

Father Richard LaMorte

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, NY

Transcribed by Wai Yen Oo

For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

Transcript - Father Richard LaMorte

Interviewee: Richard LaMorte

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Summary: Father Richard LaMorte talks about his earlier years, arriving at Marist College, and becoming the chaplain as well as the assistant dean of students. He discusses and reflects on the role religion plays in college, his interactions with the students on campus, and how he sees Marist College in the future.

00:06 **Gus Nolan:** Today is Monday, 18th of August. We have the good fortune to have Reverend Richard LaMorte, the Marist College chaplain with us. Good morning, Richard.

00:17 **Father Richard LaMorte:** Good morning Gus.

00:20 **GN:** I would like first of all your permission just to call you Richard occasionally because it will slip out.

00:25 **FRL:** It's easier to call me Richard. Sure. We've known each other too long.

00:34 **GN:** Right. I would like you to give us a short thumbnail early review of Richard LaMorte. Where were you born, early school, hobbies, interests, through up to through high school?

00:47 **FRL:** Okay. I was born in the Bronx and I went to high school at Mount St Michael High School. Upon graduating from high school, I went to the Cathedral College and from there to Dunwoodie or St Joseph's Archdiocese Seminary and then was ordained in 1966.

01:13 **GN:** OK let's go back to fill in some of spots. Through those years, did you have a particular ... did you play baseball, football, potsie?

01:25 **FRL:** Yeah, I played baseball. Baseball, handball and tennis were my things at that time.

01:36 **GN:** Did you have an opportunity to work? Did you have kind of job where they actually pay you money? (laughter)

01:43 **FRL:** As opposed to the one I have? (laughter) No, I did. I worked most summers. One of my first jobs in high school was cleaning up a switchboard office. There were twenty-eight switchboards. Most people wouldn't know what a switchboard was. A switchboard facility where there were about twenty-some odd operators who answered calls and connected them to different folks. My job was to clean the place up. A very humbling job.

02:25 **GN:** When did you do this, at night?

02:27 **FRL:** Yeah at night in high school. I would walk about two miles from the house into Mt. Vernon to do that and then walk back until I got car. Well not till I got a car, until I got a license and then I was able to borrow my parents' car which I then got into a car crash with very quickly.

02:52 **GN:** OK after Dunwoodie, what further studies did you do? You have a certain gift in speech. Did you go to seminars or were there courses? Or what do priests do?

03:09 **FRL:** What do they do? Well in the seminary, we did have a course in the homiletics basically the form of preaching. I don't think I learned much there. First of all, I was terrified of speaking in public and when I was first ordained, I dreaded going into the

pulpit and had everything written out. At some point along the line, I liberated myself from the paper and that made all the difference. I think. And plus I was very enamored of several preachers over the years. Fulton Sheen when I was a kid and his style and Billy Graham. Those are probably the two biggest influences in terms of speaking. After I got out of the seminary, the only further education I went into was at St John's, I got a master's and then a professional diploma in counseling and then certification as a family counselor and a school counselor. But the rest of it really was a matter of observing other people speaking in public.

[04:43](#) **GN:** You have any interest in music or stamp collecting or anything like that?

[04:48](#) **FRL:** Oh yeah, I used to collect stamps when I was much younger. I like music very much. Most kinds of music I would say but particularly I particularly enjoy baroque music. And it's a matter in fact to this day every summer, I go to a concert series over in Salisbury, Connecticut of baroque music.

[05:18](#) **GN:** Okay. Moving on, what's your first familiarity with Marist College. What's the origin of the genesis of your coming to Marist?

[05:29](#) **FRL:** Well when I was first ordained, my first assignment was in Poughkeepsie. I was terrified of that as well because I didn't know being from the Bronx and having New York City myopia that anything existed north of the Bronx. So we came to Poughkeepsie and I was in Mount Carmel Parish which was a neighbor to Marist College. My first introduction in that respect was that I had several young Brothers who got involved in part of our youth program at the parish that I managed to meet here. And I'm actually even here because on several occasions, I was asked to come here to celebrate Mass for various levels of out-taking on the part of the Brothers in parts of the campus ... that I must admit to this day are just a dim memory as to where those buildings were located because it was always at night. But yeah, that was my first intro.

[06:47](#) **GN:** I have a similar ... just a sidebar, as it were ... Every night for two years that's over seven hundred times in the novitiate, we went to the cemetery to pray for the souls who I could not tell you where the cemetery is now on this same property. I know the direction of it but it's been buried as you know.

[07:13](#) **FRL:** Yeah. Every now and again, someone asks that question.

