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Interview of James T. Dever

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Recommended Citation

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William Gold

April 28th 2012

History 650

Field Notes for Oral History Final Project

Dr. Barbara C. Allen

Interviewee: Father Jim F. Dever

Interviewer: William Gold

Interview date(s): March 15th 2012 (4:15 P.M.), March 30th 2012, (3:30 P.M.), and April 13th 2012 (3:00 P.M.)

Interview location: The office of Father James F. Dever at the University Ministry and Service located inside College Hall at La Salle University in Philadelphia Pennsylvania.

Interviewee:

James F. Dever was born in December of 1945 in the Kensington section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was the second child and only son of Walter and Ruth Dever. James has an older sister Ruth. His father, Walter, worked as a counter manager for industrial restaurants in Philadelphia, including Kresge's which would go on to become the Kmart department store. His mother, Ruth, stayed home with the children for several years. But when her children had gotten older, Ruth became a crossing guard, and later on, secured a position on the assembly line with a pharmaceuticals factory. When his parents were not working, the family would spend time together watching television or sitting on the porch.

James attended North Catholic High School in Philadelphia. The teachers at North Catholic belonged to the Oblates of St. Francis De Sales. James was attracted to the Oblates belief in having a sense of brotherhood, and a belief in service for others, and joined the Order of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales while still in High School. Years later, James Dever would come back to do his student teaching at his alma mater, North Catholic High School.

James entered the seminary while still in high school, and attended both Catholic University, and Allentown College to obtain an undergraduate degree in Theology and English. He then attended Villanova where he received his masters of arts in English. James utilized this degree after graduating when he returned to North Catholic High to teach English.

Despite teaching English at North Catholic, James continues to pursue his passion of becoming a priest. And after 10 years of undergraduate and graduate study, James F. Dever was ordained as a priest in 1973. Since then he has fulfilled many roles of service as a priest including parish priest, hospital chaplain, and his most recent position as the campus minister of the University Ministry and Service (UMAS) at La Salle University.

The Interviewer:

I, William Gold, (b. 1970 in Philadelphia, PA) have had a deep love of learning since I was a child growing up in Elkins Park, PA. I would always play school when I was younger, and assume the role of Mr. Gold, teacher, and my only pupil would be my sister, Shari. I loved spending time with my mother as she shared the exploits of Clifford the Big Red dog, and Grover from Sesame

Street. My desire to enrich and educate the lives of others has been a lifelong passion.

I remained in Philadelphia, PA after graduating from Temple in 1993 with Bachelors of Science in Early Childhood and Elementary Education. Shortly after graduating, I was hired by the School District of Philadelphia, and have taught with the district for close to twenty years. I returned to school for a graduate degree in elementary education in 2003 at LaSalle University and am currently pursuing a degree in Public History. I have been married for six years to my wife, Bonnie. In 2010, we purchased our first home as a couple in the Lawncrest section of Philadelphia.

Background

There are two main elements within my own life that lead me to choose a Campus Minister as the subject for my Oral History interview project. The first aspect is that I have always had a fascination with the universe, and our role in the existence of life. I often wondered as a child about spiritual matters such as fate, and the reasons why things happened. Therefore it was my belief that by interviewing a priest that I might be able to gain some small insight into the inter-workings of life. I do not believe that I gained that knowledge. However, I do believe that I learned something about devotion to your chosen profession, and about how an individual can enrich one's own life by providing support and counseling to others.

The second main factor that led me to choose Father Dever for my project is that I observed that we share some common goals within our chosen profession. As a Campus Minister, Father Dever works with young people, and helps them to grow and strive into becoming better people. Similarly, as a Preschool teacher, I counsel very young people on a daily basis about why it is appropriate to share with others, and how an unkind word can hurt a classmates' feelings. Through my small efforts, I am assisting my students in developing into caring, productive members of the society.

Considering the fact that Father Dever works with young people, and provides them with counseling lead me to the conclusion that Father Dever would be an excellent choice for me to interview for my History project. I emailed Father Dever, and he quickly responded that he would be more than happy to assist me with my project. At that time, I shared with Father Dever the details of the project and that I would contact him to set up the time date of our first session.

Once Father Dever agreed to assist in the completion of my History project, I began to work on the preparation for my interview with Father Dever. These tasks included the use of the University Archives to gain information about my subject, a visit to the University Ministry and Service, and developing interview questions using Thompson's *Life Story Interview Guide*.

