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Father Ralph Bodziony interview, 20 February 2003

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Tremont Oral History Project

Interview with Father Ralph Bodziony
Interviewed by Garrick E. Lipscomb
February 20, 2003
6:00 PM
Assumption Church
Grafton, Ohio

Garrick E. Lipscomb: How long did you live in Tremont?

Father Ralph Bodziony: September of 1969 to January 2000, January or February, something like that

GL: You were both a priest of the church and then the pastor of it as well?

RB: Yes, well, the first four years I was the associate, there was another Father who was pastor. Then he retired, changed the retirement age at that time. So then in 1974 I became the pastor.

GL: Was any of your family from Tremont?

RB: No. I didn't have any relatives there at all.

GL: What's one of the first things, when someone mentions Tremont or the Tremont History Project that comes into your mind?

RB: There have been a lot of studies and different things like that there, so it doesn't surprise me. We had while I was there a celebration of 150th anniversary of the area being a city. (Something like that). There've been different observations and things like that. I didn't think that it was anything out of the ordinary, especially the way that the interest in the neighborhood has changed.

GL: In that thirty-year period, what were some of the things that you noticed changed?

RB: I think the biggest change was the city. The city was the biggest problem. They didn't care. Snow didn't get cleaned very quickly or very easily or at all sometimes. Safety was a big issue. I thought it was neglected quite a bit. I think it was that, and then what they did was they split the ward up. It was one ward, the Seventh Ward, then they split the ward. Mr. Kucinich was the councilman and it was split and became part of the downtown ward. They split it four ways actually. Part of it went to Broadway, part of it went to downtown, part of it went to the West side, so it made a boundary right there. Whether they did it on purpose or not, I don't know.

GL: Did that seem to split the neighborhood?

RB: Well, in a way it split influence somewhat, because you had four different councilmen, who were sort of butting up against each other in the neighborhood. I would say though, that the neighborhood was always, sort of (divided). There were a good number of people that were active people. There was an organization where I was on the board, Merrick House, and there was another organization called TACA, Tremont Area Civic Association. Eventually that wasn't funded too well and I think they still keep a telephone number but I don't think they get any funds, I'm not sure. Mrs. Marvis worked with them. And then there was a charter activated for the neighborhood development and the Merrick House was instrumental in instituting Tremont West Development Corporation. It went off on it's own and had it's own funding. One of the guys from Merrick House became the first director and later he was in charge of other projects in Cleveland. So people started trying to put pressure on the city. At least improve the neighborhood in a lot of ways. It was a good neighborhood apparently years ago. We had some good families; unfortunately the highway started them moving. They built the highway in, and peoples started moving more and more and more. Then the people who owned the homes, unfortunately there were many absentee landlords, I don't know if there still are many, they would just rent to anybody. Those people were careless and burn down the house. When I came there and saw the streets, and then a few years and the houses were burned down, they were burning down so fast that you heard fire engines all the time. Whether they were burned down on purpose, I don't know. They were really burning fast. It decimated the neighborhood.

GL: Were you concerned initially about the security at the church?

RB: Yes and no. We had a few break-ins. One break-in to the church that I can recall. Some guy broke in and I don't know what he was looking for. I think he was half out of his mind, he broke into the school cafeteria and he just took some pop. So apparently he needed some pop for his dope or something. That's all he really did, there was a little damage. There was a broken statue or something. Other than that really nothing, I was thinking of that today, we used to keep churches open, actually at that church (Saint John Cantius) we always kept the back door open. We never had any trouble. There was a breezeway if someone wanted to go in that way, so the security wasn't there. Mostly the security was for cars. People who would come to church, first thing you know, somebody would break into a car and steal it. That was only in recent years that it became a problem. It wasn't real flagrant, but it would happen once in a while. It got to the point where you had to hire somebody just to supervise. If you had some activity, you'd have someone around. Make sure kids didn't come around stealing cars. Although people in the neighborhood, once in a while, the elderly, would get robbed, pocketbooks especially. Whether they we people from the neighborhood or not, I don't know. They could have been from anywhere, I don't know. There were a couple of bad families, I know that. Always in trouble. That was part of the problem. I don't think we ever had a break-in at the rectory. Not in all the time I was there. People would come to the door, and ask me why I didn't come to the window first to see who was at the door;

here they'd come for baptismal records or something. They told me to look out the window next time. During the day it wasn't a problem, of course at night, people were a little leery to go out at night. At that time business after business was closed and people moved out and it was sort of an abandoned neighborhood for a while.

