, none of us theologically educated, but boy, you talk about men who had their pulse—or their finger on the pulse of what the church needs, brilliant. We are a bunch of knuckleheads, that religious life has to be this and this and this and this and this, and we have all these conditions and all the—that what do young people want in religious life? Nobody's smart enough to ask. If the kid comes in, "He's too short, you got to be tall! (DeFries laughs) If the kid comes in and, "I want to work in this ministry," "Don't you know this is what we do?" The church can't change when you have your ears closed. We don't listen.

DeFries: Well given that response, what do you see for the Spiritans going forward then? Or what do you hope to see?

[01:16:48]

Walsh: Well, I think that the young people are—you hear that—and I don't have the answer, but a lot of people wring their hands, "These young people are going to communities that wear habits." Who cares? Let them go. There's the lamenting rather than listening. Do we create space for them? Or you're going to have to do this, you're going to wear this, these are the books you're going to have to read, you have to be exactly like me. It's not listening. It's not listening. Do we create the space? In the old church, everybody wore the same habit, everybody followed the same schedule, everybody did the same ministry as prescribed from time immemorial. And it worked for some, but it doesn't work today. Have we—have we changed our way of

thinking? It's—so I think the challenge is—I've been formation director for a long time and if a guy comes out and goofs up, who's his formation director? Didn't they teach him this? (DeFries laughs) Some of the guys who don't make mistakes haven't done a single thing for the good of anybody. (laughs) They—they do very little in terms of creative things. They may say Mass, they may do things, but the—and also our ability to change. We define ourselves by the past, we're blind to the future.

DeFries: Is there anything else that stands out or anything else that you would like to share?

Walsh: No, I appreciate your doing this wonderful, wonderful task.

DeFries: Well I appreciate you. (laughs) I appreciate you sharing all of your stories and memories and your thoughts. It's been great talking to you and thank you for sharing your time for the project.

Walsh: You keep up the good work.

DeFries: Oh, thank you. (laughs) Have a good day.

end of interview

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