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### Interview with Father Tim Gottschalk

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ORAL HISTORY  
INTERVIEW WITH  
FATHER TIM GOTTSCHALK,  
CONDUCTED  
BY  
CHUCK SCHMIDT  
TRANSCRIBED  
BY  
TONY BOZARTH

HISTORY OF AMERICAN EDUCATION  
FALL 1988

The following is an edited transcript of an interview conducted by Chuck Schmidt and Tony Bozarth, of Father Tim Gottschalk, OFM Cap. The interview was conducted September 8th, 1988, at Thomas More Prep-Marian High School in Hays, KS.

CHUCK SCHMIDT: We're here today with Father Tim Gottschalk, long-time priest and instructor at Thomas More Prep-Marian High School. Father Tim is also a member of the Kansas Teacher's Hall of Fame. This interview is to fulfill the requirements of History of American Education, taught by Dr. Alan Miller. To begin with, Father, could you briefly review your career for us?

FATHER TIM: To begin with, the high school I attended back in 1919 was only for boys studying for the priesthood. It was in Herman, Pennsylvania, and was called St. Fidelis' Seminary. I started in high school in 1919. After the four years of high school were two years of junior college. After that we went to a year known as novitiate. After that year we took our simple vows to the Capuchin order. After being a novitiate, we went to a House of Philosophy, which happened to be located in Victoria, Kansas. After the House of Philosophy we spent four years being versed in theology. The first two years were in Cumberland, Maryland, and the next two in Washington, D.C. We had our own house there at the Catholic University. After two years in Washington I was ordained at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington. This was in 1932.

CS: Could you tell us about your teaching career?

FT: Well, at that time we were part of the Pennsylvania Province. We were not ordained at that time to be a teacher, or a missionary, or what have you. We were simply ordained, told to go to a place, and we went. In 1932 we took a vow of obedience, and believe me, it was blind obedience! So I got my first appointment down near Pittsburg, Kansas, in Frontenac, and also missioned to parishes in Arma and Mulberry, near the border. At that time I was only a parish priest, and the only teaching I would do was during the summer, with religious vocation schools and summer bible classes. After two years I was then sent to Herman, Pennsylvania, without ever being consulted, and told I would be trained to teach. We didn't have or need credentials from a university, we simply were told to teach. I taught at the seminary there for three years. I taught Latin, Greek, and German, and got my first taste of being in charge of a band. I taught band there, and was also Dean of Discipline. That was for three years! Then on March 15, 1938, the Ides of March, over half our building burned down. We finished the year with our seniors, and I became supernumerary, not needed, and was sent to Dennison, Ohio. From March to August I spent my time with parish work until I was sent to Kansas again found myself in parish work. I was sent to Herndon where I had St. Francis and Bird City for one year. Those were parishes I would work in during the weekend, but during the week I had nothing to do. Herndon had a high school, so I became a basketball coach, a teacher of music, and so on. So for one year I worked with the youngsters in that high school in every capacity I could. After that year, some of my classmates were at the Cadet Academy (before it became Thomas More Prep) and they requested I be

transferred, and so I came here. That was in 1939 and I've been here ever since. I probably came down here to be a teacher, but it was never specified.

CS: Could you tell us some of the changes you've found in students you've found over the years in the students you've taught, and perhaps the changes in the types of students you've taught?

FT: I had two types of schools. The seminary was a place for boys who were studying for the priesthood. There were not the problems that exist today at Thomas More Prep, or at the Cadet School. I would say teaching at the Seminary was an easier chore. If any boy showed signs of not participating or disrespect, he was asked to go home. So the teaching was easier. It was a very nice three years to break me into teaching. I started teaching with just the methods I remembered from teachers who taught me, and so built up my own system. It was a very enjoyable three years, and I don't remember that the boys were ever any problem. I never had to throw anyone out of a classroom or dish out a lot of penalties. They were good youngsters and they always had a certain amount of respect because they were studying for the priesthood themselves, and this was always brought before them.

We had an altogether different situation at the School for the Cadets. We were military, and did have discipline. I guess it wouldn't be fair to say they were trouble. It was more carefree, and you had a mixture of boys who came because their parents made them, and the top rung and bottom rung. It was quite a mixture. Now it's been fifty years here, and while it's hard to say, I believe the youngster's of today are a little more sophisticated. They see a lot of programs, and some wise-cracking. They want not to be humiliated, and this and that. You couldn't treat them the same, and for this reason I think a lot of respect for the priests and teachers has declined. You have to more or less insist on your authority. I have found that has developed in the last five to ten years, and more and more rapidly. Even your best students sometimes forget themselves and insult you. I think the level of respect and the level of studying are the two things that have changed the most.

CS: The attentiveness to studying has changed also?

FT: You have to bring that into their system. They go through seven classes now just counting the moments. Not all, but a big proportion, just want to live through the time they come to school until they get out. What I call a "hunger for education" is lacking in many. I've had as good as youngsters in my classes as the early years in the Seminary, but not as many. Those are the ones who are trained well at home, are respectful, and who still try, but we also have those who are just going to endure you.