GL: Is there a general description of your parishioners, or was it a cross-section? I know that there are a lot of churches in the area; did yours draw a certain population?

RB: At that time, I would probably say half of our people lived over two miles away and a half lived under. I got there and we had about 1400 families. When I left, there were only about 400 some families. Most of them went out to the suburbs. Other people died off. There weren't that many people moving into the neighborhood. So it dwindled down. They were a cross section, I'd say. We had one family there that now lives in Granger. He teaches at John Carroll to this day. They used to live on Seventh Street. His sister lived there too. We had some people that had good jobs. That's why some would move. They would get to be a little more affluent, I guess people would talk or something, so they'd move out further from the neighborhood. We had one family, and they're still there, the father died last year, but that was always considered a rough neighborhood. If you've read our history, did you see that where the judge told that one family that when they got in trouble, he would either put them in jail, or they had to move out of the neighborhood.

[Laughter]

GL: No, I didn't.

RB: And this father that lived there, he just died about last year, when he'd meet one of those people that lived in the suburbs, he'd say you're one of the ones who had to move out of the neighborhood.

[Laughter]

RB: They didn't think much of the neighborhood that there were a lot of problems. There were a lot of people there at one time.

GL: I know that mass is still spoken in Polish.

RB: They have one mass in Polish, yes.

GL: Has it always been a single mass?

RB: No, no. I imagine at one time they said all of them in Polish. In my time we only had one. But there are a good number of the older people that come back for that reason. They had lived there and they might have moved out to the suburbs, but they still come back in for that reason. They relate to that better. But you know you have others, Saint Peter and Paul which is Ukrainian, you have Holy Spirit which is white Russian,

you have Our Lady of Mercy, which was Slovak and then you have the other, they call it the cathedral, but it's not a cathedral because there's no bishop there, Saint Theodosius, the Russian church, so then you had your root parishes. Saint Michaels was a German parish until the forties I guess. So you had a lot of ethnic people in the neighborhood. That was why people settled there. You had the Lebanese or the Greeks, they had their church. In fact that Lebanese church turned into, Saint George was the name, now I think it's mainly Palestinian, mostly Arab. That's why people were attached there. They'd come from Europe, find a place that they could afford or live with relatives.

GL: Were there occasions when newly immigrated citizens came to the church? From Poland?

RB: Oh yes, we had. While I was there, it was a funny situation. We didn't sponsor the families, but they were brought in by other organizations, for instance there was a Lutheran Church, Redeemer, on a street behind Clark, there's a Lutheran Church there, behind Pick-and-Pay. They had, through the Lutheran organization, they had sponsored people. See the people would go to the Catholic organization, and it was all filled, so they'd try the other organizations. So the Lutherans sponsored a number of them and when they got them here they didn't know what to do with them, so they'd call us. We would take them over and provide housing for them. There were, I don't know, maybe six families, something like that. Eventually they all moved out of the neighborhood. Most of them had some kind of profession, and first thing you know they had friends in Chicago, North Carolina. They were here for a little while and then they left. It was through the Lutheran organization that this happened. One came somehow through this, maybe I shouldn't say this on the tape, it was sponsored by the Jewish faith organization that helped refugees. And it was interesting; I used to go downtown with these people, because they'd have to get a green card. We went down there and there was a whole room full of people. People waiting. We took this card up and when they saw the card, we were waited on within ten minutes. Everybody was still sitting there when they left, so it seemed that there was some influence there somehow that these people had. As far as I know they weren't Jewish, how they got in on that plan I don't know. At least I don't think anyone in that family was Jewish. Nonetheless, we had some that came directly from Poland. And before that, in prior years, after World War II, I guess the number of people; there were a number of people. We has a fellow, in fact he lives in Seven Hills now, he's an artist and he draws pictures and they're just lines. I don't know if you've ever seen a picture like that, it's a pretty big frame and all it is is lines. He sells these, I don't know. His mother told me the father some how, during World War II some of the Polish soldiers got into the English army somehow. Relatives were taken out through, I don't know if it was through Russia into Iran, and Egypt. Some of them ended up in South America. This one kid, he was baptized in Iran, made his communion down in South America somewhere. Well this particular kid, his mother and the ladies were told him they were going to take him to Africa, and they thought Africa and America were the same place. And so they went, and they said that the ship dropped them off on this barren piece of land, gave them some food and they left. They said they had a missionary with them, they claimed the missionary went to look to see if they could find anything and disappeared. So they don't know if the natives got him or what happened.

