

Interview with Monsignor Nolan McKeivitt

Location: St. Peters Cathedral, Marquette, Michigan

June 6, 1989

[TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

Interviewer (I): Interview with Monsignor Nolan McKeivitt Marquette Michigan, June 6, 1989. This interview will deal with Monsignor's years as a priest, talk a little about the history of the diocese and some associated activities.

I: Okay, Monsignor. We'd like to begin with some of the background, where were you originally from? And how did you get interested in the priesthood?

Nolan McKeivitt (NM): Well I'm from Ironwood Michigan, I went to St. Ambrose school belonged to St. Ambrose parish there. I was interested in the priesthood, no doubt with some influence from the nuns there, particularly Sister ____ in the eighth grade. And before I left I had a cousin who went away to study for the priesthood and he was sent to Milwaukee to the seminary there and a year or two after that I decided that I would like to go, I made contact with Bishop Nussbaum at the time and I suggested I would like to go to Milwaukee and I had a cousin there, for some reason the bishop had changed his schooling for priests to St. Paul, so I was at that time going to, would have been a junior at the seminary. I said well in that case I will perhaps wait another year, I called the bishop saying well even if you wait another year you will go to St. Paul. And I did wait another year, and I left in my senior year of high school to Nazareth Hall, so called prep seminary. In those days the education system for priests was it began in the first year of high school consisted of six years of pretty ordinary types of programs and then after this first six years which included two years of college we were moved to what is called a major seminary, and there was two years of philosophy followed by four years of theology. I spent the three years at Nazareth Hall and then to the major seminary in the fall of '27 I guess. As many will remember within a couple of years the so called depression came. Which had some effect all across the country but it didn't have any particular effect on me as that portion of the education is provided for by the diocese. I was ordained in 1945 and assigned to a cathedral, simply because Monsignor Buchholtz was at that time the pastor at the cathedral, the director, had once been in Ironwood, at St. Ambrose about the time that I was born, in fact there is some dispute whether he had baptized me or if an uncle of mine who was there at the same time. At all events, after my first mass at which Monsignor Buchholtz

preached I was assigned to the cathedral. The first mass was on June the 11 which I believe was on Tuesday and I started on Friday with the assignment of the cathedral. Father Sheringer, Francis Sheringer was the assistant there along with me at the time. It was of course a fairly normal summer, nothing particularly new, we did take some kind of a census. In the fall when school began I began making acquaintances particularly with the grade school, Father Sheringer had religion in the high school. The fire...

I: At about this time in the fall of 1935 wasn't there a fire in St. Peters Cathedral, could you tell us a little about your reminiscences of that?

NM: Oh yes, the fire came at the end of October the beginning of November we, I cannot remember whether there was, I know there was an obligatory mass on the morning after the fire began, so it was either all saints day, or a Sunday or both. I had, the bishop had died just two weeks after appointing myself and Father John Hughes [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], and Mother Superior [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] had died during the summer, it began to look like there was somewhat of a jinx, and then came the fire. The fire was discovered by someone walking along the street at a fairly late hour, I couldn't remember what it was at this point, but someone called the directory and the telephone in those days upstairs was right outside Monsignor Buchholtz room, so he answers the phone and got the alarming news and Father Sheringer woke me, and we dressed hastily and went up to the view the situation, perhaps offer whatever help we could. At that time the big concern was for the blessed sacraments and the so called rescue of the blessed sacraments was a very strong force, motivating force. Monsignor Buchholtz was the first to attempt this he was accompanied by a fireman both were attached to a rope, in the possibility that some kind of a disaster. But they both went in to a very heavily smoked sacristy from the directory side, but emerged very shortly afterword with the rather odd situation that it was the fireman who was unable to take it and had to be, not really rescued, but assisted out by Monsignor Buchholtz. At this point it was decided, it wouldn't really make much sense for Monsignor Buchholtz to attempt it again, so Father Sheringer was next in line and he went in with the fireman they were wearing smoke masks just as Monsignor Buchholtz and the other firemen had, but he was completely successful. He knew where the tabernacle key way, he was able to locate it, although there was no lights in the place, he was able to locate the tabernacle on the main alter, get it open, and gather up the two or three articles that were there, and perhaps with the help of the fireman, they came out in very good shape for all intensive purposes. Up to this point there was no evidence of fire, there was obviously very heavy smoke and in the lower areas of the church but the stained glass

windows very little could be seen. But shortly after the rescue, the fire began to appear along the eaves, up at the top of the stone wall and after that things developed very rapidly, it wasn't long until we had a very roaring fire, and eventually the whole of the ceiling collapsed down into the interior and the floor of the situation had collapsed before that. In the mean time Don McCormick [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] who was chief police at the time, or at least was on the police force later I know he was the chief, made some efforts to rescue some other articles from the sacristy such vestments, and other things that were considered of reasonable value and in this he succeeded with the help of one or two other people. If we were honest, it was simply a question of waiting until the situation was more or less under control, get to the time of the first mass was supposed to be 6 o'clock, people were beginning to gather. Quite a few had gathered who had been able to detect the excitement either because they lived nearby or because they were able to see the flames when it was up above the cathedral. The problem with what to do about the 6 o'clock mass was solved by Monsignor Melocin [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], Father Melocin at that time, who had been assisting at the cathedral and had moved to take charge of the orphanage, very capable individual he arraigned for a mass to be set in the auditorium of the high school, and I personally was sent over to St. Johns church to say mass at approximately 6:30 in between the masses scheduled for the institution itself. More on there was very little to say about it, it was a question of an attempt, a beginning of a cleanup and the weather in the end of January and during January Bishop Clajus [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] from Detroit, was made to be the Bishop of the diocese, his installation was at St. Johns church. Up to this time the diocese was a beneficiary of a number of priests of the passionate order, which was the order, the order to which Bishop Misva [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] belonged, Bishop Nussbaum had been the Bishop of Corpus Christi, Texas where had been involved in a serious automobile accident and was recuperating at the monastery in New Jersey but there was a point to fill the vacancy made by the death of Bishop Nussbaum. Shortly after this installation, some adjustments were to be made, a number of the Passionist priests were going to return to their monastery or to the other assignments. In the mean time the Passionist priests, Father Sidney Turner [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], was acting as chancellor in the diocese, and he was one of them that was going to depart. Father Zwed [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] at that time later Monsignor had been educated in Rome and at the church of the diocese and had been sent to Bessemer as an assistant largely because of his mastered Italian there was a number of Italians in Bessemer. It now became imperative that Father Zwed [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] be returned to act as chancellor at the diocese, and I was elected to a place in Bessemer. And I was there for about a year and a half and I went from there to Escanaba St. Patrick's well, for three years.