[07:17](#) **GN:** Back to the coming to Marist. Do you recall the chaplains here at the time? Were there a Father Driscoll, were the Dominicans here? The Marist here?

[07:28](#) **FRL:** No, **Driscoll** was here at that time. Then after **Driscoll**, was Father Gallant.

[07:37](#) **GN:** He's a Marist brother.

[07:39](#) **FRL:** Correct. And he and I interacted a number of times over weddings that were taking place here. And he would come to Mt Carmel to register. That's how I got to know him. Driscoll, I never got to meet until years later when I came to Marist as chaplain. But his reputation was very large as I understand he was from the very day I set foot on the campus.

[08:12](#) **GN:** Did you know Father Ben from Saint Francis? He was here for a ...

[08:17](#) **FRL:** Yes actually, I had recruited him when I was leaving, when I found out that I was being assigned a pastor and leaving here. I had known Ben from St Francis and I encouraged him because I knew he had an interest. Encouraged him to apply and so he wound up actually succeeding me.

[08:40](#) **GN:** How does the diocese work in terms of assignments? Do you get a chance to put in a request or are you just picked out and said, "you'd be best, you speak Italian"? You speak French you go there?

[08:54](#) **FRL:** Usually, your first assignment is more the latter. It's this is where you're going. And then after that you're able to indicate your interest or lack of interest in certain areas of the diocese, certain types of work until you're actually at the point where if you're applying for a parish to be pastor then you literally apply as you would for any other job. You indicate an interest when the parish is advertised and indicate why you think.

[09:35](#) **GN:** People apply to become pastor?

[09:36](#) **FRL:** Yeah, they do these days.

[09:40](#) **GN:** OK. Who are the personnel at the time here, was Linus here? Has Murray come on board yet?

[09:49](#) **FRL:** Linus was here. I believe it was Linus' last two years. But Linus was here at the time, they had an interim. An interim dean of student affairs.

[10:10](#) **GN:** Where was Jerry Cox? He was dean of students...

[10:14](#) **FRL:** That was after. At the time that I was hired, it was **Fred Lambert**. And as a matter fact it was **Fred Lambert** and **Reese Williams**, a wonderful episcopal minister and an incredible intellect. He also taught our faculty here who first approached me about considering the chaplaincy. That was in 1976 and I indicated to them at the time, I'm coming to the answer to your question. I indicated at the time that decision, while I was interested in that decision, that decision was not in my hands. The confusion at the time was this. I was at that time assigned to Holy Cross campus which was a child-caring institution of diocese in Rhinecliff. So therefore I was under Catholic Charities so Catholic Charities had to get involved and because this was an educational institution, the vicar of education had to get involved before I would be free to do anything. So one had to release me. The other had to be willing to accept me and accept me for this particular position. Well Fred and **Reese** went down and I guess they convinced them. Since I was willing to accept the position, that's how it happened back in '76. Yeah, that was when I first came here. So Linus would've been president. Fred at that time would have been acting Dean of Students. He was then followed by Jerry. No, he was followed by **Antonio Perez**. Antonio was here for about a year and a year and a half. And then he was followed by Jerry Cox. And for the rest of my time... my first time here it was Jerry Cox.

[12:34](#) **GN:** I'm just trying to put into in historical perspective. Then it says, you're here for a period of six or eight years and then you leave to go to Regina Caeli or what's the...

[12:44](#) **FRL:** No, I was here for nine years and then I was made a pastor in **Amenia** so I went to **Amenia** that typically would have been a twelve-year assignment. Two terms of six. but I got a phone call in the middle of my third year from the diocese asking if I would consider going to going back to Mt. Carmel as the pastor because the fellow who was there at the time was sick. And as a result of his illness and incapacity at times, the place was sort of going down the tubes and they figured a known quantity might help. So I went back to Mt Carmel. Then it was after Mt Carmel that I want to Regina Caeli. And then from Regina Caeli, I came back here.

[13:47](#) **GN:** Alright. Give me that year. When did you come back here?

[13:50](#) **FRL:** 2000. Dennis came the third year of my first time here.

[14:02](#) **GN:** 1979, 1980.

[14:05](#) **FRL:** Correct. As a matter of fact, he lives with me for that summer. In Burn House. I lived in burn house. That have been the chaplain's house. For years, that's where all the chaplains lived.

[14:22](#) **GN:** Yes built on the construction of the Dominicans who wanted a choir so that they could talk to one another. There is so much in the history of this place.

[14:33](#) **FRL:** Twists and turns everywhere.

