The Savvy Gal's Guide to Online Networking (or What Would Jane Austen Do?) provides tips, tactics and etiquette advice for businesswomen who want to build professional relationships through email, online networks, blogs, and message boards.

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Conversations in the Abbey

Senior monks of Saint Meinrad reflect on their lives

Ruth Clifford Engs, Editor

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Dedication

"Above all, the Abbot must not ignore or minimize the spiritual welfare of the lives entrusted to him."

Rule of St. Benedict 2:33

This work is dedicated to the seven abbots of Saint Meinrad under whom the various monks in this publication were formed or served:

Justin DuVall, OSB: 2004-present
Lambert Reilly, OSB: 1995-2004
Timothy Sweeney, OSB: 1978-1995
Gabriel Verkamp, OSB: 1966-1978
Bonaventure Knaebel, OSB: 1955-1966
Ignatius Esser, OSB: 1930-1955
Athanasius Schmitt, OSB: 1898-1932

Foreword

Reminiscing is a faculty proper to human beings. Dogs do not write histories. And history, it has been said, is not simply what happened; it is the way what happened is remembered. When we look back to recount the past, we therefore disclose something of who we are in the present.

This collection of remembrances by some of the senior monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey offers the reader a slice of our history as well as a peek at our present. The monks interviewed form part of the living history, if you will, of the Archabbey and their individual recollections are colored by their particular experiences before entering the community and after they vowed themselves to remain here as monks of this house.

Needless to say, they did not found the community into which they professed themselves, and the community will continue after they themselves become the subject of recollections for monks currently too young to have known much more about this "greatest generation" and its times. The gaze backward must inevitably turn to the road that lies ahead.

But the recollections in this book are more than history, more even than the way what happened is remembered. The monks whose memories are recorded here are men of faith. They believe that God reveals himself in the circumstances of our lives, whether favorable or antagonistic. Faith is a condition of the way what happened is remembered, and while it does not necessarily alter the past, it does enlighten how we come to understand it in the present. For this reason memory has been key in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The remembrances here are serious and humorous, profound and fleeting, joyous and sorrowful—in other words, they are the stuff of everyday life. They are also the witness to the continuous faithful search for God to which the monks who remembered have dedicated themselves.

In the course of her interviews with the monks, Professor Ruth Clifford Engs solicited the recollections that she subsequently shaped into the present volume. The three historical essays illustrate how the

lives of each monk are interwoven with the history of Abbey Press, finance and development, and agricultural ventures of Saint Meinrad.

Her work preserves the memories of the past and gives a point of reference for the future. Though her perseverance and her professional skill, she has done us a great service.

To all who will read these pages and find your own memories stirred: may God enlighten you with faith to trace the lines of his hand at work throughout all the days of your lives.

Archabbot Justin DuVall, O.S.B.
Saint Meinrad Archabbey
July 11, 2007
Feast of St. Benedict

Preface

Introduction

This collection of interview profiles includes the reflections of men who have lived through much of the 20th century. They have experienced vast changes in society and the upheaval that has characterized much of the modern history of the Roman Catholic Church. The conversation profiles in this publication are from interviews with monks at Saint Meinrad Archabbey, a Benedictine monastery in southern Indiana. All monks in this publication were born in 1930 or before. In military history, this age group would be called the "greatest generation." At the beginning of 2007, the oldest of those interviewed was 106 years of age, the youngest, 76.

The Benedictine monastic tradition and way of life were begun by St. Benedict in what is now Nursia, Italy, in the early sixth century. The community has a tradition of hospitality and living a humble life. Many recent publications concerning monks and nuns have focused upon their spiritual and prayer life. However, the Benedictine lifestyle is a balance of both prayer and work with the motto, *ora et labora*. Both prayer and work are considered essential to the spiritual life, sustenance of the community and growth of the individual.

Therefore, this publication, in addition to spiritual reflections of each monk, will spend some pages on the *labora* of each monk and the community. Three historical essays focus on the work of the monastery: "Finances and Fund Raising," "Abbey Press" and "Land." These serve as a backdrop for the work of most of the monks interviewed for this publication.

Within the personal interviews of each monk, observations concerning his childhood, early life in the monastic community, career, spiritual life, and reflections on changes in the Church and monastic community, pre- and post-Vatican II, are discussed. Within these comments, little

homilies and words of wisdom are found. All speak of the triumphs and crises that have marked Church history in the past six or more decades.

The History and Process of this Project

The oral history of "senior monks" was originally conceived by the late Edward L. Shaughnessy, a former seminarian at Saint Meinrad College and retired professor from Butler University. After obtaining permission to interview senior monks from Abbot Lambert Reilly, OSB, Shaughnessy began the interviewing process during the summer and fall of 2004. However, he died unexpectedly in January 2005. In the summer of 2005, the editor, Ruth Clifford Engs, a semi-retired Indiana University professor and an oblate (lay member and volunteer) of the Saint Meinrad community, was given permission by the new abbot, Rt. Rev. Justin DuVall, OSB, to continue the project.

Shaughnessy interviewed three monks in this publication before his death. The editor also interviewed these monks to ask additional questions not on Shaughnessy's original questionnaire. For these monks, the interview transcriptions by both Shaughnessy and Engs were used as the resources for the monks' comments. Although all monks were asked the same questions, some chose not to answer some of them. In other cases, they diverged from the questions but added interesting historical material that was included in their interview profiles.

The interviews were recorded on audiotape and then transcribed by the editor and other individuals. The transcription was condensed for this publication. In a few cases, material from essays concerning memoirs of an individual monk was used as part of the interview profile. References to these are found at the bottom of the interview. The complete raw transcriptions and essays written by the monks are found in the Saint Meinrad archives. In these complete transcriptions, details concerning printing operations, the history of the library, composing chant in English, the Civil Rights Movement, Rome in Pope John XXIII's era, and other material can be found.

The editor distilled the essence of various conversations and comments of each monk from the much longer transcription. This condensed and edited version was given to the individual for his review, comments and changes. Copyediting was then accomplished by Mary Jeanne Schumacher, the director of communications for Saint Meinrad Archabbey.

Personal Reflections from the Editor

I first went to Saint Meinrad Archabbey on a retreat around 1997. Needless to say, my stereotype of the monks spending much of their day isolated in their cells praying was quickly shattered. In fact, most of the monks with whom I have had a chance to interact with, or interview, lead—even in retirement—active, fulfilling and productive lives. Yes, they have dedicated their lives to God and the Church, and have taken vows of stability, obedience and *conversatio* (the monastic way of life), but this does not mean that they are not fun-loving, vibrant individuals.

The monks of Saint Meinrad are extremely talented in their chosen fields and avocations. Many have advanced academic degrees and are internationally known in their fields as artists, academics, musicians, scholars, writers and lecturers. They live life with a purpose and daily strive for balance between work and prayer. Because they do not have to take time out to pay the bills, cook their dinners or wash their clothes, they have time to pursue their careers and individual talents to the maximum. Although they take a vow of stability—remaining with this particular monastic community for their whole lives—many have traveled widely or lived in other countries or communities for years before their retirement, when they then come home.

In the life stories of most of the monks interviewed, doubt, uncertainty, disappointments, struggle and the "dark night of the soul" have been experienced, just as they have been experienced by most of us; this is the human condition. On the other hand, perseverance, accomplishments, peak experiences, lessons learned from failures, resolution of con-

flicts, and the telling of a life filled with challenges and continued striving for humility, the love of God and the Church, and peace emerge from these most inspiring and talented men. It has been a privilege and a great honor to be able to interview, and interact with, the senior monks of Saint Meinrad.

Ruth Clifford Engs, Editor
February 10, 2007
Feast of St. Scholastica

Acknowledgements

Like most books, this publication could not have been accomplished without the help of many individuals. First of all, I would like to thank Abbot Justin DuVall; his secretary, Fr. Julian Peters; and the prior, Fr. Tobias Colgan; for their support and encouragement of the continuation of the project. I am also grateful to all the monks profiled in this publication for engaging in the interviews.

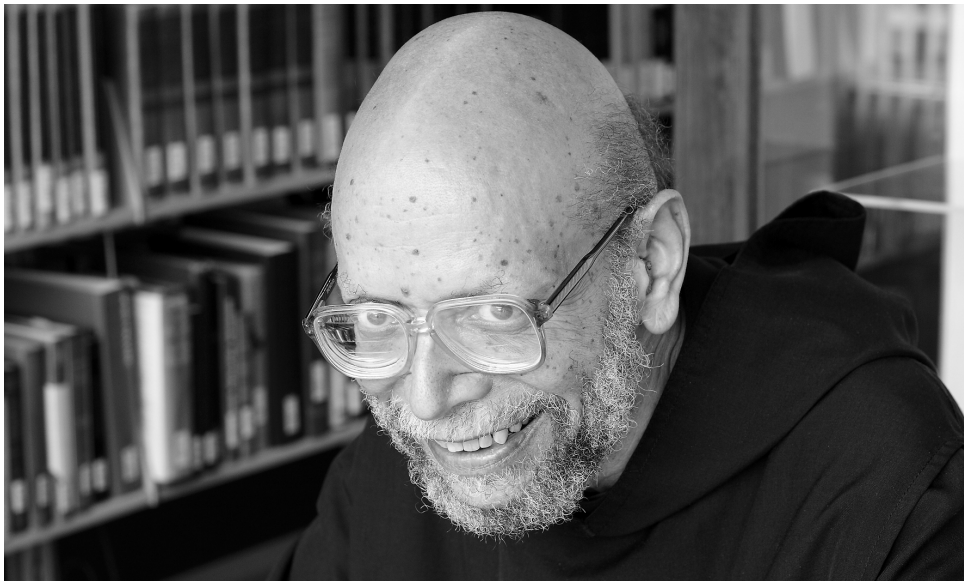
Invaluable advice and comments have come from my advisory committee. They include Fathers Meinrad Brune, oblate director; Simeon Daly, the former librarian; Cyprian Davis, the archivist; and Harry Hagan, who translated from Latin the quotations from the *Rule of St. Benedict*. I would also like to thank other monks at Saint Meinrad who have been most helpful and hospitable in the development of this project, including Brothers Maurus Zoeller, Terence Griffin and Dominic Warnecke and Fathers Louis Mulcahy, Joseph Cox, Gabriel Hodges and Augustine Davis. A special thanks to Abbot Bonaventure Knaebel, who reviewed the manuscript.

Various co-workers at Saint Meinrad have been very helpful, including Monica Corcoran, Ruth Denning, Mary Ellen Seifrig and Daniel Kolb of the Archabbey Library; John Wilson of the Business Office; Daniel Schipp, Mary Jeanne Schumacher, Janet Werne, Jo Bishop and John Farless of the Development Office; Brenda Ubelhor of the Oblate Office; and Pat Clark and Janet Braunecker of Physical Facilities. I am especially indebted to Gerald Wilhite of Abbey Press and his staff, including Norma Schipp, and Human Resources Director Mike Gramelspacher for information concerning Abbey Press. Thanks, also, to Gary Guy for his assistance.

In addition, I appreciate the support of the Reference Library at Indiana University, and the Department of Applied Health Sciences and

School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation for its continued support of my research. I am appreciative of Jain Liu, who took the current photographs of the monks, and Father Anthony Vinson for the cover photograph. Lastly, I would like to thank my husband, Jeffery Franz, for just being there.

Chapter One



Fr. Cyprian Davis, OSB

As a Benedictine monk of Saint Meinrad, Fr. Cyprian has several major responsibilities: professor of Church history in the School of Theology (1982-present), and the archivist for the Archabbey (1963-present), the Swiss-American Congregation of Benedictines (1978-present), and the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus.