CS: You've worked with many teachers over the years. What changes have you noticed in teachers from when you started?

FT: It's rather hard for me to say, because I've never concerned myself with how another teacher was teaching. I simply go into my classes with my information and my methods, and that's how I conducted them. I have no one that I imitate. I think about what needs to be taught, and then I pick a method that will get it across in any way I can think of. Year by year it's changed a little. Over the years I've changed very much. The objectives pretty much remain the same, but the method changes.

CS: Currently, you're teaching only German.

FT: I also taught Latin for many years. That was always my best subject, and German was always my easy subject because I was born and raised in a German speaking community, and so gained a pretty extensive knowledge of the German language. I would also substitute for English and American History. In fact I was sort of a loose cannon teaching everything. I guess they thought if you were ordained you could teach anything. But mostly, I was trained to teach music. To prepare myself, I realized I didn't have a single music credit to my name, so from the years 1940 to 1949 I was teaching half the day and studying the other half until I got my Master's. I studied at Ft. Hays and Indiana University.

CS: Well, for myself, having had you for four years as my band teacher, you did very well. Could you tell us, perhaps, what one of your best moments was as a teacher?

FT: There are many. The best example of your teaching is the fruit that it produces. Many Capuchin priests that are now in their province are men that came through here and that I taught. I could mention ten, fifteen, twenty, that I knew as students. Father Chaput (Bishop of Rapid City, S.D.), I taught him Latin and had him in music. These students I helped lay a foundation for, they are the fruits of my labors. When young people that you've had in class come back, that's the moment of joy. Sometimes the guy who seemed headed for academic destruction turned out to be the finest man. What we do, we sow the seed, and they reap them.

CS: It must be very rewarding to see those former students who go on to religious service.

FT: Oh yes! I've had a great number, especially from my three years at the Seminary.

CS: Well then, how about some of the worst moments you've had as a teacher?

FT: I try not to remember those. I really haven't had too many. I think maybe the last years, especially last year, had some troubles. But you simply have to chalk that up as being one of the costs of being an educator and dealing with youth. They can be, and are now, very rebellious and stubborn.

CS: Could you tell us some of the ways you tried to motivate students to learn?

FT: Well, I don't have any secrets. The whole secret, if there is such a thing, is that I try to motivate myself, saying how will I go from here to there. Number one, I found out to get very well acquainted with what your teaching, so you can approach it backwards and forwards and from all angles. I believe I could say that over fifty-four years I've taught, no two years have ever been approached the same. The first thing to do is see what talent you have in class, and then match the material to meet their mental level. If I had a weakness in anything, it's that I was too impatient and wanted them to learn too quickly, and instead buried them. I'm beginning to spend a little more time, slow down my presentation, give it time to sink in. After all, I know the language and they don't I try now to spend a little more time going over it. I hit as many different ways as possible. The beauty of it is after six weeks or a semester they have accomplished something. That hope spurs you on to do more. So I think the secret is to study what I've got and adjust it to my situation. It's nothing but a little application of horse sense.

CS: So know your subject well?

FT: Oh, that's so important. For two years I was the fifth wheel in the wagon here. They shoved me wherever I was needed. They had me substitute for Father Matthew in American History when he was in the hospital. I'd teach, I'd grade, then I'd study. That triangle doesn't work. There was so much to present, I didn't know how. But language, that was a different story. If you don't change your method now and then you get stagnant.

CS: What methods of discipline did you use for those students who would fail to respect your position as a teacher or a priest?

FT: When it gets to the point of where you can do nothing, you eject them from the classroom. I have had to do that once or twice. Most of the time, if they become publicly abusive, I become abusive, in a sense, to them. Many of them because they ask for it. I think a little dressing down if they are publicly abusive lets you tell them what they are. Usually I used penalties of writing, and made it part of my class. If you have to give too many penalty periods, I think perhaps this is a sign the class is getting ahead of you. If you lose control of you class, you've lost your ability to teach. You must maintain their respect, even if you have to dress them down. Youngsters nowadays lose their respect very quickly. You can't use physical retaliation today. We used to. We would swat people, but that's not the thing to do, we know that it's wrong, so I step back for a while and think. It's not easy, each teacher has to find his own method.

CS: Do you see a change in the role of the family in education in the years that you've taught?

FT: You've put your finger right on the sore spot. My best resource up to today was parents. Now at the seminary, we couldn't call up parents because they were in different parts of the United States. I never had to write or call parents, that was handled by the director, and those kids worked their way out.

When I get to the point where I can't do anything with a boy or girl I call the parents. It's a last resort, and if that doesn't work, I'd say he's hopeless. But parents, in my opinion, are the soul of education. You can't educate without them. With them on your side, you always have a chance. Without them, your case is lost.

CS: Have you seen a change in the involvement of the family?