[14:35](#) **GN:** Alright, lets change the pace a little bit. Let's talk about the students. There's been a change I think in the students or maybe not. Give me your perspective of the students. Let's say like on honesty. How about for values, honesty, generosity, dedication. on generosity at time, money, what they put themselves into. Talk a little bit about that from what you have seen.

[15:06](#) **FRL:** I think you know when I go into alumni events. I'm often asked by alumni who were students when I was first here what I see, how I would describe the difference.

[15:21](#) **GN:** So this is not a new question. You've been down this street before.

[15:25](#) **FRL:** Correct. My caricature of that is this. When they were here, most of the kids did not have a car. If they had a car, it looked like it had been run over by the train. Now all the students have cars and they're usually this year's model and they're usually a car that I can't afford. So that's my caricature of it.

[15:55](#) **GN:** Speaks volumes already. I know that ... subdivisions. Go ahead.

[16:00](#) **FRL:** And the second thing that usually I get from alumni is from that period if I had to apply for Marist especially if they have kid that's applying to Marist or has gotten into Marist. They'll say if I had to apply for Marist now I could never get in. At which point I respond, I think that's purely a matter of numbers not necessarily a difference in intelligence. If you have ten thousand people applying for nine hundred seats, your level is going to go higher automatically so I think that's a big difference there. I think many of

the kids especially when I meet kids whose parents I knew come from a completely different world than their parents came from. Back then, most kids here were first time going to college, blue collar workers. The father worked. The mother took care of the home and in a great number of cases, I would say I don't think the percentages have changed. Religious percentages. We're still from what I can tell from the figures we get, we're still somewhere about eighty five percent of the students who apply to the college when asked what their religious preferences would indicate that they're Catholic. So their sense of values, I think I don't know that I'd say this sense of values change as much as their sense of themselves. I think back in the earlier days that the kids had a much more, a much humbler sense of themselves.

[18:12](#) **GN:** They were told that. You're nothing. Just follow me. George Somer, you just sit there. I'll tell you all of that you have to know. I don't want to hear your point of view.

[18:24](#) **FRL:** The latter years. The kids at times have a tendency to be a bit entitled. And some of that could just be a result of ... they have more at home you know and they sort of have come to expect more, they very much expect that their parents will resolve every issue. Whereas in the previous generation if there was an issue here, the kid would resolve it. You know so it's an interesting kind of way in which in many cases what I think is a greater affluence plays in the way in which these kids wind up seeing themselves.

[19:22](#) **GN:** Tell me about this though. I've been impressed by the generosity of time and service that these kids say now. I don't know if it's the other kids that have the opportunity, we didn't say ... I don't know if they weren't generous we just didn't see it.

[19:40](#) **FRL:** Well you're absolutely right, Gus. In the previous era there were no organized ways of kids to get involved in volunteering or being of service as we call it now. Today, that is a major mantra in all of the years of the campus certainly campus ministry has taken the lead in its service programs with typically on any given year close to six hundred sixty to seven hundred students involved in service on a daily basis in the area. And maybe another fifty or so out of the area. But also all of the clubs now and teams you know have gotten involved in service. Part of that was sparked I have to say I think by the time the priority point system that was put into place in the housing area back in 1978. Where your housing wasn't just random you know and it wasn't by lottery, it was by points that you either received or didn't lose. And there were basically five areas, academics, how long you had been here, conduct that's where you could lose some, nobody ever gains points from conduct and, what you call it, involvement. So involvement certainly does get a great push here on the campus and it's made a great difference. Typically especially in the area of campus ministry and then on the level, I think of the institution, primarily through the comments of the president, the connection between the importance of service as a value. And if you will, Marcelin Champagnat and the Brothers that he brought together that I think is a big difference from let's say... That's where I think it gets set apart especially from what let's say clubs and organizations would do service. But unless there's that sort of overriding vision placed there somewhere and I think in this case the only one who could do that campus wide is Dennis so I think those things have made a big difference in terms of service.

[22:46](#) **GN:** Just coming in a parallel thought, you see the football team out there now. You know, in the earlier years, I don't think we could get them to come two weeks before school to get involved. They didn't have the time or the energy or that was just another, So the dedication to everything they do.

[23:08](#) **FRL:** To the larger institutional efforts, I mean over the next couple of weeks starting with two weeks ago when the football team first arrived between the athletic teams, the music department, the housing staff, and then students who have particular jobs and

then at the very last minute like the last week before we open, students who volunteer to help move the freshmen in. Because they remember what it was like when they moved in. We'll have seven hundred kids on campus before the freshmen arrive on the scene.