Born September 9, 1930, in Washington, D.C., Fr. Cyprian made his first profession as a monk August 1, 1951, his solemn profession August 1, 1954, and was ordained May 3, 1956. He graduated from Saint Meinrad College (1954) and completed theological training at the School of Theology. Fr. Cyprian received his STL in theology (1957) from Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., and the licentiate in historical studies (1963) and doctorate in historical sciences (1977) from Catholic University, Louvain, Belgium. He served as assistant spiritual director at Saint Meinrad College (1965-67).

Fr. Cyprian has been awarded several honorary doctoral degrees for his research and writings concerning black Catholics. He has numerous publications including the popular *History of Black Catholics in the United States* (1990) and was editor for *To Prefer Nothing to Christ: Saint Meinrad Archabbey, 1854-2004* (2004). During the Civil Rights era, he participated in the March on Washington and the March in Selma, and was a founding member of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus.

Fr. Cyprian was interviewed by Prof. Ruth C. Engs on November 14, 2005.

Childhood and Early Years as a Monk

Tell me about your family.

I was born Clarence William Davis, Jr. in Washington, D.C. in 1930. My father was Clarence W. Davis, Sr. He was born in Hartford, Connecticut, and was a professor, first at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and then at the University of District of Columbia. My father was a professor of health and physical education. My mother originally was from Washington, D.C.; her name was Evelyn Jackson Davis. She was a school teacher and taught physical education in the elementary schools.

I had one sister; she is now deceased. Both my parents are deceased. My sister's name was Evelyn R. Davis Gardiner, then Evelyn Beckford. Most of her life, she lived in California and was a school teacher in Richmond, California, which is in the Bay Area.

How important was religion in your family as a child?

I am a convert to Catholicism; I became a Catholic when I was 15. One of the reasons why I became a Catholic was that I was very much impressed by the fact that the Catholic Church was the oldest Church, and I loved to read history. I read all about the Middle Ages and Catholicism, so I became a Catholic. My parents were not at all happy about it in the beginning.

Why?

My mother was a Presbyterian, although her father had been born a Catholic. One of the areas where blacks are traditionally Catholic is southern Maryland, because of the Jesuits' slave holding. His family was originally from southern Maryland, and so my mother was baptized a Catholic, but when my grandfather left the Church, my mother grew up as a Presbyterian. My uncle, her brother, was about 11 years old when they broke with the Catholic Church, but he remained a Catholic. He was the one who took me to Mass for the first time.

My father considered himself to be what, at that time, was called a Congregationalist. He became a Baptist at the behest of his mother. When I was growing up, my parents hardly ever went to church. My mother became a Catholic when I entered the monastery, and she became a very, very devout Catholic.

Tell me about your early schooling.

It was a time of racial segregation. All the schools I went to were public schools in Washington, D.C., and they were schools of all black students. I graduated from high school in 1948 and during that summer came out here for a visit. After I graduated from high school, I went one year to Catholic University in Washington, D.C.

What influenced you to become a monk?

I had read about monks in history and I was very much interested in becoming a monk. I used to go out to the English Benedictine monastery, which at that time was St. Anselm's Priory. A friend of mine said, "Why don't you write to various religious orders? They will send you all kinds of material." I thought that would be a good idea, so I did. One of the places I sent for information was to a Benedictine abbey. My friend said, "Well, you'd better explain to them that you are black." This was in the 1940s, and it was still a period of racial segregation. Many religious orders did not accept blacks, just like many of the dioceses didn't accept black priests.

I did explain in my letter that I was a Negro—in those days we were Negroes—but that I very much wanted to be Benedictine. I got an answer back and it said, "That's a very nice idea." But at that time, I was not yet baptized. They encouraged me to be baptized, but said, "The best thing to do is to join the Josephites." The Josephites were a religious community that worked for the evangelization of blacks. It was obvious they did not want to accept someone who was black. This was very ironic, in one sense, because I knew that, historically, this community had had some Negroes as monks. Their response made me so angry and I said, "I will never be Benedictine."

Then why did you come to Saint Meinrad, a Benedictine community?

At home in Washington, I had gotten to know a woman quite well who was a professor at Catholic University. She had a student who was from Saint Meinrad. He was always telling her what a wonderful place it was. One day she asked him, "Would they accept a Negro at Saint Meinrad?" He wasn't sure, but said he wanted to meet me. I met him and he began to talk to me about going to Saint Meinrad. He spoke about the fact that, if you wanted liturgy, this was the place to come for it. Later, when I started to talk about coming to Saint Meinrad, I was told by one friend that I shouldn't even think about it because Saint Meinrad is in southern Indiana and they would never accept blacks.

The monk who had invited me out here was Fr. Gerard Ellspermann, who was a doctoral candidate at Catholic University. I persuaded my parents to let me come here for a visit. I think my father was very leery about this, as southern Indiana was the South. It had its Jim Crow laws, except that they were never publicized. They didn't have signs; you had to know where you could go and where you couldn't go. But it was decided that I could come out here for a visit. I came by train to Louisville. It was one of the first places I ever saw "colored" and "white" reading rooms.

Chapter Two

Fr. Columba Kelly, OSB

Fr. Columba's lifework as a Benedictine monk has been music. He was professor of music at Saint Meinrad College (1964-98) and choirmaster (1964-78). He helped develop liturgical Latin-style chants in English in the wake of the changes resulting from Vatican II.

Born in Williamsburg, IA, on October 30, 1930, Fr. Columba graduated from Parnell High School (1948), attended St. Ambrose College, Davenport, IA (1948-51), and received a BA in philosophy at Saint Meinrad Seminary (1956). He made his first profession as a monk July 31, 1953, his solemn profession August 6, 1956, and was ordained a priest at Einsiedeln Abbey in Switzerland, July 5, 1958. In Rome, Fr. Columba received the Licentiate in Sacred Theology from Sant Anselmo (1959) and a doctoral degree in sacred music from the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music (1963).

At Saint Meinrad, he served as prior (1978-84), and since 1978 has been a visiting professor of church music in the School of Theology. He has been an adjunct professor at several colleges and has given numerous lectures over his career. Fr. Columba has composed thousands of English-language chants based upon the principles used to create the original Gregorian chants. His compositions have included antiphons, responsories, psalm tones and other material including "The Passion According to St. John," which has recently been released on CD.

Fr. Columba was interviewed by Prof. Ruth C. Engs on November 14, 2005.

Childhood and Early Years as a Monk

Tell me about your childhood and early schooling.

My mother and father were farmers. In fact, my father was farming the family farm that had been bought in 1856 by my great-grandfather, who made money in the Gold Rush. It's in eastern Iowa near the English River. It had become a 360-acre family farm when I was born in 1930. My dad, who had been out husking corn, said my birth was almost "trick or treat." This was because it was 7 o'clock at night on October the 30th. I was named John.

My mother had a ruptured appendix when she was a teenager—this would have been the early 1900s. Because it was too late to get her to the hospital, they used the car lights through the kitchen windows and operated on the kitchen table. For the rest of her life, her legs would swell and the doctor told her, when I finally arrived, "Don't you dare have any more kids." She lived to be 102. So I was the only child. They didn't get married until they were 35 years old. She was 36 when I was born.

However, I had first cousins and I went to a one-room school for eight years. The school was only about three-quarters of a mile from the house. I walked down the road to school and my companions were all

the neighbor kids. The closest relative I had was a first cousin who was one year older than I. She was always one year ahead of me in school and was kind of like a big sister. That was the closest I would have to a family relationship. So you learn to entertain yourself and take care of yourself very early. Of course, being around adults, my vocabulary really expanded. I was known for big words at an early age.

Describe your experiences at the one-room school.

It was out in the country on one square acre that had been donated by a local farmer. They built a schoolhouse on it and it took care of the kids in that area. I was one of them. It was one room, and we had a stove in the center to heat in the wintertime. Kids could come in with frostbite, practically, from walking to school. All the grades were taught in this one room. So when you finished your recitation, you either went back to your seat, or if you were good, you might get to go to the sandbox in the back of the room and play.

We did all these creative things, like building towns in the sand while other kids were being interviewed. And you eavesdropped on kids that were ahead of you, so you got an inkling of what you were going to get next year. You also heard what the kids last year said, "Oh those dummies." I didn't think of it at the time, but I look back at it now with the educational problems we have today and realize we got the best possible education because the teacher knew every single one of us.

In fact, when I got to about the fifth grade, I was sloughing off on math. The teacher lived in the farmhouse beyond ours. One day she stopped at our house and talked to my mother. That evening, Mom and Dad sat me down and we had a discussion about what I should do about my math lessons. Those were the days when the teacher's word was gospel and whatever she said, the folks believed. There was no way I could defend myself against that. So they didn't defend me; they defended the teacher.

Every day the teacher would line us up from grade one on up to

eighth grade. You all had to read something from a book. We all did this public reading, so that was all part of my background. Today this is all coming back to haunt me. This is because I'm finding text that people are translating from the original languages into English. It's obvious they don't read them out loud. This is not good for oral communication, as these texts are intended to be used as public readings or to be read by a lector. I just did "St. John's Passion" and we read a couple of sections. I had to fuss around with the rhythm and the wordplay to get it to make some sense. If you looked at it, you'd see the whole sentence. But if you're listening, the thing didn't make much sense.

Describe your religious upbringing.

My parents were very religious. They saw to it that we went to Mass and my dad made sure that night prayers were done. You didn't go to bed without doing night prayers. They were good solid—not off-the-wall religious—but just solid, pious people.

Were you brought up in a Catholic community?

The only Catholic neighbors we had were these first cousins; they lived a mile north of us. To the west were good Protestants. To the east were Protestants. To the south were excellent Methodists. He was also a high degree Mason. So we had Masonic Lodge people, Methodists, Lutherans, etc. Ecumenism was just part of the community. We all got along. In fact, when I was helping bring water for the threshing machine one summer, the neighbor, Dick Owens, who was a Mason and a good Methodist, was talking to my dad. He looked up at my father, Joe, and said, "You know, Joe, you're a pretty good guy for being a Catholic." There was that thing about Catholics being terrible people, then. Yet, because of the relationships, because we knew each other and helped each other, this was obviously not the case all the time.

Ecumenism was already there. I had no problem with relating to non-Catholics, because we lived and we worked with them. They were part of our threshing community. They were part of our hay crop. These farm-

ers would get together and help each other. In the summers, you would help with harvesting of the hay. As a kid, I had enough strength to guide the horses and the farmers would pitch the hay into the barn. For oats thrashing, you had what they called a "ring of farmers." Almost a dozen farm households, including the women, would come together. They cooked this huge thrashing meal. Then 24 or 30 men would help you thrash your oats. Then you'd go to their farm, so it was a constant ring. Once the combine came, all these thrashing rings broke up. We're talking about the late '30s before the Second World War. So that's the kind of background I had growing up.

How did you get into music?

They're two stories. I don't know what grade it was, but the teacher learned in teacher training in normal school that you're not supposed to let kids write with their left hand. Make them write with their right hand. I had started to write with the left hand, but she came behind me, pulled the pencil out of my hand, put it in the other hand and forced me into writing with the right hand. So I can't write well, but I'm ambidextrous.

The creamery in the local town of North English sponsored the summer fair called the Creamery Picnic. They would hire local kids and a local talent band. When I was maybe about four years old, I remember the folks took me there. They put me up on the railing fence. I was watching the band and I started directing it. Everybody was watching me direct the band, so this became a big joke about the Kelly kid who was into directing bands at about the age of four.

My mother had studied art and my parents saw to it that I had piano lessons at the very earliest age. When I took lessons, the teacher noticed that I was strong in the left hand so she gave me pieces that had good left-hand parts, including Chopin. She said, "I can't give these pieces to the other kids. Their left hand isn't strong enough." So I would be learning things that had strong left-hand parts. My parents got this second-hand player piano for almost nothing that had a nice stiff action. This turned out to be good training. It also played rolls and I would cheat by

playing those darn rolls. Finally, the teacher said, "You know, he's probably wasting practice time. Why don't you take that out?" They took out the guts of the piano so that I had to make my own music. I had piano lessons all through grade school.