I: Could you tell us a little about your year and a half at St. Sebastian's [pronounced wrong] in Bessemer?

NM: No Sebastian.

I: Sebastian, Sebastian sorry. Could you tell us a little about your stay there and the parish and the composition of the parish?

NM: Well the parish had a grade school, a little building that, I can't recall what its original purpose was but it was purchased by the federation in order to establish the school. The teachers and the school Sisters of Notre Dame in Milwaukee. Most of my work there it seems was making occasional contacts through the parish and some contacts at the school, we did attempt to get a youth organization _____ in those days, and a somewhat older group, kind of like an after high school group of young people. So this occupied some evenings throughout each month, at least during the school year months. Otherwise I can't recall anything more than gradually getting broken in as it were to the routine of being a priest and being active, were and still are in personal activities. Same as Sebastian church, a very ancient building, a rather dilapidated state. It was eventually replaced it was somewhat of a marvel that it lasted as long as it did. It was brick veneer building and good portions of the brick veneer were breaking loose the floors inside were extremely wavy, it was heated by a furnace underneath with one or two vents in the middle aisle. Sometimes when it was pretty cool in the winter, and there were confessions on Saturday in the night a jacket or an over coat. We did have one mission there, the priest in the order of the holy cross, which is an interesting way, these people at that time had their own way of preaching their own program in a week's time they would investigate the good part of the cosmetic structure of the church and I think the job was pretty well, and the moral stance of the church. In those days, there was much more vivid picture of hell than there is today for what reason, and for what results we are still waiting to find out I guess. But he was a very, very shall I say, relaxed person he was vivid and fervent in his preaching, many conversations I had with him ___ in his activities I picked up quite a bit of his professionalism, his easy attitude toward responsibilities in the priesthood, he succeeded mostly of what he had to the conviction that it was only some very often invisible, supernatural support but there that much possibility of being successful. But I arrived Bessemer in February, and I left there a year after the following June I believe,

I: So that would have been June 1938?

NM: Yeah... I was there for some three years, actually I went to.... so see I left in.... So I was thinking it was three years in Escanaba, it was '38,'39, and '40, I left in the middle of 40. '38,'39,'40' it sounds like

just two years now I'm sure I was in Bessemer more than three months because I went through the school year I recall. So that covers things up to this point.

I: Okay. That kind of gives us some of your background in early years and we will get back to your own life in the priesthood. Could you tell us a little about, some of the older priests that you encountered in those early years, some of the older priests that went back probably into 19th century, could you tell us something about your impressions of them and almost what you heard about them?

NM: Well, actually at the time that I was ordained I, were only four or five priests mostly in the western end of the diocese there. Father Sobota [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] to whom I became an assistant was known to me because he was somewhat of a friend of the family and would drop in once and a while to visit. Father Secula [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was at the polish church, St. Michaels, and Father Spicer [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was of the Holy Trinity Church _____ Church. So I knew them quite well I had had a contact with Father Pelisear [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] who at that time was in L'Anse, because he had to come up to visit in the last summer before I was ordained with John Hughes [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], whom I had never met because he went to the St. Louis Seminary and I went to the St. Paul. But that was about the extent of those that I knew, after I got to Marquette of course there was Monsignor Javase [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], and who had considerable history in that city which includes by the way a section of Garden _____ to my first parish. He was at St. Johns he was a Father over at the _____ in Munising, there was Father Turner Clarse [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], Clarse [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was chancellor, a priest at the hospital as a chaplain. And this particular group gathered quite regularly on a Sunday evening to play a little cards, in addition Monsignor Bocals was of course the pastor, director...was particularly friendly with Father Thomas Kennedy [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] in St. Patrick's in Escanaba, and _____. And the other was Monsignor Raymond Jocks [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] who at that time was at Sault St. Marie at St. Mary's they used to come down and meet at Monsignor Bocals' on a fairly regular basis so I made their acquaintance. In addition in those days, the priests retreats were held at the orphanage and they took place in the fall in two successive weeks. One week it would be half of the priest of the dioceses I can't tell you if it was geographically half or alphabetically half and then the following week the other half of the priests of the diocese would be on a retreat. All because all because a person moved from week to week, it wasn't very long before it was possible to go by name with all of the priests of the diocese, ones memory is a lot better in those days than it is today. Priest that I recall at that time was Father O' Bennit [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], and I didn't know him at that time, Father Teski [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] _____ who rarely showed up

around Marquette except for these retreats. The younger priests right at that time there were not very many assistants, Father Joseph Sipher [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was assisting us in manuals and ____ hymn. It was Father Carnell [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], was assisting us at St. Patrick's and had known him because he went to St. Paul's with me, and there was an assistant at the Sault, but I cannot recall who that was at the time but that was about the extent of the assistants. Father Zwed [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] in Marquette as chancellor there. So from there on I would have to page through the order and took up the names [....] But it wasn't very long particularly with that retreat operation before one became quite acquainted with a lot of the priests. When I was in St. Patrick's Father Sheringer had been made the pastor of Rapid River and we were able to get together once in a while and occasionally we would take a trip down to Green Bay. In those days we, this was practically everybody along the way would stop at, down around there, would stop at Stevenson to Father Dupra [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], stop at Menomonie to visit Father Karsh [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] there, [...]. I can't recall exactly but this is one where I virtually became acquainted with older priests and I think in some case they were astonished to see a couple of so called young fellows dropping in on them, but they were always very hospitable and at least acted as though they enjoyed the visits. After that, after I got to Garden, I didn't have very much contact with the priests except on mass and occasions, funerals, and _____ that. Then of course St. Ignas I had more contact with the priests down in Grand Rapids diocese [...] and that brings me to this point.