[23:48](#) **GN:** What are the student's attitude toward their parents? Are they the guardians still?

[23:56](#) **FRL:** I think the parents are even more. If you will more in-charge then they were in my first year. Some of that is ... I think just the way in which our society has evolved. You know every kid is special and I will do whatever I can do to help my kid. Both of which are good motivations in themselves. And then, that has been thrown into overdrive with texting and cell phones. You probably ... I mean there's no accurate statistic but just a general notion, that's thrown around is that a freshman especially will be talking to his or her parents in one way either by phone or by text. Maybe ten to fifteen times a day. So you come out of class and somebody said something, bingo. You know what he said today. So yeah, there's very much that.

[25:07](#) **GN:** How does religion and God fit into this? I think God is so loving and so on. And I think they take that too seriously. He doesn't care at all what you do. And I think that the culture is there. Well, you speak more about it than I do.

[25:31](#) **FRL:** Well I think you're right there, Gus. It has become a societal thing. I think after the 60s and going into the 70s, what translated from the 60s on a societal level as you know, everybody loves everybody. Then in the 70s and 80s became and God loves everybody regardless of everything. And then one has ... You can then have a loss of any sense of limits. However having said that in a way the students of the previous era, I would say, were more religious out of obligation. Yeah see that's what they did. They got up on Sunday. They went to church and by the way, percentage wise, they were not necessarily more students going to church then there, then there are now. Approximately 14% of the students who identify themselves for example as Catholic go to church on campus. But what I find is attitude-wise, the kids now, the students now go more out of a sense of desire and need than was the case before. So in a sense the transitioning if you will to the looser thing you know I think has created a greater sense of the value of what they're doing. You know and the purpose.

[27:36](#) **GN:** The love of God. The person, God. Rather than the judge we saw God as the judge, you know.

[27:42](#) **FRL:** Correct and the parent are right behind them.

[27:45](#) **GN:** Right. Yeah you probably know this, Mercy by Cardinal Kasper, interesting not an easy text but he's got a sense there about mercy transcends justice because of the love of God. And so there is a hell but there's nobody in it, which I thought this is a clever way of putting it. On that last thing, their interests, you know, are they more interested in money than the kids before? They're interested to make money when they get out of here, I suppose. To get a job is a driving force. Not that it always wasn't. But it's very important now they're go to college and they going to have to get a good job. It's part of the expectation.

[28:42](#) **FRL:** It's part of the expectation. It's also part of what they wind up seeing as a necessity when they see the size of the bill that they're the walking out with. I think they also can depending on their social environment see it as a judgment on themselves. You know you know, Okay. I've gone through four years now, the test of what I accomplished. If the test of a basketball team or basketball coach for example is how many wins did you have. The test of a kid going to college is very often on the simplistic level ... is "Do you have a job and how much do you make?" Yeah. You know so it is quite a pressure. And for many of them unlike the previous era,

they know all too well too many stories of people, friends who were not able to get jobs when they got out. That level of pressure when they're graduating, over five of my friends have jobs already. I don't have a job. I've seen and dealt with kids who really get very boxed in by that. You know so it's definitely is part of the picture.

[30:06](#) **GN:** Are we lucky here with rape, the drugs and the stuff that we don't make the paper as much as some of the other places, you know? I asked security about this and John Gildard said he thinks it's pretty much the presence. There's lot of presence of security around, you know, that there are means taken too avert this kind of vagrant violence you know. But it could be under the covers. I'm only saying from where I sit, I just can't imagine could just get away with it.

[30:45](#) **FRL:** In terms of, I guess it depends on how you define some of those things. Yes it certainly in terms of all those criminal things in that sense. Rape and that kind of violence. I would have to say it's minimal at best. It's very unusual like in a given year you might hear of we might be told of maybe one or two cases where a student is actually claiming to be raped and in less than a half dozen, I would say. And this is just, you know, my trying to reach back cases of where students were ... where there was violence and most of those cases are students either making their way off the campus or toward the campus by folks outside. I can't remember in recent years, an incident where a student was attacked on campus.

[32:15](#) **GN:** I think we've had one shooting in all the years that I've been here.

[32:20](#) **FRL:** It was. Yes, it was two years before I came the first time.

[32:26](#) **GN:** Yeah, a girl from Brewster and her boyfriend came over after and that was so unusual. And yet we've been ... you know just that kind of phenomenon that God has been good to us. That has avoided this...

[32:44](#) **FRL:** Sure. I mean considering the population of the college. Let's say when I was first here was about a thousand. The population of the College now, it's close to six thousand.