What kind of high school did you go to?

It was a public school; however, the town is Catholic. The board of directors were all Catholics. They hired sisters to teach and they hired a principal who was a Catholic. It was run like a Catholic school. They didn't teach religion there, but the Catholic faith undergirded everything. It was five miles or something east of us in a little town called Parnell, Iowa.

I had Sister Mary Ignatius. I'll never forget it because, as a freshman, she taught us English. On Monday morning, she figured all the kids had all weekend to do homework so you had to have lots of sentences ready to be put on the board and diagrammed. There was no excuse. Today, kids have every kind of excuse. But you had no excuses in those days, even if you had basketball practice or whatever; you have time to do it. She was very strict on this. So today I get very upset with people who have poor grammatical constructions. I'm working with liturgy text and I'm just tearing my hair out at the awkward constructions they're winding up with and the inability to communicate orally.

In high school, I continued piano lessons with a sister who taught me all kind of things. In fact, I started picking up flute and violin. I went to state contests and won prizes. I won the state contest in piano one year. In fact, I did Chopin's *Fantasy Impromptu* and all those tough pieces. I played them for state contest as well as a couple of Bach inventions.

Did you do other activities in high school?

Well now, basketball was a disaster. As a freshman, I went out for basketball, but I was already beginning to get nearsighted. I didn't know it, and my parents didn't know it either. The coach figured it out. I'd be

shooting the basket and it was obvious that I was not seeing things clearly at a distance. So he went to my folks and told them to get my eyes checked. Sure enough, I was nearsighted. Of course, that was awful. Here's a high school kid who has to wear glasses. Ugh.

Another thing I did was to take typing. This would have been the fall of '44. I think we were freshmen. Three of us boys decided we'd like to learn typing. But boys don't take typing; that's for girls. In fact, the class was all girls because they were being trained to be secretaries and typists for companies. They all could type at 120 words a minute without any mistakes. We just wanted to learn to type. The sister said, "Fine, sign up." She let us have a lower standard as long as we were able to do touch typing. She gave us good grades. For the girls, that was different. She would tell them they made too many mistakes. Boy, she'd be all over them. "No, do that again." She didn't do that with us. So we learned to type.

Now that we have computers, I look back and say, "Thank God we did that." There's a monk here who's not much older than I, but he never learned to type. Therefore, he's locked out of using a computer. What a shame, because all my life's work is on the computer now. Everything's through computers—writing music, making text, whatever. Anyway, those are the things that happened in high school; they kind of set me up rather nicely. Then I went to college.

Where did you go to college?

I graduated from high school in '48 and went to St. Ambrose College in Davenport, Iowa, that fall. It was a diocesan college started by the bishop. Now it's called St. Ambrose University. I started the year Harry Truman won the election. In the early morning after the election, several of us freshmen went downtown to pick up the Chicago *Herald-Tribune*. On its front page it said, "Dewey wins by a landslide." But we had been listening to the radio all night and knew better. We wanted a copy of that paper, so all of us bought a copy. When we went back an hour later, they had taken them off the shelves. But we were down there early enough

before the guy in the newsstand realized he had better not keep that paper out any longer, so it was one of those historic moments.

In college, I'd been toying with a vocation. It was either that or go to Korea. That was the time when, in a sense like many of the kids in the Vietnam period, I didn't see any sense to that damn war. So I said, "This is the time to make the move." I had already visited here during a Thanksgiving vacation and had sized up the place. I thought, "Yeah, this is where I would like to come." Then as the draft began I said, "Okay, I better make the decision now. Otherwise I'm going to wind up in Korea." At St. Ambrose, they wanted me to join the diocese and I said, "No, I don't feel called to be a diocesan priest. I want to be a monk instead." So halfway through the junior year, I transferred to Saint Meinrad Seminary to finish my college work.

What were the influences that led to your decision to become a monk?

You know, being the only child, I had my own room in the farmhouse and my own space. I would kind of play "Mass" or "setting up the Mass." So already I was going that way in grade school and high school. When I was in high school, I went to a music institute at Loras College in Dubuque. There I met the famous Harry Seitz, who had been head of music for all the public schools in Detroit. He was one of those dynamic characters and would do a one-week church music workshop. My parents sent me to that, because I used to play the reed organ in the local parish church. Well, he helped me train my voice and he knew Saint Meinrad. He'd been down to Saint Meinrad helping out Father Eric. Harry helped me to breathe properly and project. I took private lessons from him and, of course, we'd end up discussing monasticism and Saint Meinrad. He said, "Check the place out."

Did you meet priests who were good role models?

Yes, especially once I got to college. There was a Father Madsen in the diocese who was music director and everything else. In high school,

we had contests and I got to know some really fine priests who obviously were talented. They weren't dumb. They were highly talented. They were priests and were leading people. They were good role models and we had several of those in college. And, of course, I met some of the people here.

I came down here for Thanksgiving vacation and that's when I decided, "Yes, I must come here." It's one of those things where God speaks to you. If you're a good fundamentalist, you'd say, "I was struck by the Holy Spirit and God spoke to me." Well, yeah, okay. Hear voices? But you get the point. The message gets through to you somehow. "This is where you should be." I did it in order to beat the draft, if you wish. I transferred so that I would have seminary status, because I was just a lay student at Ambrose. I thought since I'm going to join a monastery at some point, I might as well make that move now.

Then what happened?

Well, they didn't know what to do with this guy who's almost finished college but hasn't had an awful lot of Latin, and besides he's not been in the seminary high school. In those days, you started your seminary's four-year high school in the minor seminary and then went into the major seminary. I had none of this. I'd been dating girls, running around and doing Joe College stuff, you know. Friday night, you'd have a beer and pay a dollar to the guy that plays the right tune and have a date. Gee whiz, this is all part of college.

They took me for a year and a half in the school here. Since I didn't fit into any of their curriculum, I was called a special student. Now you know what that term means. So I always say to people, "I was a special student, but they ordained me anyway." That's what they called me, because I didn't fit the mold. I took Latin, other languages and philosophy courses. They get to see you and understand who you are, and you get the lay of the place. The next stage was the novitiate in '52. The following year on July 31st—Abbot Ignatius' feast day—I made first profession.

How did your family feel about you becoming a monk seeing that you were an only child?

You know, that's the worst of it. They were definitely against it. Of course, mother was very upset because I'm not going to have any grandchildren. She said, "Gee whiz, why do you want to become a priest in the first place, and then be a monk?" And my dad would say, "Oh, you've got good brains. You wouldn't have to do that. You wouldn't have to become a monk." There was the idea that monks were second rate. If you couldn't do anything else, at least you could become a monk. That's a big problem today. If somebody has all kinds of talent and brains and looks like they'll go places, they say don't waste it by becoming a religious.

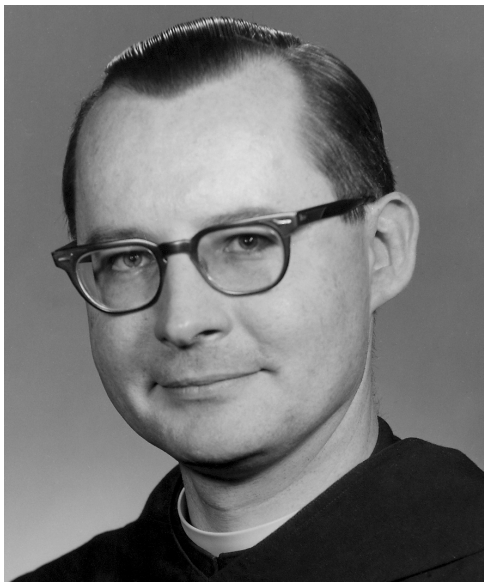
What was the tone and nature of the discipline under which your vocation was formed?

Oh gosh, everything was done very precisely and you had the usual jobs. You clean toilets; you clean wards and rooms. That's what novices do. They still do it today, "Start at the bottom, guys, and learn what it's like. Here are the household chores." You also had meditation, spiritual reading and so forth, so your day is completely scheduled. And there's recreation, always with the same people. It's kind of like a family, you know. These are the people you're going to live with. And they all come with different personalities.

The abbot of that time, Ignatius Esser, believed very much in making sure to test the humility of a monk. He would always see to it that, at some point in your novitiate, you would be confronted with some kind of mistake you made. He would then literally have your back to the wall and would say, "You've done this. Are you stupid or don't you care?" There would be a dramatic pause. Should I answer that? If you've got any sense at all, you won't. This was done to almost everybody. At least you learned pretty quickly that you weren't singled out. This is not bias; this is part of policy. We're going to test your humility. When you set up Ignatius' books for Mass, you had to have the ribbons exactly in order. If

they weren't, he would take the time, while you were standing there, to rearrange the ribbons correctly.

There's another wonderful illustration. We took turns cleaning the abbot's choir stall. Somebody did it one week and then somebody else next week. In this particular case, there had been a white spot on his choir stall. Well, birds had gotten into the church. The windows were open and this spot was a bird dropping. Well, Ignatius knew darn well what it was and he didn't touch it. So the novice master came to us one day and said, "Ignatius wants to see you in church." So we all filed out single file and got ourselves in a semicircle around his choir stall. He stood there and said, "Who cleaned my choir stall last week?"—the spot had been there awhile. So one of them said, "I did." "Who cleaned it this week?" And one of the other ones, who was very shaky because he realized something was coming up said, "I did."



Fr. Columba, as a young monk

Then the abbot said to this person, "Come here. What is that?" Now this novice knew darn well what it was, but said, "White paint." "No," the abbot answered. "No, it is bird excrement." He couldn't quite use the word "shit." "Now how do you remove that?" And Ignatius took out his white handkerchief, very carefully, and unfolded it, moistened it, and cleaned off the spot. Of course, then we all had to do penance. But I describe this because these were the kind of things that were done to make sure that you were of solid character. We look back now and laugh our heads off, but at the time we were quaking in our boots!

Do you have anything to say about making your profession?

I made solemn profession in '56. One warm night in July, I'm called to the abbot's office. This time it's not Ignatius Esser; it's Abbot Bonaventure. He has a little slip of paper on his desk. I'm standing in front of his desk and he says, "You will be going to Rome this fall to San Anselmo to get your licentiate. While you're there, study Italian so that you can go to the music school to get your degree in music. When you get your degree in music, you're to come home and be choirmaster."

There was no discussion about this. It was simply laid out for you. This was how you dialogued about your future with the superiors in those days. All this took less than six minutes. In five or six minutes, your whole future was mapped out for you. I went over to Rome in the fall of '56 and in '59 got my STL. I then started music school that fall and went on and did the master's and doctorate in musicology.

Work

Tell me about your career.

I came home from Rome the third of January 1964. On my desk, Abbot Bonaventure had placed a letter. I put my suitcase down and opened the letter. It said, "When you read this, you are choirmaster." So, it seemed, it was just like what he'd said would happen.

Since your time in Rome was during the early period of Vatican II, can you give any details about your time there?

Dennis Dougherty, a classmate, and I were sent to Rome together in 1956. He made solemn vows with me. Later, he left Saint Meinrad and wound up teaching at Marquette in Milwaukee; he died there. We had visited relatives in Ireland, went on to Einsiedeln and then took the train down to Rome.

Our Fr. Guy Ferrari met us. If he hadn't died of diabetic shock [1965], he would have been Saint Meinrad's first cardinal. He had a heart of

gold. Guy met us in his car. We were in the back seat and he leans over from the driver's seat and says, "Welcome to Rome, you two. If you don't lose your faith in the first year, you never will. Because you're going to see all the scandalous behavior that goes on in Rome. You see, this is the holy city of Rome, and by that you mean the shenanigans of the clergy, the weakness, the politics and everything else that goes on; that will test your faith. The Holy Spirit guides the Church, anyway, in spite of all this." By golly, it's absolutely true!