FT: Not here in Ellis County. Those parents who are willing to put money in education still value education. They want results, and they will help you. When I was in grade school, if we came home and complained a teacher was too rough, we got a second helping of trouble, so we shut up. Nowadays it's not quite that way. In most portions, the parents are still behind us, and I find that refreshing, I like that.

CS: You have a bit of a unique situation at Thomas More Prep, because it's private and the parents are paying for the education.

FT: Exactly, that's the point. They believe in the system, because they're paying for it. It makes a difference, there is no doubt about it.

CS: Most of your career you taught at an all-male school. Thomas More Prep is now co-educational. What differences do you find with girls now in the school?

FT: Lots. See, I had a mixed group long before the high school went co-educational. I started the instrumental music program at Kennedy Junior High. I worked with that for twenty-five years. I also had a girls orchestra, so I was used to working with girls. I never had any trouble with that at all, so when the girls came here, I had already worked with them in chorus, band, and mixed chorus.

CS: So you had no trouble adjusting?

FT: Oh no! I enjoy having both groups here. The girls are not quite as mild and subservient as they used to be, but they do all right.

CS: Drawing on your experience, what do schools, particularly Catholic schools, need to do in the future. What do you see?

FT: Number one, the Catholic school must maintain and teach the Catholic doctrine. Not only do we need an academic record, but we need something to aid and help in the molding of character. Unless we do that, we have no reason for existence. Our religious program must be good. You teach religion, you know what that means. We have four years to teach things, to introduce things. In the public school they can't so basically the grade school program of religion is all they get. They don't rely on that, they've lost it. If we can't teach them by our religion and our example, then we've lost them. It's something

we must do, always. We always hear talk of TMP closing, and that talk doesn't worry me. We've heard that since I've been here. I don't think we will ever close because there is a big portion of the public that believes in a Catholic education. We have to have something good for them so they can become good students, good citizens, and so on.

CS: Did you ever find that your role as a priest conflicted with your role as a teacher?

FT: No, never. If that happens, then something else is wrong. I cannot ever imagine where it would conflict.

CS: In your preparation to become a teacher, was there anything you wish you would have been prepared for, anything you might like to suggest?

FT: The only thing I can think of, of course, is that I had no musical preparation. There was never any question of trying me out. I was drafted, then went to school while I was teaching. I think perhaps that was the most difficult thing I had to go through. I was running a full program in the afternoon and morning. I took a whole year off for Indiana University, thank God, but I was fully prepared for everything except my major topic, music. Father Albert was here, and was the same way all the old Capuchins were, they never consulted you. I was here for one year without a degree, without anything, so I was pushed from pillar to post. I said I would like to study art, and he never said much one way or another. That spring he told me I was the new music teacher, took me down to Ft. Hays, told them "This is our new music teacher. Teach him." and off I went. If I hadn't been so young, (I almost said stupid!) I wouldn't have survived doing that from 1940 to 1949. I never felt like quitting anything once I started, I just stayed with it. After that I was on my own, at least I knew what to do with it.

CS: For our last, and perhaps most important question, what advice would you give to a young person thinking about going into teaching today?

FT: Well, there are mixed thoughts on that. The first thought is, "Do you really want it bad enough?" Do you have a fervor to teach? The second is "Is it financially feasible for your life?" To be a teacher of course you have to have certain qualifications. Teaching can have bitter moments, and any teacher who's been at it a while knows this. It's not all sunshine. The glory of teaching is nice when you hear a person who's taught so long talk about it. I've had my problems, but I've never regretted one year of the fifty four years I taught. I think you have to have the type of personality that can absorb shock, pain, disappointment, and so on. These have to jump off your head and shoulders and you go right to it. I went in, I never quit, I never gave any thought to quitting, and I guess that's why I've been here so long. I was given charge of all

music, and I stayed with it until I retired in 1974. That's a long time, from '40 to '74, and I finally realized I was getting too old for some of the things, such as the shows. I would say be sure that you like it! If you can't stand some disappointment, then you had better think twice. I think it's more important to prepare well for this profession, than say an ordinary profession. You better like it because it doesn't pay that much. That's always the worst part. It's important for me, as a priest, to know that I used my position in a way in which it was intended. As a priest we serve the people, we educate them, and we try to save souls. In education, we go to all of that.

CS: What would you like your legacy to be? If someone were to write a biography of you, what would you like said?

FT: Oh gosh, probably the less said the better!

CS: No, really.

FT: I think the best thing to be said for any teacher is that he was faithful to his job, did it the best he knew how, and he had some good results. I think those three things. The fruit was good, the effort was fine, and the intention perfect. You can't have helped but do some good after teaching so long. For instance, you've come out pretty fair. All of them do, that's expected. He tried hard, he was successfull more often than not, and he tried hard. Then the good ones are your reward. There is a little poem my grandfather wrote when he was studying in Germany: "A teacher will have sheep, even as our Lord has, and in teaching his flock, this is as great as any priestly reward." I always liked that poem, and read it over many times. My grandfather was a teacher, and my father was a teacher, so I came by that more or less naturally.

CS: Thank you, Father Tim.