[32:54](#) **GN:** Yeah because that has increase not only the students but in staff and personnel and faculty and so on. And they're not all saints either. Well because I was among them.

[33:04](#) **FRL:** Plus the number of events that are now taking place on campus and from that bring in outside people. For example, now every dorm, every building actually has a security person at it. In the previous era, we didn't have security so it's made a big difference.

[33:32](#) **GN:** OK changing again. I would say Marist has changed, well let me put it this way. Old timers who come on campus kind of rare. How did this happen? I mean Marist is different than in a way. You might say, "Well. Let's hold on how different is it?" There's a lot of Marist that is the same but on that general question how did this happen? I would say that maybe you would agree. One of them would have to be the president making things and then with that you know the board et cetera. You feel that way?

[34:12](#) **FRL:** Definitely. I remember the first ... I remember when Dennis first came and when he addressed the faculty and the staff and I remember the sense because I'm usually pretty good at reading the sense of the crowd. It's part of what enables me to preach

actually. And there was a sense of total disbelief at what he was articulating. In this sense, he was articulating a vision of a place that didn't exist. And the vibration or the sense that I got from all of us sitting there was, this is like, "the man's crazy." You know this is too far to reach. But what I witnessed was Dennis repeat that vision, constantly and little by little. I think he has affected that vision. You know. He's in many ways made that vision that he articulated the outset a reality.

[36:04](#) **GN:** You were talking about Dennis and his vision about... Dennis' vision. What allowed him to implement it? How did that come about? Members of the board for one, you need money.

[36:29](#) **FRL:** Correct. And I think the board that at that time predated him and then the institution's staff. The faculty and the staff, we got it. Began to believe in what was happening. I think that's what did it. And of course his longevity didn't hurt in that process.

[37:11](#) **GN:** I was just thinking one of the first do's was the Lowell Thomas building. A little joke on that, we always put Foy in the football field and they had a parade. You know it was the second annual groundbreaking for the Lowell Thomas like you know the build ...it skips me at the moment. But he leveled the field and then they had to level it again. Besides Dennis, how about the location the Hudson, New York City? I mean what has made us what we are today? A proximity of a source of students kind of helped.

[38:02](#) **FRL:** Yes, certainly that was certainly true for a good number of years. I mean during my first time here the joke was that diversity at Marist College was when you met a kid from New Jersey or Connecticut. They all came from Long Island. Yeah but you see currently diversity now extends right across the entire country. You know, on to Hawaii and several other countries. Yeah. So but I think there are so many things that have played into that. You know whether it's a sports team becoming more notorious in a wider spectrum or whether its particular programs that managed to gain a reputation outside the area. I think those things have made a difference. However and this is purely a neophyte's observation here. But when push comes to shove when a kid and their parents come here, the place is what puts the nail in the coffin.

[39:32](#) **GN:** They see that I can live here.

[39:36](#) **FRL:** Yeah exactly. Yeah, it looks like it's out of a movie. You know and I think the fact that the Hudson was always there. Yeah but as I recall one time I think was the hundredth anniversary of the Marist Brothers and we had a gathering of all of the Brothers that could be found and discovered very quickly after they got here. That the older brothers needed to have somebody with them. Not because they were old and senile but simply because they had never known. Well they knew. They had never seen the Hudson River. So their sense of direction... But I think that has made... When I was here my first time, you didn't see the river from any place except if you were on ninth floor of Champagnat. Now you see the river from every place.

[40:31](#) **GN:** Another factor would be I at least saw and lead to believe is the Marist tradition. **Sean Carlos** says, "We get ten thousand applications, three thousand we could fill with just with Marist." You know there's enough Marist out there that want to come back. Kids come back and you know, he says, "We can't do that. We really have to diversify."

[40:54](#) **FRL:** And I've had parents of kids I had a call just the other day as matter of fact. This guy graduated in my first time here. His daughter graduated two years ago. Now his son wants to come. You know so there is that aspect of it, that's now becoming generational which wouldn't have been the case before for obvious reasons.

[41:22](#) **GN:** Right. Yeah Roy Merolli talked about that. The Notre Dame has its tradition and people just to go there. Marist has a number now that's spreading who just want to be part of this thing. That's called Marist and where it is.

[41:37](#) **FRL:** I think that goes to a lot of the work, believe it or not, that the alumni office does for example. Because if they weren't assiduously working throughout the year gathering alumni together you know that sense ...that you're still part of the body, you know.

[42:00](#) **GN:** The success stories too. I think Lee Miringoff and the polling has made us known a little bit more. And the girls' basketball team has made this known. You know so there are those kinds of success stories that would add to this.

