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Interview with Reverend Raymond Lavelle

Raymond Lavelle Reverend

Alisoun Davis

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Alisoun Davis

interview (community), Reverend Raymond Lavelle. 24 Oct 1995. Saint Vincent de Paul Catholic Church, Mount Vernon.

I am known for my lack of directional sense so when I encounter a detour on route 36 in Mount Vernon on my way to interview Rev. Lavelle, I start to panic.

Luckily, we are equipped with maps of the county and I find Reverend Lavelle's office as promised at 303 East High Street. Reverend Lavelle is in a meeting but soon emerges from his small square yellow office and greets me warmly. He wears the typical black collar vestment and also an electric blue cardigan. He is approaching sixty and has a friendly manner. He asks me all about my geographical and religious background as I set up the recorder and again makes the disclaimer that he made on the phone when I called to set up the interview, "I don't know if I am the person you want to ask about family farming." I assure him that he is *just* the person I want to talk to and I start the tape.

I am green in my interviewing skills and the first two questions are brisk and awkward, but as we continue, Reverend Lavelle slips comfortably into the informant role and I into listening. He goes on for some time on certain questions and makes particularly interesting points about the slower pace of the Mount Vernon community compared to Cleveland where he grew up. He also gives a beautiful description of farm land as a kind of sacred, holy ground for farmers, particularly those who have inherited the farm from their fathers and grandfathers. He bears witness to the idea of a farm family as closely-knit and closer to God through their work on the farm together and through their dependence upon nature. He cannot say enough good things about the 4-H clubs and the sense of responsibility and pride they instill in children. When I ask about the bypass, he responds that while it might be a good idea, it might do more damage to land than it's worth in convenience and so he does not think it will happen right now. His continuing explanation about how all different kinds of people look at it shows me that he is trying to look at the bypass from all sides. He talks of how it might make truckers' lives easier and how it might make school bus drivers' lives easier if they don't have to drive in town with all the trucks and how city counselors might feel. He is willing to look at the issue from many sides.

When we get to the question about the importance of family farming in the community and he does not think it is of critical importance, I have to restrain myself from going into a lecture mode. I want him to know I think it is VERY important, but this is not the point of the interview so I just listen.

Reverend Lavelle also sees the many sides of the expansion of Columbus.

He has moved here himself because it is more beautiful and friendly than the city, so he sympathizes with people who want to move away from the city. He also sees that, if farmers choose to sell, they can make a lot more money on their land because people are moving in from Columbus. He thinks many family farmers are getting second jobs and this is possible because there is Cooper Industries and other places close by where they can work.

Reverend Lavelle thinks that a great project for our class would be to interview families that farm and write up feature articles for the Mount Vernon News. He says he would really enjoy something like that and thinks the families would appreciate the interest. He mentioned two families in particular: Julius and Chely Broerman, (419) 886-2141, turkey and chicken farmers; and the Grasspaughs from Rural Delivery. I think this is a good idea too, although it limits the area that we reach to subscribers of the paper only. It is an idea to consider though. He also makes an interesting distinction when I reply to our class' intent as increasing "awareness" of family farming. He corrects that wording and says perhaps increasing "sensitivity" to family farming is a better way of looking

at it. The interview seems to wind up naturally, and after I turn the recorder off Reverend Lavelle tells me that perhaps someone we could contact is Father Richard Snoke, pastor and hobby farmer in Danville (599-6362, Saint Luke's Parish).

Father Snoke has many more family farmers in his parish than Reverend Lavelle, according to Reverend Lavelle (although I never did ask Reverend Lavelle for a rough estimate of his congregation). As I leave, Reverend Lavelle gives me a hug and tells me he knew we meant business when he saw the recorder and I should be very proud of myself. He hands me a bulliten and invites me to mass anytime.

I feel good about the interview and leave on a high note.

I still feel that Reverend Lavelle was an interesting person to interview and gave some unique insight and suggestions. I am much more critical of how the interview went, though, now that I am in the midst of transcribing. I think I lost focus sometimes and slipped into having a good conversation as opposed to a good interview. This was particularly dangerous because Reverend Lavelle's responses were often so verbose. The question would be one thing and the answer covered ten topics. His ramblings were interesting, but I think if I were more focused, they could have been more pointed and centered. I never got bored but perhaps should have steered the interview more than I did. On the same note, two times I interrupted him and I hate that, and there is an interesting part of an answer and you can hear a truck going by on the street outside the window.

Thankfully the phone did not ring during the interview. I must hand it to Reverend Lavelle, though, he was very comfortable and made me very comfortable in his office and presence. We did not concern ourselves with the recorder much, which is actually another thing I bungled. When I did the introduction, I said the wrong date and in trying to correct it later managed to bungle things more, so I am going to try to patch that up as cleanly as possible and always double check the date before taping in the future; a good lesson for me, and humbling.

This interview has stimulated my interest in the idea of family farmers being closer to God and of the land as holy ground (which has been done, yes, but still interests me), and also my interest in children and their roles on the farm and in the community. There is still so much I would like to know about the community. I am glad we did these interviews. But, maybe we can pay a transcriber? Just kidding. It is humbling to have to write down all the huge answers that we off the subject anyway. Next time, I will remember how long it took me to transcribe Reverend Lavelle's answer to "what kind of solitude would you like" and I will restrain myself. I am looking forward to getting better at this interview process. Perhaps my next lead is Father Snoke? That may put me more in the direction of a religious man's approach to farming though, and if you feel that that has been sufficiently covered then perhaps contacting him to get a sense of the families in his parish would be of use. I look forward to what the others think after their interviews.