Amazingly, we found that there was a priest shortage in Rome and Italy. Italians don't want to become parish priests in some poor, neglected, forgotten parish in southern Italy that has no income. You get chickens and eggs and barter, but your future is poverty. We Americans think the priest shortage first happened over here. Oh, no. Rome has had a shortage of clergy since at least the '40s and '50s. What they did was to bring in religious from Spain. What Italian vocations they got were people who scrambled to get into the curia and become part of the bureaucracy. It's hardly the best motive in the world for being a priest, but they do it to become part of the bureaucracy and have a safe job. They may be pretty honest, otherwise, but it's such a narrow focusing of a lifestyle. When we were at San Anselmo, it was the golden age of the Church, because it looked like it would go on forever and that Latin would be the language.

Then I left San Anselmo to live at San Gregario on the Capitoline Hill, because it was closer to classes. Because of my schedule of classes and music assignments, I had to cross town twice a day. What traffic! I had a Vespa and that's the only way to get around Rome, because you could park it anywhere. I have a doctorate in driving, because I never had a serious accident with it. With classes and rehearsals, I went until about eight in the evening. Dinner was served at 8 o'clock. So that was my time from 1959 to 1962. The last year, I spent the morning and afternoon writing the dissertation.

Because these were the years leading to the Council, were you aware of the politics?

Politics were already pretty strong when I was there in '56, '58. Giovanni Battista Montini, who became Pope Paul VI, was at the Secretary of State with a man named Domenico Tardini. Pius XII was playing politics because he just didn't want to take either side. Tardini was ultraconservative. Montini believed that the Church had to make some changes and move. He was more open-minded than Tardini. Today we call it progressive.

So Pius XII set both of them up as head of the Secretary of State representing the Holy See. This was a very important position in Rome. Tardini did internal affairs and Montini external affairs. Well, it was like when the Roman Empire had two people ruling the empire; eventually, one of them had to go. Montini was shipped to Milan and made archbishop of Milan in 1954 to keep him out of Rome. It's called lateral arabesque. He arrived not with great glory in Milan, and had to kind of work his way back up. He stayed in exile until 1958 when he was made cardinal by another person in exile, Angelo Roncalli, who became Pope John XXIII.

I was in the piazza when Roncalli was elected Pope John XXIII in 1958. The Italians were shocked. As soon as the announcement *Habamus Papam* [we have a pope] and his name, Angelo Roncalli, was announced, the Italians turned to me and said, "Who's he? Who's he? Who's this big fat guy?" So Roncalli becomes pope and we all know what very quickly happened.

He started all kinds of things. He began the visitation in Lent of all the parish churches in Rome. This was the first time the Pope had done that for centuries. On January 25, 1960, he's at St. Paul Outside the Walls. I'm in the schola and we're singing chants for the Mass. It's the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, and the cardinals were invited. Right after Mass, all of the cardinals filed into the chapter room of the Benedictine monastery attached to the church so the Pope can talk to them. We figured Mass was over, even though we had not done the Recessional.

Meanwhile, one of the Americans has a little Sony radio. The Vatican Radio was announcing that there would be an ecumenical council. The problem was that the timing was off, as the radio station thought the Mass was over. The cardinals were now being told what was already being announced over Italian radio. We waited in the church for the cardinals to come out. We expected them to come out with smiling faces, like good cardinals should. But their expressions were all something like, "Oh, no!" We knew they didn't want it. Only the Pope was happy.

What happened next?

Fr. Guy Ferrari, who at that time was curator of the Borgia Apartment in the Vatican, was working under Tisserant [Eugène Gabriel Gervais-Laurent], dean of the College of Cardinals and part of the Vatican entourage. Guy would come back in the evening for our 8 o'clock supper and tell us what had happened that day at the Vatican. He and Tisserant would have coffee in the morning together. One day Tisserant said, "Yeah, this pope is really something. You're negotiating with him across the dinner table and by the end of the meal, before you know what's happened—because he's smiling all the time—he gets his Council going!"

The cardinals try to roadblock it. They said, "Well, you know we really think it's too much work to get this thing done." They figure they can stop him because they know that, at his age, he can't last very long. He knows it, too. He made a famous remark soon after his election, "Well, here I am at the top of the heap and the end of my rope." All they want him to do is make some cardinals for the next time. So they say to him, "Oh, we can't have this Council because we've first got to have a Roman Senate. We haven't had that for 400, 500 years." So, a Senate was the compromise.

But he got them on board. We'll have the Senate first; then maybe we can have the Council. The cardinals agreed because they figured he wasn't going to live long enough for this. Sure enough it starts; 700 and

some canons are presented in the Senate and it goes on week after week, month after month. Guy described to me that one day the Pope was flipping the pages of the many canons. Finally, he got up and addressed them. He said, "I want to thank you for all this wonderful work you've done on this. Now, I propose that we vote, in one vote, for all the rest of these canons. All those in favor of these canons, please vote…. Fine, thank you for this wonderful Senate. Now we will all proceed to have the Council." And they went on then and prepared for the Council. But the Senate was extremely conservative. Let me give you a couple of examples of their canons [decrees].

One of the decrees declared that clergy were not allowed to frequent bars. Well, a bar in Italy is a coffee bar. It's where all the clergy go to get their coffee and talk. You can also get a drink, too, in the sense of an American bar. The clergy said, "You've got to be kidding." They paid no attention to that canon whatsoever. The clergy continued going to coffee bars. But it's still forbidden, according to the Roman Senate.

Another one was that all clergy who had automobiles had to have them registered at the vicariate or Roman chancery office. Two Americans who were doing graduate studies had cars. These American priests went to the office with the canon in front of them. They said, "According to this canon, we're to register automobiles here, aren't we?" This monsignor looks up at them and said, "Oh, get out of here. We have no intention of doing this thing whatsoever." He shooed them out of the office. So, when you get these edicts from Rome, you want to listen carefully as to what they mean. Is this really workable or not? That was all part of the politics, you see.

You can see why I kind of just grin about new things that come up. For example, "You're now going to kneel for this. Get people up and down now in Mass." I preside in Tell City [2005] and the ruckus and disturbance is incredible. It's all supposed to be more reverent, but it's actually destroying all sense of reverence. People getting up and down, up and down, and not sure when they should be getting up and down. With

that noise, you can't continue the Eucharistic prayer, or if you do, you have got to shout it out over the bedlam. Is that supposed to be more reverent? Having been in Rome all that time, you realize in Rome they would have just said, "Duh," you know? "Besides we can't kneel anyway; we don't have any kneelers. We've got moveable chairs in St. Peter's." So the Romans look at us and think, "What's wrong with you guys? Don't you have any common sense?"

How about the Council?

This business with the Senate is what led up to the Council. The guys who were running the Church lost control of the Council. John XXIII put worship first, rather than doctrine. He said, "I want the bishops, all of them, to get up and talk. Since they all think they know something about liturgy, then we'll have the liturgy document first to get them talking. They all said something about liturgy because they all thought they knew something about it, whether they did or not. If he had started with doctrinal issues—this sin and that—a lot of bishops would be scared to say anything.

In the spring of 1963, Hannibal Bugnini, the principal architect of liturgical changes during Vatican II, who later becomes head of the Post-Councilor Commission for Implementing the Document on the Liturgy, gave a music seminar. In this seminar, we discussed what was going on in the Council with the liturgical document. He said it could go either way. However, he forecasted that, "Although Gregorian chants are the models for the normal music of the Church, for pastoral reasons we will promote the vernacular." This document got approved in the fall of '63. I came home and the monks asked me about changes. I said, "Oh, I know exactly what's going to happen…."

My former novice master, Placidus Kempf, who went out and did weekend work occasionally, came to me and said, "The Prayer of the Faithful, how will we do that?" I explained it to him. Or someone would ask me, "Are you sure that this is what the Church wants?" I said, "Trust me, this is where it's going." And sure enough, there was a decree from

the Councilor Congregation of Worship, from Bugnini, about what's going to be. There goes the Latin chant!

Having done a doctorate in chant, I understood how they wrote it in the first place. The original is Hebrew or Greek and then they translated it into Latin. Latin is the first vernacular of the Western Church. English now is simply the second vernacular. The official language of the Latin Church up to the fifth century was Greek. It's only about the time of Leo the Great [pope 440-461] when it switches to Latin.

What was the reaction to this?

Some didn't want to hear that, because Latin is the language of the Church. Oh, come off it, guys. It's already vernacular. So from '64 until now, we're still at it. It's been just a constant battle of musicologists against each other saying, "You can't sing chant in English." And I say, "You can't sing Latin chant in English, but you can sing chant in English." In fact, we do it here every day. There was also a lot of experimentation, but the conservatives didn't like it.

In '74, I had a sabbatical and visited Bugnini, but in 1975 they moved him out of Rome and sent him to Iran. He died shortly after; I'm sure of a broken heart. The Congregation for Beatification was joined with the Congregation of Worship and the head of Beatification was made the head of Worship. However, he knew nothing about worship. He was a conservative and he was going to hold the line, and he did. In the meantime, I had reworked the Good Friday liturgy, which if Bugnini had stayed on, I think we'd have gotten permission to do it. 1975 was a crucial year. It was like a steel door closed. Since then, you fight for everything in terms of liturgy.

How did you rework Latin into English so it made liturgical sense?

I took my doctoral dissertation under the direction of Eugene Cardine, who is the one who discovered that the ways of writing chant in ancient manuscripts also told us how you sing it. They give you performance practice indications. It would be like looking at Leonard Bernstein's

score of the *Fifth Symphony*. On it he says, "Move it here, slow it down there, crescendo there." These notations give directions for doing all kind of things. In other words, how do I perform these notes and phrases?

On the ancient manuscripts, we found that what looked like squiggles were the conductor's gestures on how to sing it. Some people said this is primitive stuff and decoration. Like heck, it is! It's the real rhythm of the chant. Look at the early notation and follow it. In other words, redraw it as you sing it. This was my doctoral dissertation. It's called semiology, the study of signs. The notations are found in the earliest manuscripts that date from around 900. If you draw it with your hands, you've got the exact rhythm. They really knew how to bring out the meaning of a text as it's orally proclaimed. In other words, how would you say something effectively and convince people with effective speech? Chant is doing all that, and so you take those rules and principles from the Latin and you apply them to what English demands.

What happened here at Saint Meinrad?

I came back in January 1964 and we started an experimental Divine Office that included both priests and brothers. The first problem was to write things in English for that group. All they did was recite the psalms, but they wanted to sing some things. So I composed some simple responsorial settings, a couple of antiphons, a couple of hymn settings. Once we got that going, my plan was to add the proper antiphons for feast days and everything else, but at that time we were still divided into three choirs—experimental choir in Chapter Room, the main one in Abbey Church, and the brothers' oratory had its own.

We had three choirs going at the same time. In order to have unity, we first had to have division. We broke into three to get to one. During the spring of '64, I was writing new things. Fr. Cyprian [Davis], who knew his Latin, had an altercation with me. He said, "Father, these things are too simple and we're losing all that rich variety we had with the Latin Office. There's not enough written to sing." All that I could say to him at that time was, "Patience, Fr. Cyprian, we'll get there someday."

We had all this wonderful Christmas, Lent and Easter music, and we had to create this all in English bit by bit. Now we've got all these things!