[42:18](#) **FRL:** And even some of these quotes, lesser notorious for example teams if you will and academic areas. But they've created niches and you know. A kid who wants to come here believe it or not because of the lacrosse team. Go figure. You know a number of years ago, that was my first time. That wouldn't have been the case. First of all it wasn't a lacrosse team. So I mean that level of diversification, both academically and from the point of view of sports and other activities has made a difference too.

[43:00](#) **GN:** Personally, what were some of your hardest decisions and problems here? Would you care to share one or two? Difficult things. You were a dean one time. You had to send students a way.

[43:19](#) **FRL:** During my first time here, I was besides the chapel which - this will appear to be a non sequitur - but I've beside the chapel, I was the assistant dean of students which at the time I agreed to with the notion in my head that students could make the distinction. In hindsight, I realized I sacrificed a great deal for that duality that I was not distinguishable for many of the students. But apart from those issues, you know those kinds of issues, the discipline issue that we dealt with back then that I dealt with back then. Although some of them somewhat were humorous, I was telling someone a story just the other day. A freshman who came to my office at like the second week of school says, "Father, there's a problem with my roommate." So I said, "Well would you tell me what the problem is? Otherwise it's hard for me to do something about it." Well the kid's hemming and hawing and hemming and hawing. So I said, Okay. I'm thinking in my head. that's probably four different things that are the cause of this typically especially with a freshman. Kid finally says to me, "Can you come to our room tonight?" Oh so, I did. Knocked on the door, come in, I go in. I saw the problem right front of me. Rick Smits had his head on the desk and his legs on the dresser with his body taking up all of what was the bed. You see, we had gotten this very tall basketball player. Our first. But had never thought about the furniture. So maintenance took the metal frame of the bed, two beds cut them and weld of them together into a Frankenstein and got a large mattress. We've done better since then because now we know we're going to have big students. So we get different kinds of beds. But probably the most difficult thing was a student, a very active student who was home for a break and two days before he was coming back... from I think was the Christmas break a friend of his asked him if he would sub at his job at a gas station for him that night. And he did and he was killed in a robbery. An incredible swimmer but also a very active kid on campus. It was my first direct issue with the death of a student there. That was a standout primarily because it was the first, you know.

[46:43](#) **GN:** We lost another student in the river, on a boating...

[46:47](#) **FRL:** Actually, we lost two in a period of three or four months, that year. Both. And one was an adult student and one was an undergraduate student in the river.

[47:01](#) **GN:** Turned the page. What are the good times? What's your happiest....? What's your best... it's hard to say the best. Give me two or three "am I glad I was here to do this."

[47:17](#) **FRL:** You know this is going to seem trite but graduation does that for me. When I am sitting here on that stage and I'm watching those kids go by, after a while, you know, it becomes a bit of a drone ... it's just more kids going by. But every year, there are a couple of kids. You hear their name. You look up and you say, "Wow that kid made it, you know." And you know what the kid struggled with. Those graduations for me never fails to give me those kinds of surprises and hopes, you know. A sense of hopefulness in what you do. Not simply just because it's at the end of the line you know but because it says, "Yeah!" It's the closest to come short of a student verbalizing at some point. You made a difference for me. That's really what the faculty are predicated on that's what the staff is predicated on.

[48:35](#) **GN:** But you got to focus and realize it at the time. Otherwise it just can't be. **George Somer** would read his book. He didn't care one bit. I don't want to pick on **George** again. Funny thing you say that. VanderHeyden told me a story once. You know how during the orientation session, they put on these little skits on the stage. Well there was this one about "Oh, we're going out to study." "No I can't, you know." "Come on, we're all going." "No, my parents spending twenty thousand dollars, forty thousand dollars of my coming here." "Yeah but it's not your forty thousand!" One of the parents came up to me if you can take the lump of mine and make him like that. It's worth the forty thousand. That kind of changed that.

[49:23](#) **FRL:** That the transformation of the person.

[49:28](#) **GN:** How would you characterize the chaplaincy you have versus being a parish priest? Is one more active, one more demanding? Is there more surprises? How do you put it together?