I: In those early years, and we can sort of move across time were there a lot of priests from different orders like you mentioned the Passionists and the Jesuits in the diocese, what other orders were represented?

NM: Well we the Jesuits came in, of course the Jesuits had been in this area back in this area in the 17th century but they, they had not been around for a great length of time, and Father Paul Fredon [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], was brought in he was strictly an Indian missionary and really covered the whole diocese. Since then of course there have always been Jesuits here, they established a parish in Sault St. Marie. The Franciscans were in Escanaba, I became acquainted with some of them, particularly Father Lary [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] who was there at St. Josephs at the time. ____ in Manistique church Father Scavers [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was at the church there there and I visited him quite regularly..., there were the Franciscans in the copper country particularly in ____ at that time, but that was about all [...] priests. Most of these had established parishes.

[END OF SIDE A TAPE 1]

[START SIDE B TAPE 1]

NM: Manistique was in charge of the _____ known as the white Fathers to some degree and Father Winston Sabadul [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] who I succeeded in garden had been the assistant in Manistique and was moved in temporarily, in quotation marks some 25 years before I arrived there, so his temporary assignment turned out to be rather challenging, but during all that time those five parishes there, Garden, _____, cooks, Isabella and, _____, lived on the spiritual efforts of Father Sabadul [SPELLED PHONETICALLY]. This was true for me too for the first year that I was there but after that I began receiving assistance. You see the order priests are kinda a conical structure there, eventually the _____ moved out of Manistique and Father Sheringer was established there, but the Franciscans were well established in St. Bernard's Calumet and St. Josephs in Escanaba, the tapestries were brought into the diocese later on and lived in Marquette, and eventually they took over the old orphanage left by the _____, and kind of the.... the tapestries that left the diocese now. Otherwise it was, the diocese is made up pretty well of so called diocesan or secular priests, who prefer the term diocesan. There was quite a surge of locations, particularly after the war, our number of priests in our diocese grew quite rapidly, we were drawing people really from all over the country some areas particularly out east had an over abundance of priests, so that, which was a question of making an acquaintance of a fairly good number of new priests and it were in the east _____. We did not suffer any lack of priests whatsoever, assistants grew like topsys they say, there were no assistants in any parishes and never had any, a lot of little parishes were mission parishes, parishes that were opened up as parishes. We held pretty solidly to this development up until the _____ the Vatican council which seemed to be kinda a debilitating effect on the vitality of the church.

I: Could you, do you want a little more about what you are saying about the Vatican council and what happened here?

NM: Well of course, my own view of the Vatican council is that, its basic skeletal structure was completely _____ but unfortunately it seemed to lay itself open to two, three, of an interpretation. It also seemed to have a lot of, in my view, a lot of chaotic development with the church. _____ about the fact that you could say mass anywhere in the world for all intensive purposes because of the lack of knowledge, I really feel that it was inevitable that that could not last forever. We could have adjusted to that quite easily but for the area of liturgy safe to fall into the hands of people with more imagination than the capable adjustment of the needs of the liturgy and you add it to the situation where people who did a little touring during the summer and stopped in the various churches would come back and

say boy oh boy you should have seen what happened there and this town and what happened that church. Of course we were all aware of the fact that the things that come apart at the seams as far as the upward devotional activities of the church with concern, changes inevitable, throughout the history of the church there have been changes, that usually things were in pretty good control. The council in print, is not what is thought as ideal in these days but they did have the very powerful effect of pulling the church together at the time of the protestant reformation for all intensive purposes, and structuring it and laying down guidelines which to a great extent were absorbed all over the world. Whether this whole social structure which kinda rebels against the any kind of restriction and emphasizes liberty and free choice and the individual, didn't contribute something to the churches problems and certainly not deniable, but obviously a little, entirely different kind of society now. We were not necessarily before the Vatican council, this social development preceded the situation in the council. So called sixties in the own country and evidence of things that might come as the council began in the mid-sixties, the, I recall that when I was in garden I subscribed to a magazine called Theological Studies which was put out by the Jesuits, in the beginning it had some very long and very pedantic articles, in which ones interest would lag quite rapidly. All over they had reviews on catholic writings in Europe and other parts of the world, usually from theological magazines of one kind or another, and these reviews I found very fascinating. The tendencies of the writers in Europe was to really break away from the discipline in which the church is famous and a lot of very heavy thinkers there without a lot of examinations of the scriptures in particular so actually when the council began, and these theologians from Europe in particular demonstrated their influence made in the speeches by the bishops and even cardinals who were at the council, I was not very much surprised when we began to sound like what I had been reading in the theological studies for some fifteen years or more. I feel that the structure of the church in liturgy and everything else will eventually come to get the continuity and the even the similarity which will help us to identify ourselves as what we are, the Catholic Church. It's stressed within our developments in which we seem to be throwing away the image in which we have had over centuries in particularly representative of the trust in the supernatural into the midst of this very confusing world. We have become humanist, materialist, realists, whatever the supernatural is not considered to be very present, or certainly not very presently active force in the world. Once we lose that faith in the church, once we detect that we can't compete with the problems of humanity on a completely human basis, our calling, our reason for being in the world would have to disappear. The whole religion of course has been effected by the television and the radio and these various other, filling the airways with profound

and simplistic false spirit of God and Christ.... And we have not been unaffected by this, and I believe that the necessity of competing with some of these people in...

I: Okay. Well we can get back to some of your ideas and so on, could you give your own ideas and insides to the different bishops that you were a priest under over the years, maybe talk a little about them.

