

Waterloo - Blessed Sacrament - Oral History - 1987

I'm Lou Rico, age 57 with my wife Ruth whose age 54 young. We live at [omitted]. We are now visiting with our 12-year-old granddaughter, Katie Harrington. Gramps, when did you first come to Blessed Sacrament parish? Katie, in the Fall of 1958 we moved to a house on Julian Ave, south across from Hwy 218 from McDonald's. Of course, McDonald's wasn't there then. What was the neighborhood like then? Hwy 218 was 4 lanes then and not so busy, most of the businesses weren't there yet. Lots of the area was just open fields like you see out on the farm. Steffan Ave was a gravel road and quite a few of the houses weren't even built yet. Carriage Hill Drive wasn't there and the area behind our house and the church was big field with a little creek running through it. In fact, the house on Steffan Road where we now live wasn't built until about 2 years after we came here. Nani, what did you think of the parish at first? Well, I heard a lot about Blessed Sacrament parish, but I'd never been there, and I don't really know what I expected, but anyway I was really surprised. We drove up for Mass and we were a little early there were Grant's and myself and your mom and Sue ??? and [inaudible]. Well, we finally figured out Mass was in the basement of the school, where the cafeteria is now. That's what served as a church then. When we went inside, I was amazed to see that some of the pews were varnished, and some were painted, and they weren't all painted the same colors. The walls were several colors, and most of the kneelers were just boards with no padding on them. I didn't really like it at first, but after a few Sundays we got used to it and when we got to know the people of the parish, we didn't even notice all the different colors of the paint. Nani, how did you get acquainted? Well that first Sunday after Mass several people came up and greeted us and talked with us a little bit and then they invited us to the bazaar they were having, so we went over there and talked to some more people and then we got your mother and Uncle Nick enrolled in school, and then the next week Father Putz came to our house to visit and he asked us to join CFM and we got to know a lot of other people that way. Gramps, tell me about CFM. Well, Katie, CFM stands for Christian Family Movement, all of the people who belonged were divided into groups of 5 or 6 couples and the groups met every two weeks in our homes and discussed many different subjects, mostly pertaining about how to be better parents and better Christians, even about budgets and what have you. We had books with lessons and projects in them for us to follow. Father Putz usually attended the meetings and I remember one night when the meeting was in our house, at the end of the meeting there was a time for Father's remarks about our discussion, everyone was quietly waiting for him to talk when the cuckoo came out of the clock right above his head and leaned right over him and cuckooed 10 times, everyone snickered, but Father never even let on that he heard it. Many of our parish activities were started by CFM, like the Passover meal on Holy Thursday, that was started by our particular CFM group and on the first Passover meal was held in Hank and Irene Lenford's basement, it was just our little group there. And then people heard about it and they wanted to come, so we asked the KC's and we had it there and then it grew some more and then we had it at the motel downtown, and then it got so big with other people wanting to come from other churches, some weren't Catholic but they were all interested, and it got so big that we just couldn't handle it, so we started having it again in our own parish and just our people mostly would come to it. But then there was our Epiphany party where we used to have 3 little boys as the 3 kings, and we had potluck supper and [we brought] in the old Christmas trees and we had a big time. And then there was the parish camp outs and several other activities like that where the families would get together for fun and fellowship and it made us more concerned about our parish and the things we could do to help. Gramps, how did

you get involved in the parish? Well, when we first moved there I started ushering and then I figured that I'd better start getting more people involved in being ushers so I could get involved in other activities in the church. So then I got, became active in the men's society known as the Holy Name Society then, in fact I was president of the group when we got the chance to manage the parking lot across from the Cattle Congress at Cattle Congress time, it was a successful project and that's where we earned a lot of our money to help keep our sports program going. Actually, it was so successful that the Men's Society still carries out the project each Fall. Later on, I served on the parish council, also then as president of the Board of Education, and then also on the Finance Commission. Nani, were you involved with parish activities too? Yes, Katie, I was over the years, I've been active in the Women's Society and many of their projects, such as being a Circle Leader. I was co-chairperson of a funeral committee and I helped with Fall Festival work. In fact, one year Gramps and I were co-chairmen of the Fall Festival. I belonged to the Legion of Mary many years and for several years I cooked in the school kitchen. At the present time I'm the parish historian. Gramps what did you think of Father Putz? Well, Father Putz was a living legend at that time, and we loved him very much. He always worked so hard, never thinking about himself. He was such a [kind] person, so kind, so considerate of everyone else. He was our priest that spent much time at the school, but wherever he went there was always a group of children around him. He loved kids so much and they loved him, and I remember that if somebody was really really naughty at school [inaudible]. And sometimes if they were really really bad, he had to spank, but they said that when he spanked he always cried because he loved the kids so much. Father Putz was kind of a jack of all trades, he was the school bus driver, janitor, carpenter, painter, plumber, and even a donut maker, whenever we needed some extra money, he and Larry Cunningham, at that time was the school cook, would make a big big batch of donuts and sell them after Mass. Were they good? I hate to laugh Katie, I'll let mom, or grandma say something here, but they were kind of greasy. They were so greasy that they would put them in paper sacks and sell them after Mass and the grease would come right through the sack, but nobody could say no to Father Putz though, so we all went home with donuts. Father Putz was a good friend and a devoted priest, without him our parish certainly wouldn't be what it is today. What was the school like then Nani? Well, when we first came to Blessed Sacrament they just finished building the second wing of the school. The west wing where the little kids had their classes, and they connected the two wings. The cafeteria was on the north end of that west wing, because they basement where it is now was being used for the church. At one time there were 620 children in our school, it was very crowded. There were 40 in many of the classes, with 2 or 3 classes for each grade. There were many nuns teaching then too, at least 16 or 18. Sister Florence was the principal, and there was no kindergarten or preschool in those days. In fact, Katie, I think you were in the first kindergarten class at Blessed Sacrament, weren't you? Yes, that was in 1980. Our children attended Blessed Sacrament and then went on to Columbus High, we saw things change. The cafeteria was moved downstairs after the new church was built and more classrooms were put in the space where the little one had been and then the learning centers and the library were developed, and the preschool and the kindergarten were started. The house across from the school on the corner of Steffan and Stratford had been used for the rectory but after the new rectory was completed after the church was built, some of the nuns moved there to make more room in the convent. Later, that house was sold. We got to be really good friends with many of the nuns over the years and we miss seeing them and also many of the priests who have moved on. Gramps, when did they decide to build a new church? Katie, because it was so crowded and there was so many more parishioners

all the time, often the smaller kids would sit on the kneelers while the parents and older kids sat in the pews. There were folding chairs everywhere and people standing up in the side aisles and the back of the church. We just needed more room. Do you remember watching them build the new church? Oh yes, almost every evening we would go over to see how much progress was made that day, we tried to be like sidewalk superintendents. It was very exciting especially when they put the great big beams in place. Do you remember the first Mass? Almost like it was yesterday. It was on Thanksgiving Day and everyone was so happy and so grateful and so thankful. Many people cried with joy. I got to be among the people who carried up the gifts that day, so it was an extra special day. It meant so much to me. Do you like to live next to the church? Yes, we do Katie. It's been very convenient. We never had to worry about getting our big family to church or school or meetings because we could walk, and we always felt a part of what was going on at church or school because we were so close, and I really enjoy hearing the bells ring. Will you always want to go to Blessed Sacrament parish? We surely hope so. It has been a very important part of our lives, and when I say "it" I mean Blessed Sacrament parish. Thank you.