[49:50](#) **FRL:** They are different to some extent. Although I've always approached the chaplaincy both times now from the point of view of a parish in terms of my mindset. There's been no doubt in my mind over these forty-eight years that I have been a priest that my preference is the parish. It's why I got into this really. In the beginning because there, you have the whole gamut of life sometimes within a week but certainly over time. Whereas here, it's a specific slice of life through which you might see the other aspects of life. Having said that, I love the challenge of working of... what I refer to in preaching as trying to get the opportunity to get into their head for a minute. It's the same thing I try to do when I'm in the dining room, when I'm sitting on the bench at a basketball game. My objective in the end, it's just to get in there for a minute no matter, how much time it takes. What it takes to get you there is less important. So I think the difference in the chaplaincy, now versus then, to some extent ... The most important part of the chaplaincy can be the time outside of the chapel because that's A. when they get their best opportunity to know you and you to know them. My knowing them helps me when I am in the chapel because when I am trying to confront the Scriptures, I have to be able to confront it from the vantage point of their circumstance not mine. And if I'm going to be of any value to them... So all of that time outside if you will and those other things that you get involved in... really just prepare the stage for that along the way. You definitely have the opportunity to get to know kids that will never be in the chapel near you and to help them.

[52:35](#) **GN:** And maybe someday they'll come.

[52:38](#) **FRL:** Well yeah. Typically I find the rhythm of the kids, those who are Catholic anyway is that in their freshman year and their sophomore year, there are kids that will just say I'm not going to church. I did that and I had to do that. I'm not doing that. And they'll have a whole variety of reasons that they'll come up with. Typically by the end of their sophomore year into their junior year, I find that kids come in that period come to church because they find value in it, a personal value for them. So there again, all that being about in different ways. Plus I think you really have to be open. You really do. You can't you can't just see religion as simple box or you know. Not at this stage in their lives. If ever. Yeah but I mean certainly at this stage in their lives where everything is so in flux. You know? I had a kid say to me once. This isn't my first time here and talk about the confusion of roles when I was dean and chaplain. The kid had to come to the office because he was going to have his girlfriend up for the weekend. His roommate was going home. So I said, "Well, you know we don't allow that here at the school." So and this is where the confusion piece came in. He said to me, "You're assuming that we're going to have sex." He said, "That may be true but I resent the fact that you assumed that." Well you know Gus, that made me think. So much so that I've kept that little story in my memory bank where I've forgotten almost everything else all these years because in a sense the kid was right. You know and all that by way of saying, you really do have to be much more open to where they're at. You know if you're going to have any crack at giving them a sense of where they might want to be.

[55:29](#) **GN:** And I maintained that the kids now because of the culture we're in. They don't see sex the way we did. You know, premarital and living together. You're crazy if you don't do it, you know. Because you know why take the chance you know.

[55:47](#) **FRL:** I'm currently dealing with four alumni. All of whom have announced that they are getting married who want me to participate in their wedding. All of whom are living with their spouse to be and all of whom are getting ready to see a priest somewhere throughout our country you know and I find myself in the position of trying to prepare them for that meeting with the priest.

[56:18](#) **GN:** And the priest unless he's a very recently ordained and went to college first. And then you know would have a hard time understanding their mindset about... That's my view. Time is running out but I have to get to a few things. If you had a chance, Dennis said to you, "We're having a planning session at the board, I'd like you to comment, what do you think the college needs?" What would you want the board? Could be a course in taking drugs so they realize you can't fool around with drugs because it stays in the system? Would it be building a bigger chapel because eventually we'll need it build it. Eventually they'll come and where do you see a need in the college that... they've?

[57:08](#) **FRL:** From a religious perspective?

[57:09](#) **GN:** Any perspective.

[57:13](#) **FRL:** Well, since I am the religious guru, let me touch on the religious perspective, okay? I think if we were to move if you will in a sense into that into another level of the story of Marcelin Champagnat... We would have a greater sense of the value of religion to human persons. Therefore get over the fact that we were Catholic college and are now not a Catholic college. Because I think in a way, it inhibits the way in which we deal with religion academically and from the point of view programs ... We could be in a sense if you will. It's an overused phrase but we could truly be I think from that perspective alone which is not the whole college but it's an important piece to me. On a cutting edge, if we began to emphasize, inter-religious, interdenominational sense of the way in which we approach religion. Right now we sort of nod at religion with Jewish Studies, Catholic Studies, Religious Studies. Because in the

future, just look at our world. Yeah, I mean we're getting into religious wars all over again. A sense of those values and where they cross paths and where they come from. So...interfaith.

[59:24](#) **GN:** Would this be a course in interfaith? What the world people believe?

[59:35](#) **FRL:** To some extent, it has to be more than just a course. There's got to be an attitude about it. Service could be part of it. There's no sense in having service those unless you connected with what one of the values of it. There are either going to be human values or are they going to be other than human values or they could be both. But they can't just if they're just human values then it's what because I feel good when I do that or is it because I am executing justice which is a higher value. You know those kinds of things I think. It's more pervasive thing. It's not just a set of course it's an attitudinal thing. I think.