The difference between the liturgy in Latin and the liturgy in English, structurally, was what we did in the experimental Office in the Chapter Room. We reduced it to the primary four elements, so we could build it from its core base. This included a hymn, psalmody, reading and prayer. Abbot Primate Rembert Weakland, who later became Archbishop in Milwaukee, was able to get permission for the Benedictines to develop their own Office if they did two things. They had to have the basic premise from the *Thesaurus*, which is a collection of texts to use for the Liturgy of the Hours—antiphons, responsories, hymn text, psalm tones and so forth. The other guiding rule was you were to have common prayer three times a day: Morning Prayer, Noon Prayer and Evening Prayer/Vespers.

We did the first official English Office for the feast of the Ascension in 1967. Rome finally broke down. We had already been creating stuff and doing it. It was decided that if you have non-clerics and lay people attending, then you're allowed to use the vernacular. But if you didn't, if you were a closed community, you were to stick with Latin. Some communities even sent letters saying that it was beneath the dignity of Benedictines to be using the vernacular instead of their own sacred language.

How do you feel about what you have done for the liturgy here over the years?

I consider everything I've said is coming out of the context that I consider myself a true traditionalist, not a reactionary. That tradition is the handing on of something living. The word *traditio* means to hand on, to hand over. All those studies of ancient manuscripts for chant made it possible to do something brand new in English. That's tradition. It's the same thing as the structural liturgy. The basic elements for what was there in the beginning, such as the prayer of the Church and the Eucharist, are now restored.

Prayer

In terms of Benedictine spirituality, what would you wish to convey to your younger confreres and, maybe, to the laity?

Benedictine spirituality is creating a viable working family of faith. I use the term family because I think it's the closest image I can get. It's a community, you know.

What is your favorite part of the Holy Rule*?*

It's hard to say there's a favorite part, because it depends upon my needs at any particular time or what's going on in the life of the monastery or my personal life. But I guess I've used a lot of the chapter on the tools of good works. I've often given talks about this, as if it were like a modern mechanic's toolbox. The mechanic has special tools that he can pull out on a given occasion; that's precisely what Benedict's talking about. The mechanic would have different kinds of screwdrivers and wrenches, depending on the job he's doing. We've got these various tools and good works. They're all lined up and they're not necessarily used in consecutive order. It depends upon the job. So that's one of my favorite chapters, because it's so flexible.

Other parts of the *Rule* I like concern eating, drinking and clothes. Benedict says, in general, "Don't go out of bounds or over the edge. Don't eat too much, don't drink too much and don't waste money on clothes, but they should be nice." He said, "Anytime a monk goes out, he should look good." He should not show up in shabby clothes just because he's poor. Balance is what runs through the whole *Rule*.

What is your key to living the Benedictine spirituality?

Doing it! It's like any art and craft; you've got to practice it. And so the important thing is going to choir, doing the prayers together, keeping yourself focused on these things day after day, and letting it begin to shape you just as any good craft does. My favorite example is Art Rubenstein's advice to a young Midwest visitor to New York, who asked,

"How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" You practice, practice, practice. What do you do to implement the *Rule*? You practice, practice, practice!

Over your lifetime, what has been your most difficult time?

I guess the most difficult time was when the atmosphere changed from being open to creativity to a fear of change being disruptive of good order and beauty. This happened in 1975 when they started cracking down on experimentation. For example, Father Harry Hagen set up the structure of the St. John Passion for me to use on Good Friday. I began to see that this ought to be in the framework for the entire service.

We worked the readings, the Prayer of the Faithful and the communion rite all within that Passion setting. You ended with the burial when they were stripping the altar. The congregation, in the opening and closing of this, sang a hymn, *Wondrous Love is This*. This is from American tradition. The American tradition came into the Latin traditions. The setting of the solo parts was done in the tradition of Roman chant style. The choral parts were done in a contemporary harmony and the organ was done ultramodern. All of these traditions came together on Good Friday to represent the Passion.

We used it for about two years, in '76, in '77. Then Abbot Timothy said, "I'm just not comfortable with doing this now," because he probably was under pressure as it was not traditional. So we stopped doing it and we haven't used it since. That was a rather crushing thing because we knew it worked.

This thing may be published now, it's ironic, from Catholic Press as a special project. They've heard parts of it and are excited about it, so I know it's worth something. It probably could not be done as the official liturgy, unfortunately. I would like to see it as the Good Friday service, because it has all the material of it. So that was one of the things that was depressing.

How about your happiest or most joyful times?

I guess one of the most joyful times was when we had First Vespers of Advent in English for the first time around ’67. I had written the antiphons in chant style based upon hymns. I’d re-improvised those melodies that go for the antiphons, the responsory and so on for this Vespers. They sang those not in Latin, but in English. I went back to the choirmaster’s office and one of the monks, who’s not a musician, comes stomping in. And I wondered, what’s he going to say? And he says, “By God that was Advent.” And I thought, “Wow, that’s wonderful. It succeeded. It worked!” In other words, it’s transferable from the Latin experience. He had experienced the material in English and it worked. As a non-musician, he found it did not break his spiritual tradition.

Vatican II: Its Effect on the Church and Saint Meinrad Archabbey

Some observers feel that today as a society we are falling into indifference in regard to spirituality. What do you think of this?

I was in college from ’48 to ’52, after the Second World War—we were called the “silent generation.” But things were percolating and they exploded in the ’60s to almost a free-for-all. Then came a reaction to the free-for-all in the ’70s and ’80s, especially in the Church. The culture is in disarray because, all of a sudden, “Hey, you guys, we need some discipline. We need some order. We need to get rid of this chaos, and that’s still going on.” The sad part is—and I don’t know how long this retrenchment will go on—that it’s killing any kind of creative work. Not only the irresponsible, but also the responsible. I guess once we begin to wake up from that, maybe the next phase will be saying, “Hey, maybe we need to relax.” So maybe in 2010, 2020, things may loosen up again. My problem with this whole culture is that the psychology of the people right now is into fundamentalism. Hopefully, we can ride through that, because it’s not going to produce anything of great value…no way.

Some Catholics think that Pope John XXIII was overly optimistic and that, ever since the Vatican Council, the Church has been paying a heavy price for his initiatives. Still others applaud his gestures. What's your view of this?

Overly optimistic? Well, I still say he was a realist. I think, in a sense, he wanted to restore some of the things that we lost, and that meant change. How's that for an irony? We're going to have to change in order to restore. John XXIII certainly was a realist. He knew exactly how weak humans were. A few days after he was elected, he made a famous remark to journalists. When asked, "How many people work in the Vatican?" He said with a twinkle in his eyes, "Oh, about half." He didn't give a number, because he had inspected various places and had to wait in the reception area for people to get back from their long coffee breaks.

Has the Church paid a heavy price?

Well, emotionally, for some people it's a heavy price, but for the rest of us, it has been a glorious opening. Thank God for that at the monastery. For example, we would be in terrible shape here if we still had to keep absolute separation between ordained priests and the rest of the community. That's what we had back then. You couldn't speak to brothers without permission. They couldn't speak to you. We had no common Chapter. Then, all of a sudden, the brothers are treated with dignity and equality. There is now inter-communication and they share responsibility.

Assuming that you agree there's no going back to pre-Conciliar days, what has been lost? What has been gained?

What's been lost, I think, is a broad perspective that included the Latin tradition and all that flows out of this tradition. Until we have greater respect for where everything has come from, we're still going to have problems. What we've gained, though, is a greater understanding of the content, because most Catholics didn't really know Latin. Many priests, also, didn't know Latin that well, you know. There were only a

handful who could read and maybe speak Latin in this house. So, yes, we have greatly benefited from Vatican II, in spite of these people who want to go back to the Latin. If you go back to the Latin, you will be cutting people off from knowledge of the faith. Literally cutting them off. And then the faith will really suffer because it will not be based on solid content. It will be based on personal feelings, which is not Catholic.

Even if the Mass is to be celebrated in English, was eliminating Latin from the academic curriculum a good idea?

No! It would be like eliminating Latin and Greek from medical school. Because if you don't know your terminology, then you're going to be in serious trouble, because practically all the terminology in medicine comes from either Latin or Greek. The more you know of both those languages, the better off you are. You can limp along, I guess, as a doctor without them. You can get by, but I think that for a solid basis you need a little bit of Latin and Greek. The two sacred languages of the Church are Hebrew and Greek. I believe that Fr. Harry [Hagan, OSB] still teaches these languages. I think that Hebrew, Greek and Latin should be available and every seminarian should at least be introduced to those. Ironically, that ought to occur at the college and not the theology level. By the time they are in theology, it's almost too late.

Pastors need a good old-fashioned liberal arts background. They should study philosophy, not just in history, but as a practice, because they need to think logically and use the rules of reason. Any leader, especially spiritual leaders and pastors, needs to have that kind of training. If they don't, it will be the blind leading the blind.

Striking changes have been made in the liturgy and parish organizations since the days of the Council. Please comment on positive or negative changes that have occurred in recent years.

My problem is that many parishes are still not adequately using the resources of the members of the community, the laity who are not

ordained. We have yet to reclaim the traditions, such as all those wonderful ministries like porter and lector. These ministries of the Church got subsumed into the preparation of priests. They were called minor orders and the Church simply dropped them. I would like to see them re-established. It's not something new, but it's going to be a change because we haven't done this for several centuries. But it's going back to one of the very valid traditions of the Church.

We ought to have the ministry of financial officer. The father in a parish shouldn't have to be tied down with all the bookwork concerning budget and finances. That's where you need an accountant, somebody trained in accounting who knows the rules of the game. Most priests don't have any business experience. I think Peter would have said, "No, that's for somebody else. These are things for deacons to do. Let them also distribute to the poor." That's going back to tradition. That's being a real traditionalist.

The number of religious vocations declines every year through death and retirement. What's the meaning of these changing patterns to the monastery and the Church at large?

The culture's changing. Becoming a cleric or religious is no longer a step up the social ladder. In older days, when there were big families and people were poor, if you had a son who was a priest or a daughter who joined the convent, you could proudly say, "We've got a religious in the family." Today many parents say, "Oh, don't squander all that intelligence. You can become a doctor or lawyer. You don't have to become a priest." That's an argument that's actually used to discourage a young person from becoming a religious. Women who want to become a nun are told, "Why do that when you can have a career?" Because of changes in our culture, it means fewer vocations. But in the long run, it might mean a purification of and strengthening of those vocations, because a person chooses it for the right reasons.

Compare the morale of the monastery today with that of 30, 40 or 50 years ago.

Well it's a whole different ethos. I use that word because it's the environment or ethos that's different because the culture's different. I would say there's less tension now than there was 40 or 50 years ago. The regulations were such then that one didn't know when the ax might fall. It was just, "Do what I tell you. Don't ask questions." The superiors kept a tight lip on information, which was basically on a need-to-know basis. Today, there's more open communication, and it's encouraged. Now, instead of the abbot putting up a sign saying that silence will be enforced, there's a discussion about why we need to keep silence. The morale today is much calmer. Of course, one gets discouraged about what's going on in the world and the negative reaction to the Church. That does affect people, but within the house I think there is very positive energy.

Is the decline in vocations affecting the house?

Yes. But in the last few years, we have been getting vocations. We're happy with the quality of these young people. They're coming for the right reasons and are solid. They're not misfits who can't do anything else, like we used to get. We screen nowadays. We used to get requests from parents who would like to send their son to a monastery because they can't handle him. Sorry. This is not the place. Go send him to some other institution, but not to a monastery. That was part of the mentality then. If a kid can't make it in the world, ship him off to a monastery. We laugh about this now.

When did vocations start to increase here?

About three or four years ago, we began gradually increasing because of Fr. Anthony [Vinson, OSB]. He's now working with vocations and is using the Internet. We used to rely on the schools. We called them the feeder schools. We closed the high school and then closed the college, so we have no feeders from the schools. We had to do some advertising

and let ourselves be known. There was a resistance to that for several years. Today, because of the culture, you have to, at least, get your name and who you are out there, so that people can make a choice. We're making ourselves available as a choice. That is producing some vocations and it will probably continue. So I'm hopeful.