NM: well of course I was ordained by Bishop Nussbaum, who had been having some physical difficulties at the time he ordained Father Hughes [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] and myself the 8th of June of '35 and about a week or so after that, it may be somewhat less, at the time they were working on the bishop's house, the new bishop's house, and he was coming over to the directory for a meal in particular. So it was kind of an experience for a young man just out of the seminary to be having his meals with the bishop, and the bishop, Bishop Nussbaum was type who liked to challenge, those theological discussions and moral areas just to find out I suppose where they are as an educator. Well it wasn't long a week or two after that when he was gone, Bishop Clajus [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] came in from Detroit where he had been pastoring a very large parish in the Detroit area and he was a ___ bishop of course. He was a kind of a, what should I say, he acted and thought on the upper level. It wasn't long before he decided that the bishop's house had to be expanded, enlarged. He liked to bring priests together, the time we had a priest's choir, great responsibilities we had to sing at priests funerals and he arraigned for a couple of parties just for those who were in the choir, he picked up the, what came to be known as the St. Josephs villa, up north of Marquette , and he was a lot for entertaining priests, such things of that. He was, he really gave the impression that did not feel that he was going to stay in Marquette. It was as a matter of fact, after a rather blue time he was made the bishop of Grand Rapids when the diocese opened. He was succeeded by Bishop Magner the priest form Chicago, about the only Irish bishop that we had in the diocese he was pastor of a large church there and was quite active and identified with the Catholic church extension society which plans to gather funds for missionary parishes and such things like that. Our old diocese had been a beneficiary of some of their support. A very charming wonderful person to talk with, he was not very well, he had been subject to a stroke, he was out of the diocese in Chicago for some time recovering, but he was, in those days I used to visit Garden into Marquette because I had an acquaintance with the priest there and I was with ___ we were staying at the bishop's house with one or two other priests even though I was a pastor at St. Michaels. So I would be visiting there and the bishop would drop in while we were visiting there and on one occasion I recall, he wanted to know if I was going to stay over. I said no I was thinking of going back and he said you can stay here

there is room here, so a part from meeting with the bishop I was now a guest in the house, seemed of some importance. It was under him that was assigned to St. Ignas at the time that was a very large promotion, after all I had only been a pastor for five years, in the system for five years. Parishes like St. Ignas went to older men or at least had been in the hands of older men for some time. Father John Holland was there and in fact Holland had left St. Ignas and became a pastor of the cathedral. So I felt that this was, pretty much a pat on the back on the part of the bishop really challenge their laws that the church had been destroyed by fire, not completely destroyed but the, the sanctuary end where the furnace was located in the basement, the basement had never been dug out it was just this little end over there where the furnace was. Maybe the fire started somehow in the fire there, but this was a warriors and it was not possible to do anything about rebuilding it so we were using what was normally the mission church, the old original church of the diocese, a hundred or more years old as I recall, it later was used as a museum for Father Marquette___ there. Eventually when the war ended it became possible to attain materials for the restructuring of the church, but we were not able to get any bids, we did get an architect from Big Bay and he stretched out all the blueprints of what we need according to the instructions that we gave him, including finishing off the basement. I would consider to the size of the sanctuary, and put in a very up to date kitchen in the basement. Eventually we had it pretty well finished, there was a bit of a struggle, for all intents and purposes it was the contractor, I hired everybody that worked there, I had to make out the weekly checks, keep track of the social security recordings and the rest of it somehow, looking back I wonder just how I accomplished this, certainly I had no particular training in it, but I did manage to pick up individuals that were able to take hold of the situation, one individual, I can't remember... Putting stone facing on some houses there, the kid he could read blueprints so I showed him what needed to be done, he tried it, he managed to get the interior brick___ but we weren't able to get the outside brick so after the thing started we had to leave___ over winter which did some damage to the floor and the kitchen part of the basement. At one time we had these bricks but we didn't have any mortar, but the Greyhound company was building a combination depot and restroom I suppose, they had a lot of extra mortar but could get the bricks. We worked out a deal with them to make a switch and we both turned out to be very happy. The church was finished and we had dedication, we had it in conjunction with forty hours as far as I believe at the time, and the bishop came down and then remarkably I had to borrow five thousand dollars to pay, to top of the structure and we were going to visit Bishop Noa who had come in in the meantime after the death of Bishop Magner. It only shortly after that because when I went in and talked to him and said I would like to borrow five thousand dollars he said, oh do we have that money here for that? And I said I had that

impression bishop, but I never done it before but it seems to me some of the parishes... and he said alright I'll let you know. So he, when he came down for the dedication and the rest of it, he brought the check for five thousand dollars and in interest of 2 percent...[Chuckling], that was all that was needed we were out of debt and the church was rebuilt and ready to go.

I: What year did this take place?

NM: Oh it must have been 1948 probably. One other interesting experience that I had at St. Ignas was there and been an arrangement made between the Ursuline nuns who had a mother house and St. Ignas and a boarding school. The boarding school was for high school girls but they also ran an eighth grade school, well the parish you might think, but this is not so, the parish really had no responsibility for the school, although I guess over the years they had attempted to do something to support it. But in the meantime an arrangement had been made with the local school board to pay these sisters who taught in the grade school three thousand dollars a year. That's for all the 6 teachers that were involved, and that was the total of their income, even at the time that I got there particularly with the building problems that really wasn't any money going to the nuns or even to the expenses of the school. Well somewhere along the line an individual came in to inspect the school from the state particularly interested in the fact that the public school was paying money to this school, the school was open to children of all faith but I would say about 100 percent Catholics going to it. So he, after the inspection, he told to the local school board that this would have to terminate because this was seemed to be quite obviously a religious school, he spoke of icons being on the walls, I suppose we did have crucifixes' and some statues there and the fact that the nuns were wearing their habits, that religion was being taught, so he said , well the school board was stuck because there was no way they could build a school and the children were multiplying and they needed the space they didn't want us to dump whatever was in our school out to their properties so they got together with us and they gave me a couple of ___one of the things that we had to do that had to be evoked in favor of the school board supporting this type of activity, and which was even better in many ways. The school board would have to pay the nuns who were teaching there a salary, equivalent to top in other public school areas. In any how the vote was no problem..... the school board itself was happy to make the adjustment as much as they had the school space. So anyhow after that worked out the circumstances of the sisters was tremendously improved. I had begun to try to do what I could to support them in various ways, without committing the parish to anything in particular.... Which just so happened that this change was, released me off the hook right up before 1950... succeeded me in fact we just changed places.... But not long after that, the public schools

were under the billing, more schools and situation kind of deteriorated after that in fact, eventually the school had to close and the nuns had to leave even though the building that they had there was a nun house.