[01:00:31](#) **GN:** My friend has Reverend Kasper's book on mercy and he has a point in that. When Christ gave out the Last Judgment, those who will count for those who didn't do it ... It's because you didn't clothe them, you didn't feed me, you didn't visit me. It's not because you stole, cheated or had committed adultery that I'm sending you to hell. It's because you're not good enough to people. The action of treating one another you know and I think that college can open ... take a stance and a wider perspective. Although you know, I've heard people from other colleges who I've interviewed here ... Graduates come back and say when their colleges now they say they look on at what Marist doing because we're going to follow them in terms of moving into internships, moving into computer science, moving in to all advanced kinds of concepts, you know. That has been created here.

[01:01:36](#) **FRL:** Yeah, the puzzle that has been put together. I think that has made for the success of the college.

[01:01:43](#) **GN:** Just one final question. Is college worth it? Is it worth the investment? You're putting up forty thousand dollars a year and to do that, that's a lot of money. You're putting in a lot of time writing papers that professors may read them or may not, may have substitutes read them whatever, okay. You're putting a lot of time in going to classes which are boring, some of which are ... you know. You're leaving home and all your old friends and coming up here. "God, give me my phone. Call my girlfriend back home." You know. Is it worth it? You know because Atlantic Monthly has the article about the whole... it's hard to do colleges and the whole changing of the perspective of the future of college is that it would be no classrooms, all the time. It may come to an institution but a lot of online learning. Where do you see some of this stuff?

[01:02:45](#) **FRL:** Well.

[01:02:48](#) **GN:** Let's start all over.

[01:02:49](#) **FRL:** Some perspective yes. Do I think... let me go for the first one, do I think it's worth it? I do. Every student, every freshman student that I see and get a moment to put my two cents into their life. I will say to them 90% of what you will learn while you are here, you will learn outside the classroom about yourself, about others, about life. Having said that, I have a rather traditional sense of education that its ultimate objective is to enable a person to think critically and make decisions. I fear that as colleges move more and more toward less human interaction and coming together ... whether that's by eLearning or by too many part-time faculty or by massive gatherings of students. I think any one of those things can help to lessen the human interaction. And I think that's critical to people learning about themselves. Forget the subject. There are a variety of ways in which you can learn the subject but then colleges

will become just a higher level of training, training school. You know a trade school in effect. It will become an academic trade school. It's why for example, I think that a core curriculum is so important. I remember the first time I attended back in my first period here. It might have been when we first adopted the core curriculum. And I remember sitting in on those arguments to and fro. It very much impressed me where people were coming from. And my fear and my observation to some extent is that that sense is being slowly eroded, not just here but in higher education generally. And then we're just going to go back to having kids who take computer science and the only thing they know how to do as important as that may be ... stare at the screen and punch numbers. That I fear... That's what I fear. The way I see creeping is not just what colleges do with whatever they call the core curriculum but what they do in terms of the size of their classes, the eLearning, and the percentage of part-time faculty because each of those I say takes away from the human interaction that I think is worth forty-thousand dollars and all the more.

[01:06:25](#) **GN:** And the development of the person. I mean who comes away to a campus has ... brushing against other cultures, other nationalities, other strangers as it were. And sometimes I find jewels in them you know. This is my thinking about it and a little bit of the experience as Eucharist Minister knocking on the door. You just don't know what you're going to meet when you go into the person and sometimes those who look the most angry and most you know are the most hope and sweetest things ever imagined. So you say how wrong I was judged by what I saw instead of by what I interacted with. Have I not touched on something that you anxious to mention?

[01:07:29](#) **FRL:** No. I think I've managed to get everything in. Actually your questions covered. What provoking, I think just about every area which is good. Perhaps the only unstated statement is that if I had it to do over again I'd do it.

[01:07:51](#) **GN:** Okay. Would you do this again?

[01:07:55](#) **FRL:** Yeah I would.

[01:07:56](#) **GN:** It's been a good run so it's been good having you. I know I mean I just know. From so many sources that it's not a disappointment to come to the chapel if you're going to be there. You know and that has been a longtime tradition. Oh I didn't ask you about some of the earlier experiences like are you a member of the CIA yet? Do you take.

[01:08:21](#) **FRL:** No I stopped taking courses. In my first time here I guess its youth were you never seem to have enough time you never seem to have enough things to do you know in the midst of being the assistant dean and the chaplain I wound up taking courses at the Culinary, I took about eighteen of them they were fun, you know.