

Oral History Interview with Virginia Shawler on the Catholic Church

This interview was conducted in 1998 by Amy Landsaw, Celine Lopez and Maria Macke as part of a High School Community Project.

Q: How long have you attended your church?

VS: ...I'm 73 years old, and I was baptized in that church...a long time.

Q: Why did you choose your church? Was it for a family reason?

VS: Mainly it was my parents were Catholic, so I was raised a Catholic, and I always stayed with the church.

Q: What are the fundamental beliefs of your church?

VS: Well, we believe in God and Christianity and that we should all be one and that we believe that God, the Father Almighty, was creator of heaven and earth and that there is a heaven and a hell and that we will all arrive or come to life the last day. We believe that death is really a happy time because you are going home to your.... and, I don't know. Is there anything else you need to know?

Q: Maybe, your beliefs about Jesus?

VS: We believe that there are three divine persons in God—God, the Father, God, the Son, and God, the Holy Ghost, and that Jesus is the Son of God, and I really can't think of anything else.

Q: Was it that he was the Savior?

VS: Yes, absolutely.

Q: What do you consider a full-fledged member of your church?

VS: When... Actually, in our church we believe in being baptized as a small child or a baby, and then when you reach the age of about the third grade, eight, you make your first communion, and then at about 12 or 13 you have...we have what we call confirmation. But I think that you are really considered a full-fledged member when you are baptized.

Q: What is your baptism ritual?

VS: By just holding the child, or if it's an adult person, they just pour water over the head and bless that person.

Q: What is the size of your congregation?

VS: I think we have two hundred families, and I don't know how many people, you know, that would be, but about two hundred families.

Q: Has the membership of your church increased or decreased throughout the years?

VS: Oh, I think it has increased through the years. That may sound a little strange because I don't think the young people go to church like they used to. You girls know about that, and...but hopefully, you know, we think that they know what is wrong and what is right, and eventually they will go to church or come to church like we think they should.

Q: Does your church have a youth group?

VS: Yes, they do have. I really don't know very much about the youth group because I am not, you know, active in it or anything. But I do think that Mrs. Meehling, Julia Meehling, and Mrs. Welsh, Debbie Welsh, are in charge, I think, of that, and they do...oh, they have besides that...their religious side of it, they have camp outs and pizza parties, and things like I think all youth groups do.

Q: Do know how long it's approximately...has been around?

VS: The youth or the youth group or the...Oh, oh, I'd say, we didn't have a youth group when I was young, so I'd say probably thirty years anyway...the youth group has probably been around.

Q: What days of the week does your church meet? Is it just Sunday?

VS: Sunday, mainly, but there is a mass; they have a...however, our church... since there is such a shortage of priests, we do not have a full-time priest here now, and, he, the priest that we have also administers to Greenup, IL and Casey, IL. So we only have...when I was a child growing up we had mass every morning of the week and you were not obligated to go, but if you wanted to, at least it was available. Now we only have mass two days a week, on Thursday and Friday, plus Sunday, and then during different times of the year, like at Christmas or mainly during Lent, we have extra services, and we have a few other things that people...we don't at this point have a Bible study group or anything, but we have had in past years, you know, but I guess that is about the extent of it.

Q: Do you have Saturday night church?

VS: Yes, we do have. I guess I should have mentioned that. We do have a mass on Saturday night at 7:00 o'clock and one mass in the morning here at 8:00. Now, many years ago we didn't have mass on Saturday. That was not allowed at that time, and I think that after...I don't know, we've had mass on Saturdays probably for 25 years, at least, and it's kind of nice because I think this was

decided to do this because it gets more people maybe a chance that don't want to get up and go on Sunday or...and (it's) more casual on Saturday night, but it's the same service.

Q: Okay. What does your Easter and your Christmas ceremonies include?