[END OF TAPE 1]

[START TAPE 2 SIDE 1]

I: Tape 2, continuation of interview with Monsignor Mckevitt, June 6, 1989. Okay Monsignor, at this point we kind of come to a break in your career 1950 where you transferred to Marquette, could you tell us a little about the transfer, why it took place and then the beginnings of your stay in Marquette?

NM: Well Monsignor Buchholz died in 1945 and that was part of the reason that I wound up in St. Ignas because Father John Holland who was pastor of some missions in St. Ignas was moved to the cathedral, and... Father Holland subsequently decided that he did not want to stay at the cathedral, in the meantime he had been replaced by Gather George Forrest [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], who stayed there until I succeeded him. The, Father Sanford [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] had succeeded me in Garden, but on the departure of Father Holland from the cathedral he was asked to come in and take it over. He had been there as an assistant with Monsignor Buchholtz during the reconstruction of the cathedral thought he was well acquainted. He apparently said that he would come until we were able to find somebody to fill in the job, he still ___ he dedicated the new church in Munising and I went up for that affair, he had also arraigned to have ___ at St. Ignas on the fourth of July and that particular year.

I: What year was that?

NM: That would be '50.

I: 1950.

NM: In the course of the affair there Father Giordalani [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] who was chancellor at the time said that the bishop wanted to see me, so I went to the little office there ___ and the bishop was sitting there and he said, you know Father Sanford [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] says that he just wanted to take the cathedral as a fill in and all he wants to know is there too much pressure there. Well to me I thought this was a little bit of extra news I thought he was going to talk about the ___ but he went on to say that, we have decided that you should take over. I said, you mean the cathedral? And he said, oh yes yes. Well I didn't have much to say and I suppose he didn't need to say much I think he was very brief. Well this kind of took me aback I had just...church was in shape, we had an assistant there,

the parish was well in control, the knights of Columbus acknowledged the men's club. We had organized a ladies organization ____ which had been extinct for a while because of some ____ that took place in history. I felt that this kind of changed my views of the future completely. The bishop said oh there are many things to do, you have to build a convent, you need to do something about high school, I thought if he thinks he is selling me something this way he is looking in the wrong direction, but anyhow I went home and I wrote a letter back, saying that I didn't feel like I would like to tackle this, I didn't look at myself as a monsignor or anything. But I never got an answer to the suggestion in the meantime I got a written assignment to move up here to St. Peter's cathedral. So when the day came I simply threw all the few things that I possessed at the time into the car and drove up to the cathedral. It was kinda fast, the first mass that I was going to speak my piece, all the lights were out, six o'clock mass was quite dark there was no help from the speaker system so I must have been a small voice crying in the wilderness, at my first appearance. Well things developed rather rapidly after that and... during that summer I inspected the convent and I was astounded at the fact that these nuns, averaging about nineteen a number had occupied that place for about fifty years. The top floor had been artificially enlarged by putting in dormer windows, which from what I heard were not air tight by any means. The upper floor was one room up there, with each bed divided by simply a sheet hanging around it, about as much privacy one would expect at a public beach. The basement, down where the refectory was, in the kitchen, was dripping with moisture, of course the nuns in those days were never there in the summer and didn't have to suffer that particular indignity. But the search for bathroom accommodations there was just one bathroom on the second floor and kind of a half bathroom on the first floor which Father Sanford [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] had installed shortly before I was there. There were a few bills still left, the parish was about nine thousand dollars in debt, first bill I opened was a bill for about three thousand dollars for installing the automatic bells in the church. The church had been cleaned and decorated under Monsignor Holland and so apart from these few bills we made back to the diocese and the incoming bills for the bells ... too bad but it certainly did not look as though we were going to be able to build a convent in any length of time. During one of the situations that arose at St. Josephs mother house, probably be the, something to do with the novices, who are supplied from thirty regular detailed from Marquette to ____ and I visited with the brother of one of the sisters that we had at the cathedral and he was talking about a little scheme they had there to try and pick up money or I forget what his purpose was, but they organized a group of men who went around every three months, and the members of the parish had been propagandized I suppose, to make a certain minimum offer. Well this struck me as pretty good , it turned out to be... a number of the men in the parish, I put out a call or a

group we wound up with approximately 65 men, we got a pretty good scheme of where everyone lived from a census taken more or less recently, we divided the whole of the parish, in those days there were three parishes, St. Michael's had been added in the forties, and we sent gentlemen around two by two to call on these people and ask them for twenty five dollars, which would make a hundred dollars a year contribution. This worked quite well, it seems miniscule when you look at the dollars floating around in our time, but over our first two or three years we managed to raise about thirty thousand dollars, so by 1952 we were able to look at the possibility of building a convent. I recall as time went on the bishop had told me after I got there we had to build a convent, we would have to get one half of the money that would be required to build it, well consulting those architects and builders we figured that this did not amount to very much on this business. We looked into different possibilities, at that time we were still talking about building a high school, we examined the orphanage there, trying to figure out what adjustments would need to be made to make that into a high school. We were looking into other possibilities for the convent or at least the bishop was because he invited me over to see if his home could be turned into a convent and he would get some place to live somewhere away from the cathedral. At that time he looked at the ___ house on Rich [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] Street which would have been a very satisfactory place I would think, but none of these seemed to work out very well I only knew that trying to change the bishop's house into a convent just did not work..... so anyhow we negotiated with collections as fast as well as we could make it go, it looked like it would be a long long time before we could do anything, so I went in and talked to Bishop Noa [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] and said, I think we should go out and borrow some money and get this thing off the ground, that convent over there is a disgrace and I hope these nuns aren't spreading rumor around the rest of the United States that they don't have a place to live here in Marquette. He said ok, let's go down to the bank. That's the way Bishop Noa acted. So he and I went down and we visited with the gentleman at the first national bank and we decided we were going to try and borrow 100,000 dollars and we talked to a gentleman by the name of Kaufman [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] at that time and he decided he could lend us 60,000 dollars. This to be remembered that the diocese operates as a corporation sole, called borrowings on we the name of the diocese itself and as result the banks have to add up all the loans they have out to parishes there and decide what limit they are going to put on the amount for which the diocese will be responsible. And he said that he thought with these circumstances if necessary he could isolate a loan to the cathedral and that gave him a chance to lend a little more in that direction. So then we went over to the first national bank and Ms. Pierce [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was the operator there, and we worked out a deal there for 40,000 dollars. And very interesting enough the interest was 4