Comment on your hope for the future of the Archabbey and the Church.

I just hope that we get around to really implementing what's really there in the Vatican II documents. One of the dangers we have is not reading the documents and studying them. Therefore, we are not putting into practice what the documents are suggesting, whether it be on the liturgy or the constitution of the Church. I think the Archabbey and the Church have a great future but, like any other prophecy, let's wait until it occurs and then we can go back and we have 20/20 hindsight. But I have great hope that we'll continue.

Profile based upon: Fr. Columba Kelly to Prof. Ruth C. Engs, November 14, 2005, Interview Transcription, Saint Meinrad Archives. The complete transcription includes further details about recollections of the Vatican Council and its personalities, and more details of composing chant in English.

Chapter Five

Fr. Camillus Ellspermann, OSB

As a priest and monk of Saint Meinrad, Fr. Camillus has had a varied career that ranged from teaching at the seminary schools to full-time parish work.

He was born in Evansville, IN, on December 18, 1925, and came to Saint Meinrad in 1939 as a student. He graduated from Saint Meinrad High School, College and School of Theology, and was ordained May 13, 1950. He made his first profession as a monk on September 14, 1945, and his solemn profession September 15, 1949. Fr. Camillus received an STL (1951) and a master's degree in sociology (1955) from Catholic University, Washington, DC. During his first 25 years as a priest, he taught Latin (1951-59) in the high school and sociology at the college (1951-65). He was infirmarian (1951-61) and assistant spiritual director of

the high school (1961-64). He served as instructor and novice master to the brothers (1964-67), spiritual coordinator in the School of Theology and head of the Deacon Internship Program (1967-75). During the Civil Rights era, he was part of the March on Selma.

For his next 25 years, Fr. Camillus was assigned to various parishes for pastoral work including St. Benedict (1975-1991) and St. Henry (1991-2001) in southern Indiana and two parishes in Wyoming (2001-2005), after which he retired, due to illness, and came back to the monastery. Over the past decade, he has been writing his memoirs concerning his varied experiences as a priest and monk over his long years of service. His brother, Fr. Gerard, was also a monk of Saint Meinrad.

Fr. Camillus was interviewed by Prof. Ruth C. Engs on September 23, 2005. [Fr. Camillus died on February 2, 2007, before this book was published.]

Childhood and Early Years as a Monk

Tell me about your childhood and family background.

I was born in Evansville, Indiana, on December 18, 1925. I'll be 80 in December. I came from a large family of ten children. The two youngest ones—boys—died in childhood. One died of pneumonia at one year of age and another one was killed by a car at three years of age. I have written about this in my *Memories*.[1] This booklet contains many incidents of my childhood. My other siblings were Fr. Gerard, who also was a monk here. He had his doctorate in the classics and died in 2000. Another brother, Charley, died of cancer. He has six boys. I have a sister, Helen, who's still living. She is 86 years of age and very lively. My brother Vince is 84; he lives in Florida.

My next oldest brother, George, is two years older than myself, and has early Alzheimer's, but he can still play bridge like crazy. Then myself, and then there was a seven-year interval after my two younger brothers died between my next sibling, Rose Marie, who is presently 72. My youngest sister, Yvonne, was a Sister of Providence. She traveled in

various locations around the Midwest and left the convent after 18 years. She was married about 27 years ago. I had the wedding at St. John's Church in Indianapolis for her. She was really my confidante, my critic, and the best member of the family to share with.

My father was a florist. He died, very young, at the age of 52 of a stroke and heart attack and was diabetic. My mother lived to be 89. She was a widow for almost 40 years. She died a very quiet, holy death at the Little Sisters of the Poor in Evansville.

We lived in a working class neighborhood. Most people worked at the Servel plant that made gas refrigerators. In the 1930s, it was a very, very busy industry. We lived two blocks from the Catholic church and school—a short block and a long block. I was an altar boy. Sometimes at the last minute, I would be called to serve at the 6 o'clock Mass. It had a good influence on me. I was not a good student and didn't do any homework.

In fact, I was the meanest kid on Iowa Street, which is not an exaggeration. If you talk to any of my peers, they would agree. Lennie Ellspermann was the meanest kid around. I smoked a lot in grade school, "shot cigarette butts"—that means picking them up out of the gutter and smoking them. So it was really a miracle of God's grace how this mean little kid came to be a priest and join the monastery. Some of this I have written about.[2]

With this background, what led you to come to the Saint Meinrad high school?

I came here because of the environment of the seminary. I had graduated from St. Joseph Grade School, Evansville, in 1939. That was the year that my brother, Fr. Gerard, who was a monk here, was ordained a priest. At this time, he said, "What are you going to do, Len?" and I said offhandedly, without serious thought, "I thought I might go to Saint Meinrad." My brother enrolled me. I had not thought about it, as I had a little puppy love going during the summer in the eighth grade. Her name was Betty Ann Bayer. It was a wonderful experience for life and for priesthood. She was such an innocent, sweet little girl, not by today's

standards, but by standards then. I never even kissed her. I went to the seminary in September. I was only 13 years old.

When I announced I was going to go to Saint Meinrad to my family, my older sister Helen said, "Huh!" Mind you, I was the meanest kid on Iowa Street. She said, "I'll give him two weeks." My father corrected her very severely and said, "Helen, give him at least two months." Neither said I'd make a good priest, but they did not discourage me from it.

During the summer and Christmastime of my high school years, I worked in the hospital. My father died suddenly in 1941 and I went to work when I was 15 years of age at St. Mary's Hospital in Evansville. The reason I bring that up is that about every year I fell in love with a different girl. And then, later, the nurses. I worked there until I entered the monastery. It was a very good experience for me. Later, I worked with the sick in our community and that's why I took the name Camillus. Those were good years.

When I came here, I learned to study and fell in love with study. From being "Peck's bad boy and the meanest kid on Iowa Street," I took to this regimented seminary life like a duck to water. I thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyed it. I grew to love to study, grew to love literature. At that time, if you had your homework done, you could ask for permission to read novels. About my junior year in high school, most of us fell in love with the classics—the Russian authors and Lorna Doone and Dickens. It was an experience that I don't think our peers in the high schools in the cities had. It was our love affair; we learned romance.

I also grew to love writing. That's my favorite pastime now. I had a couple of minor strokes two years ago and it affected my left side. I have a hereditary tremor, bad this morning you see, and I never could write by hand, so I learned to type, 55 to 60 years ago. I think with my fingers, and I'm presently hoping that the use of my fingers will come back, because, unlike most people, I wrote from brain to fingers. They just talk, you know—my fingers.

Why did you decide to become a priest and a monk?

There was no special sign from God to make me want to be a priest. The desire came gradually over a period of six years. I came to a decision, almost lock-step. I said to myself, "Well, why don't I become a priest?" I never gave it any real serious thought until it was time to enter the monastery when I was 20 years of age. There was accelerated course work during the war years [World War II]. We made up an extra year then. So I had to make a decision during Christmas of '44. I had just finished the sophomore year of college in the Minor Seminary. I was a prefect on the third floor of the dorm and I remember walking half the night, making this decision. I applied for admission to the monastery.

That was the beginning of the first decision, serious decision that I made about my future. I've talked and verified this with a lot of my classmates through e-mail correspondence and we all pretty much feel the same way. We were not exactly lock-step, but we didn't seriously question our future. Most of us thought, "We will never make it; we wouldn't be accepted," but we were. Our self-image was low.

I entered the monastery in February 1945. We were candidates until September because we were in the accelerated year. We entered the novitiate September 13th. After the novitiate followed three years of formation. Going through the eight-day retreat in preparation for solemn vows was hell. I was in the deepest, darkest depression I have ever known in my life. I went ahead and made my solemn vows with my classmates September 15, 1949.

That was the only time in my life I felt anything approximating the contemplation of the greatness of God. It was just a very unusual experience of feeling that my whole being was filled with God. I've never had it since, and never before. So that was a major, major decision. For monks, the final solemn vow is a more serious decision than ordination. I was ordained a priest in May 1950 by Bishop [Paul] Schulte.

What was the reaction of family and friends when you decided to become a monk?

That did not surprise them at all because Fr. Gerard was already in the monastery. They showed no reaction to it. It was early '45 and the war was still going on with Japan. It was just taken for granted.

Did you go on for additional education?

In the fall of '50, four of us went to Catholic University, Washington, D.C. The school administration had an arrangement with the university. If we took our final theology year at Catholic U and passed the test on the Hundred Theses, in addition to proper class work, we could get a licentiate in theology. So I got mine the cheap way. Now they have to spend two years getting it. The following five summers, I did graduate work in sociology and came back here for the winter. I should have stretched it out, as I enjoyed my experiences there. In '55, I received a master's degree.

How did you see the Church in your earlier years?

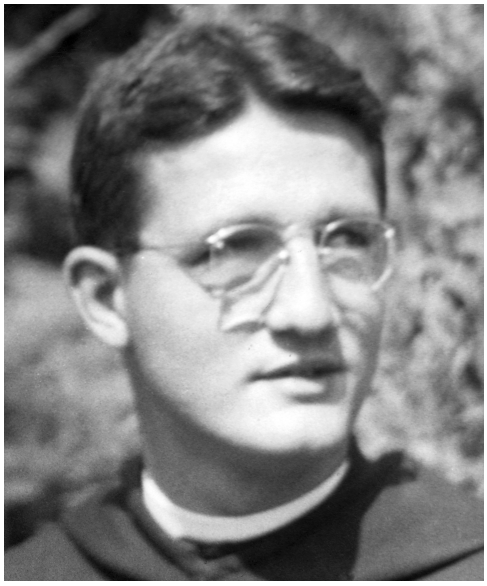
The Church was different then. It was legalistic, it was canonical, it was disciplinary. I say that, not so much theologically, but sociologically. As an institution, it was radically different; it was strict. We didn't question things at the time; we just went along. It was a Church of laws, but we didn't know that. We enjoyed the Church that we lived in and that we were subject to. We enjoyed the seminary training within this kind of atmosphere. However, over time, I have had some very serious questions about the Church.

In those early years, there was acclaim and high status for being a priest. A priest was a priest, you know. Families rejoiced in their children being ordained priests, especially working families like my own. It was a source of upward mobility for us. We didn't know it, my folks didn't know it, but it was. I would have never had a college education and graduate school if it hadn't been for my becoming a priest. And I'm thankful for that.

What expectations did you have and have they been fulfilled?

I didn't have any specific expectations. I entered the Minor Seminary with no expectations and went along with the program. I had no idea what a monk's life was like.

Reflect on your years in the novitiate. Describe something of the tone and nature of the discipline under which your vocation was formed.



Fr. Camillus, as a young monk

Our formation was more rigid and disciplined. The contemporary monks in formation now have a lot more freedom than we had. This is good, very good for them and for the community. Recreation is no longer separate. We now have a fusion between those in formation to be brothers and those to be priests. In the old days, we were separate. Now we're all brothers until we're ordained. Although there were differences then in the process, the values were the same for both groups as a way of achieving the goals of monastic formation.

Most monks that I've met and most religious, including Holy Cross brothers and Jesuits in Wyoming, say that their formation was basically the same. Once you have met one religious, you have met them all; poverty, chastity, obedience and, of course, we [Benedictines] have stability and conversion.

That gets us to the next question. Discuss your earlier life and the daily routine. Is there a difference today?

Yes, and it's gone through phases over the years. Abbot Lambert [Reilly, OSB], for example, was strict on silence. He reintroduced day

silence as being important to the community. If you want to talk to someone now, you pull them aside and talk to them quietly. Today we have two periods of *lectio divina* [sacred reading], one in the morning and one in the evening with strict silence. We have Morning Office, breakfast and then about 40 minutes of *lectio*. After Vespers, in the evening until supper, we have about a half hour of very strict silence. You're not supposed to be talking. We also have night silence. Instead of getting up at 3:40 with the summons of the wooden knocker by a junior, we get up at 5:00 now. Instead of Morning Office at 4:00, it's now at 5:30. The Mass time has varied from morning, which is good, until the evening over the years. The times for work are approximately the same.