VS: Well on Christmas we have a Christmas...what we call a Midnight Mass. Actually it starts about, oh, 10:00 o'clock, the choir starts singing, and it's actually over about midnight, but they call it Midnight Mass, and then we just have a service on Christmas day, one service, and it's a mass also, and it's usually at 8:00 o'clock in the morning, and, oh, we have...in any church we always have a crib with Jesus and Mary and Joseph, and all the Wise Men, and it's decorated, you know, really very pretty like Christmas trees and candles, and things like that.

Q: I know you said you didn't have a regular priest. So how do you choose the priest that you...?

VS: Well, we do have a regular priest. He is assigned to us, but he has to also take care of the churches in Casey and Greenup, so he lives in Greenup, so he isn't here all the time. He just comes here for the services. He doesn't live in our rectory any more, but we do have a nun that is here, Sister Therese. She's a Sister of Charity, and she does some things, like visits to the sick and takes care of...we do have a little service on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday when he isn't here, but it's just...it's not a mass. It's just reading of a few prayers and things like that, and she handles that.

Q: How did your Christmas services and Easter services used to...what happened during those...?

VS: What happened?

Q: Or how did they...?

VS: Differ?

Q: Yes.

VS: Oh, I think they are pretty much the same, honey. They really haven't differed much at all except maybe...I don't think they're as elaborate as they were as when I was a child--not quite as much folderol, but, other than that, it's the same...basically the same thing.

Q: What does the ministry outside your church include?

VS: You mean like the Ministerial Association. What do they do? Is that what you mean? What else do we do besides just church?

Q: Like last rites...

VS: Okay, the last rites of the church are given. There are two...actually two types of last rites, and sometimes you get the last rites of the church when you are not...not on your deathbed, and it's just, you know, it's just a blessing more or less, and then...then if you are on your deathbed, the priest comes and gives you the last rites, which is supposed to absolve you of your sins and...so that when you die you can enter the kingdom of Heaven,

Q: Have there been any...been any memorial events?

VS: Yes, we had our hundred and...hundred and fiftieth anniversary last year, and we had over the year...we had several things; we had a mass outdoors in a place called Castle Finn which is out towards Clarksville, and that's where the...when the Catholics first came to this community. That's where they settled out there, and that's where they thought the church was going to be built; however, it was not; then the Irish Catholics settled out there, and the German Catholics settled south of town. So anyway they came together and built the church in Marshall, and, let's see, some of the other events we had last year. We had a parish mission, and that's when you have another minister come for four or five days straight. It's kind of like the protestant churches' revivals, I think, you know, and just a prayer at night and then they give you talks, and we had an ecumenical area clergy. We had the other clergy in for a K of C breakfast and a program tour of the church, and we had a musical event concert, uh, choir, organ, both in Latin and...and in German and traditional both, and I've already told you about the mass at Castle Finn, and we had an anniversary dinner with the bishop here, and we had a program of music and history at that, and then we had what they call the Old Settlers Reunion. It was a Homecoming for former church members, and anybody over 65 was kind of honored at that church party. And then we had a traditional Latin mass, for the masses used to always be said in Latin, and my brother, who is a priest, said the mass, Father Meehling, and I think a lot of the younger priests, of course, couldn't even say the mass in Latin because they haven't...you know, they just don't do that any more. And then we had a recognition of the older members. I guess I told you that. And we had a lot of artifacts, displaying pictures and prayer books and bibles and statues and rosaries and holy cards during that year, so that's the main thing that we've had, you know, that I can remember; oh, we had a celebration after a hundred years, too, but I don't remember too much about it. In fact, I may not even have been here at the time.

Q: What missions or charities does your church support?

VS: Well, all the catholic missions which are a lot of them. I'm sorry I can't tell you the names of them. I should be able to, but then we also are active in the Food and Clothing Bank, and, I'm sure there are others, but I can't tell you what they are.

Q: How is your church involved in community service, besides this...?

VS: I guess I just more or less answered that, didn't I.

Q: Yes.

VS: Yes, I think so, as far as I can think right now.