percent. Well we were in business then, we started the convent on St. Joseph's day in 1952, then we proceeded to build it and ___ it was finished during that, most of it that summer. By the next summer we were ready to have an open house, we have a little photograph there... the people who went through the open house in the old church...were rather flabbergasted at the condition that they existed there for all those years... We were very thrilled as were the nuns with the new convent which if I say so myself was about as good a convent as, well a number of sisters from other places said this might be the best, there's nothing like going from the worst to the best. In the meantime, this high school business was hanging over our heads, the first seven years I had been the superintendent of the St. Peters school and high school because the high school there was a parish by there. But I had persuaded the bishop to investigate the possibility of turning it into a central high school so we would get a little more support, it would just cost in the beginning up a little. I had jacked up the tuition from 20 dollars to 25 dollars, something like that.

I: Was that a year?

NM: That was a year. Well it didn't see that in those days it cost me 25,000 dollars to upgrade the grade school such as it was, we had, we were using it called Little Baraga for four grades and then we had four grades in the high school but because the children's population was bulging at the time we had to gradually take rooms over in the orphanage or the upper floor. That made room for the high school which was growing in demand because this was the way it was. In fact there was one year, I recall particularly that we had eighty children in the first day and we were a little, Litter Baraga consisted of two large rooms downstairs and a large room with a movable wall upstairs.... Sister Paula [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] who was teaching in the first grade, she volunteered to tackle this whole crew if we would give her that whole upstairs area. We managed to work that out, so she put tables and chairs on one side and she put the old typical school desks on the other side and she kept moving youngsters back and forth and she actually had a share of first to second grade teacher that you have today, well destroying a persons sanity if nothing else. But actually the youngsters were a lot more amiable and docile and cooperative in those days than they are now... gradually this little independence worked down from the eight grade, to the seventh grade, to the sixth grade to, to the fifth grade, and that's just a side observance. So anyway we were faced with the need of the high school in order to provide for the grade school, now we went through all kinds of things like that as I said we looked at the orphanage as a possible high school, we might done something with it but there wasn't a gymnasium and we could find a way of putting that into the school there, eventually then we came to the fact that we would have to

build a school, whether it was a high school or a grade school, I made a suggestion and an offer that we would take over the high school building as it was for the grade school and then the high school could be built somewhere else. Well it was the architect's suggestion that all that would be necessary is to build a gymnasium in conjunction with the high school as it was, and as I recall, we made an estimate which was something between 150 and 200 thousand dollars and we could have the school and a gymnasium built. We sent out postcards to the people of all the various parishes offering them three options, to build a gymnasium, should we just add a gymnasium and some classrooms, or should we build the whole thing. To our astonishment and horror, the majority wanted to build the whole thing. Clearly not realizing what was involved. Well anyhow we finally decided that we would build a high school and St. Peter's parish would build a grade school. At that time St. Peter's share of the operation of the high school ... for the gymnasium, about 20 percent, this is largely because the township schools ... St. Michael's was still paying debt on the school and St. John's was not very strong financially structured. In all events we finally went ahead and built the gymnasium which came out at about 335,000 dollars for just the gymnasium and we tackled the grade school, in the meantime we had paid off the debt of the convent which was 185,000 dollars. We tackled the grade school which came to about 300,000 dollars as I recall. It was built very rapidly, it was worth mentioning that we received a great deal of help with all of these operations from Franz Menzi [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] and his construction company, from Walter Meyers [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] who was an architect and engineer in charge of that area. The real architect I think was, I don't know his name... in all events their design for the convent was a fantastic accomplishment. The only real assistance they had was that at that time there was a little magazine published by one of ____ there was a great deal of building going on and that's how he published this magazine. It was sort pictures and plans of many churches and schools and convents that he built all over the country. Unless we established, in those days hard to believe, we anticipated 24 nuns, and the school should be built for 16 classrooms, the convent could accommodate 24 nuns but.... Well to get down to the brass tacks we ____ the construction company and moved in in the fall and laid out the foundations for the school and then it was left there for the winter but it was spring that started early and they had the school ready to go for the opening in the fall. The only part that was not, we wound up building for twelve classrooms and then the gymnasium, and then four classrooms above there. But the upper classrooms were not finished at all, we figured we'd get to those until later on and we were.... But it was open in the fall and we had the dedication and it was a structure to be proud of, in fact Bishop Noa he was part of the whole operation I guess. We weren't necessarily of course couldn't borrow all of this money from the diocese we had to borrow from groups in Chicago who loaned money out for these

kinds of circumstances. So we fell into a pattern of constant bills from lenders and friends who ...[chuckling]. Well that was it at least all the fuss and feathers were all finished by '55 '56 I think after that it was just a question of collecting I think.

I: Now what happened to the high school? You built the gym onto the high school but you didn't get into building a new high school.

NM: No no no, we in fact we didn't have much to make some pretty___ repairs in the school itself... anyhow students survived that way.

I: What happened to the orphanage at this time?