The kind of work done by the German brothers, who were skilled craftsmen such as bakers, shoemakers or tailors for making habits, is now almost gone. Work is now more academic. One of the problems, not just in recruitment, but also for the community, is that the spirit of the original monks doing manual labor is gone. The men coming in now are more academic and are more trained. They have degrees and are older. The challenge we're facing now is trying to recruit working class people to be monks. Most come from a more academic background.

Are there other changes?

I would like to talk about recreation, which all of us older fathers had. In the old days here, after lunch and the evening meal, we would have regular periods of recreation. The fraters [monks in training for the priesthood] and the priests and the brothers all recreated separately, so we had three different recreation groups. Now there is no distinction at all. I remember one day I was playing bridge after lunch with some other priests when the news was announced of President Kennedy's assassination.

Today our communal life has given way to contemporary culture. We don't have time to associate with one another as much as we did in the old days. Recreation then was part of the old system and was a very positive part of that system. Today we have people who come from a different culture, so they don't miss it. In addition to recreation, the prayer

schedule has changed, I think for the better. I've seen this in the daily Office, as a matter of fact. It's adapted to a more contemporary way of life. We haven't sacrificed praying, though.

Are the values of the community now different?

I don't think they're that different. The times are different; the culture is different. Someone has characterized the present as being a little more free. We still have the same service, the same application of the Holy *Rule*, the same consideration for the aged, along with openness and kindness.

Work

Tell me about your career.

I'm atypical as a monk. I was here the first 25 years and then I did parish work for 25 years. I don't know whether you've talked to many other monks like myself, but it's very critical I think. I say that I'm atypical because most of the monks, or ordained priests, do not have full-time parish work. We're a breed unto ourselves. My monastic formation here, from the novitiate, to being a junior, ordination, early priesthood, teaching here and being part of the community was a very important factor in my ministry to people.

I started here in the monastery in '45. Now I'm back for what I call my second novitiate. I came back here August 4th of this year [2005]. I've gotten to talk to candidates, novices and juniors. After having been gone for 30 years, I'm being reintroduced to monastic values. Since I've been home, I've had the same difficulty of being corrected for speaking in times of silence that I did when I was a novice here going on 65 years ago.

How about your early career?

Well, during the summer after I got the STL [license in sacred theology], I came home. I was supposed to go on for theology. But they decided that I should teach biology, so I started to monitor graduate courses and

got some books from Fr. Fabian Frieders. He has since left and is married. He taught biology here. Then, at the last minute, two weeks before school started, I was told I would teach Latin in the fall of 1951. Then Fr. Abbot Ignatius Esser also asked me to be the infirmarian for the community. So for ten years, I was Fr. Infirmarian. It was fulltime. I was teaching 14 hours a week. This included eight hours of Latin and three or four hours of sociology.

How many hours in the infirmary?

I was always available. I didn't have a staff like they have now. Dr. Tom Gootee, just out of internship, was the physician. He was with us for close to 25 years. So I had that job for ten years plus teaching sociology and Latin. I also taught moral theology for a couple of years. This was all during my first ten years.

Then I was asked to be associate to the spiritual director in high school, which I did for three years or so with Fr. Lucien [Duesing, OSB]. After that, I was asked by Abbot Bonaventure to be instructor and novice master for the brothers. I had that job for three years. They were happy years for me.

But I fought my way out of a job. At the beginning of Vatican II, renewals were coming up for the lay brothers. I encouraged the union of what used to be the lay brothers and the fraters, who were studying for the priesthood, and lost my job as the novice master. Around 1967, the novitiates were combined. They're still combined, but that's another whole story in itself. I was still teaching sociology and in '63 led a seminar on race and then a seminar on civil rights in '65. I was also involved with the March on Selma, which I have written about.[3]

Tell me a bit about that experience.

Abbot Bonaventure had received a call from Cardinal Ritter in St. Louis asking that some representatives from the Archabbey be sent to Selma. We were to act as buffers between police and marchers. The abbot asked if I would go, and I said, "Yes." Frs. Cyprian Davis and Lawrence

Ward, along with Fr. Terence Girkin from St. Benedict's and the Rev. Charles King, pastor of Liberty Baptist Church in Evansville, and I drove to Selma. We checked in at St. Elizabeth's Mission, conducted by the Edmundite fathers and brothers, and went to Brown's Chapel, which served as headquarters for all civil rights demonstrators.

On Friday, we made our first vigil at the Selma wall. The wall was a single strand of plain white clothesline. It was a strong psychological obstacle to integration, voting rights, morality, human rights and dignity. On either side, the two ideologies clashed, two social groups formed and reformed for a confrontation. On our side was the singing of freedom songs, such as "We Shall Overcome" and "We Shall Not be Moved," and praying. On the other side, nightsticks, guns, glaring lights, horses and troopers stood preventing us from marching.

On Saturday morning, a large group of clergy and representatives of various religious groups met in the basement of the First Baptist Church to plan the day's march. We marched twice that day and were stopped by the troopers. A pattern of marching, a repulse and regrouping continued to build. There was no march on Sunday, just a vigil at the wall. After this vigil, we were hungry, thirsty and unwashed. The black community responded to our needs and gave us food and shelter. The charity and love they showed us came from the heart.

On Monday, March 15, after the federal injunction against the march to Montgomery had been lifted, a final triumphant march in silence to the courthouse came about. Until this triumph, the atmosphere of the demonstrations was marked by uncertainty and danger. We used the nonviolent techniques of love and peace. This whole experiences was a grace and gave me insight for teaching my sociology classes.

What happened after your early teaching years?

I was asked to be spiritual director in the School of Theology. Because things were so uncertain in the mid-'60s, I refused to accept the position of spiritual director because it made me look like the authority. I did agree with Fr. Adrian Fuerst, who was the rector, to be spiritual coordina-

tor. So, along with the theology faculty, we had two years of preparation with a psychologist and psychiatrist every month in Louisville on how to do small group guidance.

This was a way of meeting the transition in the ’60s. Each faculty member had a group of eight to ten students. Faculty met weekly, and also met with the students weekly. This enabled the students to say what was on their minds. Our role as faculty advisors was to listen to them and see what would come out. It’s different from sensitivity training. I did it for the entire time that I was spiritual coordinator, from around ’66 to ’68. It was effective and I found myself using it more and more with lay people in my later assignments.

The ’60s were very, very difficult years. We went from regimentation to self-responsibility. We eliminated bells. People had to be responsible, like other graduate students, for their own lives. They had to get up to be in class, to be in chapel and so on. They were allowed to drive their own car, go off the Hill and take a weekend off. There were also theological and devotional changes. It was a very difficult time.

During the ’60s, students were restless. Things were changing and they wanted some actual experience of priesthood; they wanted field education. We started the Deacon Internship Program, which I led for seven years, from about 1968 to 1975. It was at the request of students. It was also a new experience in Catholic theological education. One or two very understanding and mature priests had students as deacons on weekends to help them preach, sort of unofficially. Students also went to their own home dioceses for the summer to help out.

Beginning in ’73 and ’74, students were placed in Indianapolis parishes selected by the Indianapolis authorities. I was there with them. During the last three years I was working in this program, students went to their home parishes. I would visit all of them and this was really an experience. I visited them in their home states. We had students as far north as Providence, as far south as Florida, and also in the west and here in the tri-state area.

I learned a lot, but I got in over my head. I knew it and I accepted it. I didn’t really know what I was getting into. I went into a bad depression

because bishops have expectations of their pastors, students have expectations of their instructors, and faculty members have expectations. I was in the middle and I was going in circles. I didn't know what I was doing. But I weathered it; it reached a climax and I finished up strong. The program still continues.

What was so difficult about this program was that we had no precedent for it. I hope this sounds modest enough, but in my early priesthood up until I left to go to the parish in '75, I was in innovative programs. I was invited to help work and to create them. I don't know why.

Why did you leave teaching and go into parish work?

A new rector was appointed. He's now Archbishop Daniel Buechlein in Indianapolis. His style was different. It's more consistent with the direction the Church is going now. He was more academic, more cerebral, more controlled than Fr. Adrian. Adrian had vision and imagination and was open to change, innovative programs and development. I think it's a terrible mistake how we are now undoing changes made after the Vatican Council. I do not belong to the contemporary school of retrenchment.

The new rector and I did not see eye-to-eye on things. I had trouble getting an appointment with him. We finally had an appointment to see each other and I said, "I'm happy, the program is going well, but if you need someone for parish work, I'm available." He said, "Fine." It took a year and a half to get assigned to do this. Abbot Gabriel finally asked me if I would be a pastor and I said OK. So in August 1975, the 25th year of my priesthood, I went to be associate pastor at St. Benedict's Parish in Evansville.

Fr. Alban Berling [died December 2005], who was there, said he would like to stay on as a school pastor. I was canonical pastor for the year, but we acted as co-pastors. When he left the following year, I became pastor by myself. I was pastor of St. Ben's for 15 years until 1991. Then it got to be too much for me, too many problems. I left, in the sense that I requested permission from the abbot to move to another parish. It was granted. I went to St. Henry, Indiana, just 11 miles from here in

Dubois County. That ten years at St. Henry was my Camelot! I loved it. I loved the people. I loved the smallness of the parish.

The reason it ended in 2001 is that canon law says that you have to offer your resignation at age 75. The bishop asked for it. I submitted it and he accepted it. It broke my heart. The people cried over it, too. But that's life. That's a monk's life—obedience. In August, Bishop [Joseph] Hart from the Diocese of Cheyenne, whom I taught in '56, saw in a newsletter that I was resigning and offered me work out there.

I was in the West for over four years. I was to have been in residence in Cheyenne at St. Mary's Cathedral parish taking care of the sick. However, while volunteering my vacation time at Holy Spirit community in Rock Springs, I was invited by the bishop to remain as associate pastor in residence there. After being there two years, I then helped as resident priest at St. Anthony's in Casper. Because of surgery last spring and losing some of my sight from small strokes a couple of years ago, I came back home this past summer.

So for the last 25 years, I was in parishes. In some ways, I went to St. Ben's as kind of a protest against just doing work at the Archabbey as the only way we could fulfill our vows. This changed with Abbot Lambert. His tenure can be characterized as having an emphasis on service to the Church and priesthood. Many of our monks now serve in parishes.

Prayer

From your experience as a monk, what would you wish to convey to your younger confreres or even the laity?

I would say the whole monastic formation, including poverty, obedience, chastity and stability, are the most important things in life. They go beyond us as individuals. As part of a group effort, we give witness to the world today that there are things more important than money, more important than material goods. The search for God, supported by the

community here, is probably our greatest contribution. We are needed; I think we all know that. We also take pride in being a witness to society. We pay a price for it in isolation. We pay a price for it in the intrusions into monastic life and silence.

Have you learned anything else that you would pass on?

Yes, unless you've developed a sense of intimacy as a human being, as a counselor, as a priest, I don't think you can be a complete priest or even successful. I have discovered in the past decade, as a priest in Wyoming, women. This resulted in some beautiful, beautiful experiences. I'm not talking about physical, but psychological and spiritual intimacy and sensitivity. Most of them were church women. Four or five of them are coming here in May to make a retreat and spend some time with me. However, when I came home, I found that the women here were just the same. So who could have changed? I have, not the women.

I think it's the rigidity of the past and fear that kept me from being intimate. My sister said to me, four weeks ago when she came to visit, "Well, you show more affection now than you used to. I think you were afraid, weren't you?" And I said, "Yup!" So it's important to be open to discovery over your whole life. I have more sense of freedom now.