Q: Has your church contributed to the Ministerial Alliance?

VS: Yes.

Q: (not distinguishable)... the pornography?

VS: Yes, they do. I know last year they had the fundraiser down at St. Mary's Hall. This year I think it was held out at the high school. But they are very much, you know, in favor of trying to have something done about that. That's a bad situation, and I don't know what...why it's like it is because if they can get rid of them in Indiana. Of course, all they tell you here is that the laws are different. That's about all the answers you get, you know, from them.

Q: Well, that's all the questions we have. Is there anything else you would like to add about the...?

VS: Oh, after you're gone I'll think of all kinds of good things I should have told you. I...I just had this book out here. I don't know. I can tell you maybe when the...there used to be a Catholic school here many years ago. There is a picture right here in this book. I can tell you a little bit about the history maybe of it. Do you want to hear that?

Q: Yes.

VS: The history of the Catholic Church in Eastern Clark County began during the 1830's. As the settlers arrived via the Wabash River from the South and the National Trails from the East, Patrick Conohy arrived with his wife and family from Ireland in the fall of 1837. Early in 1838 several German families arrived and settled in the timber south of Marshall. During that time Bishop Brute of Vincennes, under whose jurisdiction southeastern Illinois was, sent Father Butueux as regular attendant followed by Father Lalumiere. In the spring of 1840 more German families arrived--Conrad Sans, Lawrence Forebeck, Peter Staub, and Peter Schwab, settled with their families south of town. The twenty-two of them had walked from Dayton, Ohio, by way of Cincinnati, Ohio, Louisville, Kentucky, Evansville, Indiana, Terre Haute, Indiana. About the same time Mrs. Benedict and other early pioneers contributed greatly to the growth of the early church came to Clark County. Well, I could continue some more, but I don't...your tape will probably run out here. Let's see, I was trying to think. I already told you about them settling; one settled one place and the one settled the other. After the establishments in Chicago diocese in 1843, which embraced the whole state of Illinois, the priest from North Arm was ordered to tend the spiritual needs of the

thriving mission at Marshall. Father Thomas Brady of North Arm served Marshall for two years. He was followed by Father D. Byrne and Father George Hamilton. In September 1847, Father Hugh (Brady became the first resident pastor of Marshall). And the first church was built here in 1847, and...

Q: Do you know where the Catholic Church, the school...do you know where that was located?

VS: Yes. It was located, you know, where the statute of Mary is right in the Catholic Church yard there.

Q: Uh, huh.

VS: It was right there. In fact, still in the...in the summertime when it is very dry, you can see where the grass will burn out where the foundation was. So, of course they didn't have enough...they're weren't enough students so they did away with that. I don't remember the school even, so it was, you know, before me, even. And, let's see, well that's just more about the history. We've had from this parish, we've had, I think, not a lot of priests. From our own parish here I think it's...I could be wrong in saying this, but there was a Father Geheb, and a Monsignor Fred Meehling, who was...well he would be Matt Meehling's great uncle, who he would be. And there would be my brother, Father Meehling, Father Don Meehling, and I don't think there was any other priests that have ever been ordained from our own parish here. We had a few nuns—there was Sister Mary Zita (Clara) Geheb, and Sister Mary Laurentine (Martha Grace) O'Rourke, and Sister Helena--Catherine Madden, and Sister Ida--Mary Madden, and Sister Catherine Sienna (Agnes Ryan) and they were all from our parish.

Q: How long has Sister Therese, Theresa, is that her name, been here?

VS: Yes. Sister Therese. How long has she been here?

Q: Uh, huh.

VS: They've been here...she...we did have another nun here who was...her name was Sister Mary, and she...they were both Sisters of Charity. I think they've been here about five years, I'd say.

Q: Okay. Thank you for...

VS: Okay.

Q: ...for your attention.

VS: What I told you, I'm sure is fairly accurate. I mean I wouldn't...(no further recording)