NM: Well that's operating there but they gradually got into this business of putting children in foster homes and a number of, for which we became responsible gradually went down and.. [CUT SHORT BY PHONE RINGING]

[AUDIO CUTS BACK IN]

I: Okay let's continue now, could you tell me a little bit about the development of the catholic credit union?

NM: Yes that was an interesting experience there, when I was down in St. Ignas there was a place down in a little town just south of the straits there who was interested in credit union business and he had talked to me and I had talked to him we took some visiting back and forth across the straits in those days, so much so that I had, I had of course heard and read something about it even when I was in the seminary, a lot was completely unknown to me I had no idea of how it worked or anything. But just as I was getting it going I in fact called a meeting or two, I was moved, so when I got to Marquette I didn't bring the idea up immediately, but we had enough strange things to throw into the lap of the... but the fact that because times were still a little bit difficult, in the early '50s late' 40s, and a number of people were coming in talking to me looking for help in various situations, which it seemed to me within the province of what a credit union could handle I decided to start working on it again. I spent a couple of Sundays trying to explain what it was, what it was for, and what we would have to do. Finally called and meeting and I had four or five people show up. I waited another couple of weeks called another meeting and there were a few more. So I contacted the Michigan credit union league down there and explained that I needed some kind of offsite support or something, sometimes a stranger is more... So they sent up a young man and I called a meeting when he was going to be there and we got enough people there, I

don't remember anymore just how many we needed to sign a charter, but we had enough people there who were willing to participate, turn in some of their money and go in business.

I: What year was this?

NM: This was 1952 I think. There was a question of course then of establishing the normal structure of the credit union, we needed a board of directors, we needed a credit officer, we needed a credit committee, and we needed a supervisory committee. The latter two needed three persons, the board was six or seven... so we started out by opening an office for all intents and purposes down in the cloak room in the basement of the cathedral. You had somebody in there acting as sort of a clerk. Then we began picking up a little money here a little money there as one may well expect it didn't take us very long to [TAPE STOPS ABRUPTLY]

[END TAPE 2 SIDE 1]

[BEGIN TAPE 2 SIDE 2]

NM: How many people are in need of ___ funds and the problem was we were in the hole or at least myself was trying to act as the lending officer and we got acquainted with the people quite well, I had only be in the community for two years. But gradually we began working it up a little bit we needed other quarters... we needed a decent number of hours that people might use the credit union. Eventually we moved over to the bishop's janitor's house which of course belonged to the parish, and the janitor we had _____ was leaving the job and he had been living in the house. We hired another young man who did not really want to use the house at the time being, so we used that for a while..

I: [Mumbling] Excuse me. Where was the house located?

NM: Right across from the cathedral.... It's on the east side of Fourth street there... we rented a couple of rooms downstairs on the corner, that was I think Rock and West street. And that was used for a while then finally we moved into the little building in back of the orphanage there that had been used by the newspaper there, and that operated for quite some time. In the meantime Father Garren [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] at St. Johns had decided that this was a good and he would start a credit union which they did but they were rather struggling so the idea occurred to, _____ which we did. At this time we had hired a full time manager to run the operation. Well after having accomplished this he moved on to another position...

I: What was the manager's name?

NM: I think it was Bulshav [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] or something he was from iron mountain region and he was so then Pat Woker [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] came in to see me her was really biased to the safety office by Howard Buroa [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] his predecessor was the I didn't know pat he was a member of St. Michaels but it sounded very good to me so I ___ for 10 minutes to a board meeting. In those days I attended the board meetings myself even though I was not on the board I cut myself loose form the institution. Well he was accepted and as you know the district hired a few weeks ago, the credit union grew by leaps and bounds we gradually began to pick up other areas until eventually we covered the catholic parishes of the whole county. And form I think about 700 dollars that we started out with at the first meeting we were close to being up to 25... dollars and I have of course successfully loaned a great deal of money to a great deal of people and the basic philosophy of the credit union is that the credit union belongs to its savers and its borrowers. ___ its percentage of its income loans is more than... Well that just about covers that, of course in the meantime we reached the point where we built our own structure up on Third street. And eventually we had to expand that first structure. One of the recognizable institutions of Marquette which the growth of which is of course to a great degree, due to the growth of Marquette itself tremendous expansion of population and financial and commission activity in the area certainly contributed to the possibility of more people being in a position to borrow and repay their debts and existed at the time..

I: Now were other credit unions, catholic credit unions established in other areas of the diocese?

NM: No I think we are the only ones, I don't know of any others.... I think Escanaba has one, I don't know what status...

I: Now does the concept of the credit union, each credit union has to be limited to a, it has to have some limitations to the people involved with it.

NM: Yeah some identifiable group, sometime industrial credit unions are confined to the own company, for there are such things that we have in Marquette of municipal entities that establish credit unions, sometimes covering all federal employees... so the people that belong have to be identified, not really an extraordinary process...

I: Okay is there, at this point are there any other areas that you want to discuss in terms of your tenure act at St. Peters?

NM: No I wouldn't think so, with the demise of the high school of course was a climatic experience there, we made a great effort to maintain it but the costs were becoming forbidding, particularly after

the nuns began drifting away, even though to this day nuns are paid equivalent to teachers this was not so during the history of catholic schools with nuns as teachers. They really insisted sometimes almost an injustice...but it was just a development an anemia of personnel as well as finances which, well the interesting thing about that was the last year, 1969, I think was the final year, we managed to get a class C title in basketball, something which repeatedly was ___ by John D. Pierce high school which was attached to the college in which that's... we lived up to the challenge...

I: How do you kind of, in retrospect now, since you did you were involved with the high school and the grade school what do you see, what role do you see catholic education playing in say the upper peninsula today?