What is your favorite part of the Rule of St. Benedict*?*

In general, I see the holy *Rule* as a paraphrase of the Gospel way of living. It includes the sayings of Christ, his actions and his example. It is modeling his life here in the community, the life that is found in eternity. This is an evangelical life. Let me tell you a little story. When I was out in Casper, we said morning prayers. We said evening prayers and then had supper. There were generally seven people who came and they were totally committed to being a community. I would talk to them, but because of my sight, I couldn't read toward the end of my time there. However, I listened to them recite the Psalms and say the prayers. I told them that they were my little monastic community. When I came back here, I find they are always in my mind. They're not sophisticated,

they're not refined, they're not educated, but we led the Gospel principles in our life together.

What is your key to living Benedictine spirituality?

This may sound strange after 50 years of being a monk—it's life in the community pursuant to the Gospel principles, evangelical principles. Life in the community, for me personally, is the key.

What has been your most difficult and what has been your happiest time over your lifetime?

The most difficult period is when I left St. Benedict. I had a conflict with a parishioner who put politics and money ahead of the welfare of the parish. This person put material wealth as more important than God and the spiritual. That was the most difficult time in my life. The happiest times were the jobs I have already talked about. I enjoyed them all. I enjoyed teaching. I enjoyed taking care of the sick. I enjoyed the innovative work in theology. I thoroughly enjoyed parish life.

Vatican II: Its Effect on the Church and Saint Meinrad Archabbey

Today some observers are of the opinion that society is once again indifferent to the meaning of a virtuous life and that it has a lack of spirituality such as was found in St. Benedict's time. How has this affected Benedictine spirituality in the Archabbey, in the Church?

I'll put it this way. Every social institution has changed, including family, church, recreation, professional sports, economic life and political life; they're all bad. They've all been radically changed. That's the given. I think the answer is positive, however, for Benedictine life and the Archabbey. Community life includes our vows, to properly act out and live. So I think our monastic ideology—values, way of life—is still very important.

I've heard, but I don't know if it's true, that Pope John XXIII thought that his call was to revitalize the human secular institutions in the same manner as the monks did in the Middle Ages. We're trying to hang on to the traditional values, I think. This isn't a negative thing. We know what

we're doing, as we have worked at it, some consciously because of age and experience, and others, hopefully, are just beginning to grasp it. I think that's what we have to offer.

Some think Pope John XXIII was overly optimistic and that ever since Vatican Council II, the Church has been paying a heavy price for his initiatives. Still others applaud his gestures. What has this meant to you in terms of the Church and the monastery?

Where I'm coming from, personally, is that John XXIII was a hero. After the Council, we had priest support groups to work our way through the changes, you know, with the diocesan priests in Evansville. I don't know what I would do if we returned to the days of rigidity and formality. My personal life found fulfillment and a sense of comfort in everything the Vatican Council stands for. I loved John XXIII. I loved John Paul II, but not as well. I'm threatened by a return to pre-Vatican II and I see obvious evidence of it in the Church today.

With the new Pope?

Not so much with the new Pope as with the values of the bishops. John Paul probably had something to do with the appointment of the bishops. I see the Church in a retrenchment position. This includes the training of seminarians, issues of celibacy and homosexuality. I think this position is too inflexible and has a closed mentality. It's this mentality that created the problems we've had with sexual abuse among a few priests. I'm very much in favor of Vatican II. We struggled to internalize Vatican II. Desperately, we struggled, but we did get it internalized. Now there's a movement in the Church for moving backwards. I am not there at all.

How about the monastery?

We had group process before Abbot Justin [DuVall, OSB] was elected. We discussed things we considered important to the community. The number one priority was our obligation to maintain balance and

continuity of monastic life. I lived through those periods of radical change from rigidity to a more eclectic, or open, look at theology and monastic life. I do not see a movement in the monastery back to rigidity; obedience to the Church, yes. Our theologians are pretty open. It would be a very serious error to go back to the past and return to the formation and values of pre-Vatican II.

Monks have a tradition of being isolated in the Church. But in the Church, there have always been monks who have precipitated changes. Monks have also been considered naïve by the Church, as they're removed from the real world. Well, I've been a monk in the real world for 30 years and I don't think it ever changed my effectiveness as a priest, or affected my monastic values.

I do not expect to live long enough, however, to see a balance between those who accepted Vatican II changes and those who want to go back to more inflexible ways. The Legionnaires of Christ, and other radical movements who want to return to the way it was before Vatican II, don't have my sympathy at all. I think they are mistaken and I think it is a serious error to try to return to rigidity. I do not find the monks in our community to be this way, however.

Compare the morale in the monastery today with that of 30, 40, 50 years ago.

It's just as good or better.

To what extent has the decline in vocations had an impact?

We're searching for new ways to address the decline here. It's a problem compared to the past, and it remains a challenge for the future. In general, our whole culture is against young people going into a religious vocation. Today's society and youth want pleasure first and it's difficult to escape the demands of our culture to serve Christ. The acclaim, the adulation and the privilege of being a religious are now gone. Now it's often loneliness. To go into the priesthood today calls for a lot of courage and sacrifice.

One of the most important changes in the seminary curriculum has been the de-emphasis of Latin. Even if the Mass is to be celebrated in the vernacular, was eliminating Latin from the academic curriculum a good idea?

I don't think so. I'm a little biased because I taught Latin. There might have been some people who left the seminary because they couldn't master Latin, but there were likely other factors along with this. I think academically, not only priests, but doctors, philosophers and teachers all need to know Latin. It's just too bad that it isn't taught anymore.

Striking changes have been made since the days of the Council. Comment on the positive or negative changes that have been undertaken in the recent history of the Church.

My first reaction was that I was against most of the changes. But then I grew to love them. I was first opposed to concelebration. I remember taking a survey while I was teaching in the old high school. I used red ink to answer the question, "No, to concelebration." I've changed. In terms of the liturgy, by being in the parish and seeing people participate, I really feel these changes are for the better. They have made it possible for people to give expression to their religious beliefs and practices. These include having the liturgy and lectures in English, and having an external ministry to the Eucharist.

This external ministry has led to lay people helping with worship. A priest is a priest and will always be a priest, because of the sacrament. However, I got special permission from the Bishop of Cheyenne to continue with what I have done for a long time. My hands have shaken all my life. If I tried to pour the wine, I'd spill it. I had permission, and folks accepted it beautifully, for the Eucharistic ministers to pour the wine. Other priests get the Blessed Sacrament for the ministers.

Just before I left Cheyenne, when I was recuperating from surgery, a very pious, very holy woman asked for the Eucharist. I didn't have the strength to administer it and had problems with my seeing, but I could say Mass. I had asked the ordained deacon to help me. I said to this woman, "Take it from him." She answered, "I only receive communion from the hands of the priest. Would you give it to me if the deacon gets it?"

And I said, "No, the deacon is an ordained minister of the Church. Lay people who give out the Eucharist are commissioned to the ministry. My hands giving out communion does not change the sacrament one bit. Most of our ministers here are holy. Their hands are just as sacred." I added, "You pray about it." And she said, "I will," but never came back again. Out in Casper, we had our share of families who had these old ideas about receiving the Eucharist only from the hands of a priest.

We have spent all these years internalizing the changes from Vatican II and seeing the results of their use. Now, we're asked to back off; we're asked to undo these changes and go back to the old manner of doing things. It is becoming more strict, you know. That's the direction in which we're heading. This is my personal opinion from personal experience, but I think that whatever can be done by lay people should be done. They're just as worthy as we are.

Assuming that you agree that there is no going back to pre-Conciliar days, what has been lost? What has been gained?

As someone said, "In some areas, they threw out the baby with the bath water." I think we have lost a deep reverence for the real presence of Christ. I have never learned to appreciate it, but I've met many people who spend hours in front of the sacrament for perpetual adoration. I try to do it now, since I'm home, at least a half hour a day. This custom has waned, but it doesn't need to be re-introduced rigidly. Some people have found their way to continue the reverence for the real presence.

There is very little that I would like to return to. Personally, I'm thankful we've shed the old Mass. Some of my classmates can still do it; I don't know whether I could do it anymore. I don't think we've lost anything there. There are some people who have an inordinate appreciation of the way things were. And I think they have a problem. It's their rigidity, it's their dependence on rituals as they grew up that have kept them from openness and exposing themselves. I could talk to midnight on this.

The number of religious vocations declines every year and the number of retirements and deaths increases in this population. What is the meaning of these changing patterns to the monastery and to the Church at large?

I really don't know the answer to that question. I would not want to return to the rigidity of the past and the formation methods of the past. The Church has survived in the past and it will now.

Comment on your hopes for the future of the Archabbey and the Catholic Church.

Hope for the Church, I don't know. I'm saying this more as a sociologist than as a priest. I don't know. It's up for grabs. I won't live to see it. It's one of the things I've accepted. I will not live to see stability. In the monastery, I feel confident, but where we're going in the Church, I don't know. I've seen the bad effects of rigidity and how it shows up in people's lives. However, a lot of good shepherds and a lot of heroes are parents. They are good Christian parents. I've known married men who have as much dedication and balance as any priest we have. I've met women who would make good priests, but it's not at all likely now.

You know, my personal opinion as a priest working full time in the parish and my opinion as a sociologist is that I would be in favor of married men becoming priests. Most women I've met, except a few radical sisters and nuns, would also make good priests. But until the day that the Church embraces everyone for service, and not just for menial, subservient positions or helpers, there will not be a fullness of the revelation of Christ's love and His message to the world. This is radical, I know, but I deeply believe this. I also know that I will not live to see that day, but I would like to.

Our present Holy Father Benedict represents the more traditional way. He represents an academic and cerebral approach to the Church. But I'm speaking as an American priest, a Benedictine, somewhat trained, with a lot of experience that includes personal and intimate contact with people and their lives. I think for the Body of Christ to be effective in today's world, we must be open and not threatening. I am threat-

ened by retrenching rigidity. It's a sad, sad mistake. In the spirit of John Paul II, and especially John XXIII, the Church needs to function as a message of salvation to all people in today's society and world.

How about the Archabbey?

I am kind of hopeful for the monastery and vocations. Different kinds of people are seeking the priesthood today. In the Archabbey, we just can't return to rigidity. We have to be open, but this hasn't always happened for liturgical changes. For instance, up until a year ago, at the Eucharist, not only the priests, but the brothers, the abbot and all the lay people surrounded the altar. Now lay people kneel and brothers stand apart. I don't like this trend at all. I just don't like it. I was disappointed to come home to more rigidity again. As an older man approaching 80, I'm violently opposed to that type of inflexibility as being effective or healthy for people's spiritual development at the monastery. I haven't talked to monastic community members, but I think we're walking a pretty careful middle of the road.

However, I think the future of the Archabbey, in spite of changing times, is good. I think we've got good formation from both Br. Jacob [Grisley, OSB] and Fr. Harry [Hagan, OSB]. They see to it that the young men are cheerful and happy. These young men are better educated than we were. They're open and they like what they see here. They find support here. They are needed. They're needed very much. Now the rest is up to God. The monastic life is good.

Profile based upon: Fr. Camillus Ellspermann to Prof. Ruth C. Engs, September 23, 2005, Interview Transcription, Saint Meinrad Archives.

Also:

[1] *Ellspermann, O.S.B., Father Camillus "Len." Memories. Unpublished Essays, July 13, 2001. Saint Meinrad Archives.*

[2] *Ellspermann, O.S.B., Father Camillus. Reflections: A personal History, the Journal of my Years of Priesthood, 1950-2005. Unpublished essays, August 2005. Saint Meinrad Archives.*

[3] _____ *"Selma, March 12-16, 1965," Unpublished essay, n.d., Saint Meinrad Archives.*

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