During this preparation period, I became aware that there were two main obstacles to the

successful completion of my project. These challenges were that Father Dever has a policy of counseling students on an on-demand basis, which could possibly lead to an interruption in an interview session and that the Campus Minister had a very full daily workload which included frequent visits to other areas of the campus to accomplish tasks within his job. Despite these difficulties with the project I still went ahead with the preparation for the project, and set up an initial interview session for Thursday March 15th 2012.

Another difficulty that arose during the preparation for the interview was that I was unsure of whether or not that I would be able to obtain quality video while holding a video camera, and reading from a question sheet. I chose to resolve this issue by making the decision to use audio media for the interview rather than video. Therefore, I purchased an Olympus digital recorder to use for the interview.

Despite not being able to resolve my other two concerns before the initial interview session, I arrived at the Campus Ministry at three o' clock on March 15th 2012 to interview Father Dever. This first interview session went well despite the fact that both Narrator and Interviewer seemed somewhat nervous, and that I would often interrupt the Narrator with a follow up question before he was completely finished his answer. An issue which I resolved in subsequent interviews by shortening my questions and using nods and smiles to indicate interesting what the Narrator was describing at the given moment.

At the conclusion of the initial session, Father Dever and I came to the agreement that we would move forward with the completion of the interview by breaking the sessions up into

more small manageable components of two or three interviews. In addition, we decided to schedule our next session for a Friday afternoon when there would possibly be less possibility of a student interrupting the interview session.

Description of the Interview

The three interview sessions occurred on the dates of Thursday March 15th 2012, Friday March 30th 2012, and Friday April 13th 2012. All three times, I arrived at the University Ministry and Service between three to four P.M. in the afternoon and two of the three times there was a slight delay to the begin of the interview because of a work related issue with Father Dever.

These delays lasted between ten to fifteen minutes. However, for the last interview session, We started the interview with only a five minute delay.

Upon beginning our first session, I quickly observed that Father Dever had a natural curiosity. Before the beginning of the first session, Father Dever was asking me question about where I went to school, what I did for a living, and was I married. These questions and getting to know me seemed to put him, as well as myself at ease about the interview process.

After our initial conversation, I explained the purpose of my project to the Narrator, and provided him with the legal release forms to complete for the archives. I then completed an

audio text of the equipment before beginning the actual interview. For all three interview sessions, Father Dever sat in his swivel chair at his desk, and I sat in a soft back chair to the right of his desk. Once we were settled in our chairs I then asked if it was alright to begin, set the digital voice recorder on the desk, and pressed record.

At the beginning of each interview session, I introduce myself and the Narrator, stated the date, time, and location, and described the purpose of the interview. At the conclusion of each session, I stated where we were leaving off, and what we would be discussing next time.

The interview session were broken down into three sessions of two forty five minute and one thirty minute session. The three sessions covered Father Dever's early life and schooling, his career, and his plans for the future. At the conclusion of each session, I would turn off the recorder and Father Dever would ask me briefly about how things were going in my life.

After each session, I would listen to the audio, and create new questions for next time.

After the final session, Father Dever thanked me for the allowing him the opportunity to interview him for the University Archives.

In conclusion, it had been my belief at the beginning of this project that interviewing a person I had never met for two hours about his life, but this experience has been an extremely positive one, mainly in large part to my interview subject, father Jim Dever.

Notes on the Recording:

For the recording of the interview, I used an Olympus WS-700 M digital recorder with a USB charger. After the interview, I uploaded the audio to my Dell Inspiron laptop, as well as to my Flash drive by connecting the USB port to my computer. I listened to the audio on my laptop using the Window Media Player on my computer for the transcription process. At the completion of all three interview sessions, I went to the University computer lab and had the file converted to MP3 version as well as having the file burned to a CD disc.

When I went to listen to the audio, and began transcribing the interview, I would listen to a small snippet, write down the content, and move on using the pause, and rewind feature on my Windows Media Player. It took me approximately a week to transcribe the two hour interview.

Editing the Transcript:

My editing decisions included:

- 1) Eliminating false starts on certain questions
- 2) Placing words that would complete sentences in brackets
- 3) Using three dots to indicate incomplete sentences.
- 4) Frequently elimination transitional words.