NM: Well I have some problems with the term catholic education, I think this makes sense when we had schools which provided a whole education. As far as religion is concerned I always thought that we should insist on what we call catholic information. I used to tell the boys when I was in charge of the high school we had all priests teaching religion there for two or three years, I used to stop over at the cathedral in mid-morning for a cup of coffee and there were discussions there about the problems, they were complaining that the youngsters didn't do homework, they didn't seem to be reading the text books and so on and so forth. I said well in spite of this battle with normal youngsters we might do better by changing our attitude here. We often kind of forget that we are educating them in their religion, the only thing we can do in religion is inform, you can only equip them with the teachings of the catholic church and persuade them that it is worth joining. In other words you don't educate these youngsters, you convert them. In the equivalent of what a missionary does when he goes into a strange place... You just inform them and you just teach what's going on. Always be an example, four Sunday schools in four corners of a town somewhere, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Catholic, whatever they could all easily use the same term we are giving religious education, but as a matter of fact we are just giving religious information. The Presbyterians are informing the youngsters what Presbyterians believe, the Lutherans are telling youngsters what Lutherans believe, and we are telling youngsters what we believe. I feel even the whole CCD program has got out of balance because its convinced itself that it is professionally providing education but in the meantime we have neglected information. The youngsters go through three or four year course or whatever it is, they cant answer a simple question about what Catholics believe because we are stamped as educators if they are educational they are educated from somewhere else they didn't get it from their CCD classes. Unfortunately they didn't even get information in the CCD classes, the professional educators pedagogues as it were, masters of pedagogy condemned the old catechism, the whole question and answer procedure, they substituted

religion books and such, but they had very little information to the basic beliefs of the catholic church, the moral standards and the knowledge of the items in the creed simplify the whole thing just...obviously I am among the few that takes this few but I sort of hope that my position is more provable than any position. We are in a competitive position with entertainment groups. Electronic preachers, we are overwhelmed by the accomplishments of the people who collect millions and millions of dollars a year by simply preaching a sermon once a week, but that in itself should be enlightening, these preachers to be honest aren't preachers, you know called to be teachers and interpret the Bible and expose what they believe about the Bible and somehow they persuade people that their position is worth supporting even with some sacrifice. We're kind of competing almost but not quite even with this particular kind of religious group. It seems to me that we are diminishing our image a year ago we had appeared strange to other observers of Catholic church, it did have an image, a lot of them thought we did strange things, we don't eat meat on Friday, we consider it a sin to miss mass on Sunday, were convinced that tiraty [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] ... now it's difficult to say if we have attempted to persuade anyone with some kind of sacrifice.... Perhaps this can't contribute anymore, we certainly don't try to convince people that they must go to mass on Sunday we try to persuade them to get them by providing music and sometimes outlandish liturgies and as far as societies and the blessed virgin and lauding of charity, abstinence, so on and so forth you don't hear much about it anymore... there is a limit to what people can know in a certain area but there is no limit to what people can believe. That's why it is possible to have several different religions, all of these people convinced this is it. So we are on a competitive basis...

I: Now just to kind of line up, line it up with your career in terms of prior to your retirement?

NM: Well I just felt for one thing, I was instrumental in establishing a retirement program for priests in the diocese. Particularly in conjunction with Monsignor Zwed [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] and Father Burshwa [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] one or two others, we looked into efforts that had been made way back by Monsignor Rese [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], in fact that far, and we just kept hacking at it. The function of the diocese at that time was to provide 100 dollars a month for retired priests, a priest who was no longer operating in the diocese. Most of the retired priests up at that time would up as chaplains at the hospital, we had hospitals in Escanaba, Marquette and the copper country, and this kind of took care of the well the minimal number that did retire. But there were two results of this those that did retire lived in a very impoverished situation in most cases unless they happened to land in the hospital, and some priests were functioning long after they should be doing something else they just went on and on and... So we felt we needed some program which would make retiring at least minimally

attractive something that we would be able to grasp... So we finally got that going and established what became the St. Josephs association and we had a great deal of success. There was I think 50,000 dollars in the priest fund which was a collection taken every year in the parishes to provide for the retired priests, then we set up a program where every parish would put in a certain amount every month and the priests themselves would put in a separate amount. And we began to build that up pretty good and this was in the 50's there too, there were pretty good times and myself an Father Burshwa [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] in particular were kind of interested in investing. So he started to set up a structure for it, the St. Josephs association ... and the bishop give us 25,000 dollars... We just happened to make some very very good investments, I think in a short time we had about 500,000 dollars and nobody had retired at that point. But as time went on it gradually built up very well but we eventually turned it over to the mission in catholic conference they now headed the whole operation. The parishes are supplied money every year into the fund there, the priests no longer pay... but it has provided a consistent income for retired priests, not enough in itself to accomplish very much but most priest now are in social security or have been so a pretty good return for that...

I: When did you retire?

NM: I retired 1975. The main reason was I saw developments coming in the church, which I would have a hard time subscribing to completely, particularly at the cathedral which has to represent me and the bishop because the priest in charge the director it's the bishop's church. And I never had any conviction in which way the bishop might go, at that time Bishop Salakta was in charge of the diocese. I felt that I would like to move on, so I talked to the bishop and he said well I understand why you might want to leave the cathedral, why don't you take another parish somewhere on the outskirts where you won't be bothered... well I said the only argument against that bishop is that I'm 66 years old now another 4 years I'll be seventy and heaven knows what will happen in those four years, attached into some parish situation or held up in it and I prefer to at least take a year sabbatical to at least take a look around and see what I'd like to do. Well it turns out of course in those days, one of the difficulties of the diocese was having was we weren't able to get priests to come in and fill in if the priests wanted to take a little vacation or if the priest got ill, so I let it be known that I was available for that I didn't retire from.... So then about two or three years I covered 52 parishes in the diocese some of them a number of times all the way from Ironwood to Sault. St. Marie really.... I remember Iron Mountain, _____, Michigan, Republic, Ishpeming, Negaunee, right across the line I didn't get over towards Escanaba very much... I was at Manistique out at _____ up toward the copper country, it was interesting very interesting really, pretty stable but ...

I: So now are you still doing that?

NM: Yeah quite infrequently, I go over to St. Christopher's every once in while, and this coming Sunday weekend I'm going over to Garden farther than I go....

I: Okay good, I think we have pretty much done the interview here, thank you. [END TAPE 2 SIDE 2]