So they stayed there, just where this beach was, they would bring them food every once in a while, and that son got sick. He was very ill and somehow something happened to his arm and now he makes his living as an artist. Drawing these pictures with these multi-colored lines. She said that later when they went to England, after the war, she said that her husband couldn't even recognize her, that's how much weight they had lost. How bad they must have looked after that. There were a number of people that came after World War II, that was before my time, before I came there. There were a number of people that helped, they're still around, their children are still around. Successful I guess because they generally moved out of the neighborhood.

GL: So there are now roughly 400 families in the parish?

RB: Approximately, we had about 200, a little over 200 married families and 200 widows or widowers who lived alone. Some of them had a number of children living with them, I mean adult children. When I got there, I think we had 600 bachelors and old maids living at home with mama. We needed to start some kind of a club for these people, get them together. It was surprising, we had elderly people still living with their parents. Some of them retired and were still living at home.

GL: In the area there are homes in the front of the lot and homes in the back...

RB: That's from where there was another school. Do you know where Tremont School is? Well, it was torn down later, but when they were building that school, they had homes there. So in order to build the school, they sold off the homes and they were moved onto these lots that way. And so you wound up with these large lots and they'd put two homes on them. That's what I heard, how most of them got that way. They moved those homes onto different lots around the area. It got congested by having those homes. They built the new school, at one time I guess there were two buildings at Tremont, they had over 2000 kids in grade school there. One of the buildings became a receiving school, I don't know if they were for problem kids or what, and then eventually it was abandoned. While I was there they tore it down. They weren't using it, that's where the park is now in front, but that was a school there.

GL: I understand that's one of the largest...

RB: Even now, there must be about 700 kids there. It's still a large school.

GL: Were there groups that were active that seemed to maintain the cultural traditions, among the Polish?

RB: It sort of maintained itself. At one time, I guess there were. They had a hall that was; you know where the Irish bar is across the street from the church? The Treehouse. On the next corner, there was the Pollonia Club and at one time that was active and it was for weddings and they had dances. That was a real center for a lot of their activities for a long time. Then eventually they had a bar there, and there was a shooting and the place was closed and it wasn't used for a long time. Finally I think part

of it burned down, then they ripped it down finally. They just tore it apart. That was a cultural place for the Polish people. There was also, you know where that picture was made, the deer hunter? That was Lemko Hall, now you know that Lemko's our people. They're from part of Poland, the Eastern part of Europe, between Czechoslovakia and White Russia. Interestingly enough, I met a man from this parish whose parents belonged to Lemko Hall at one time and he was from Akron. I never met anyone before that who belonged to that organization. There was, at one time, across from the park, there was a Polish Library Home. That was also an organization that was a lodge-type thing. They had a hall there they used to rent out. They had a library upstairs and unfortunately when the roof became insecure, it started leaking. They threw all the books away that were upstairs. They had a dumpster outside. I found a bible in there from sixteen hundred something. I guess it's still at the parish. It was interesting if you read Chaucer in 1600, it's a lot harder to read in English. The Polish bible I could read very easily. It hadn't changed that much since 1600. It was interesting.

[Interruption]

RB: Also, at one time, where the Russian church is, the Ursalines had a convent. Did you know that? In fact they tore it down, I think when I had just came there. It was a big building. If you read the, I read an article in the thing the Ursalines put out about it. I'm not sure if it was connected with slaves or with the slaves that ran away, stuff like that. I don't know if you know but that's how Lincoln Park got started, I guess.

GL: No, I wasn't aware of that.

RB: The homes, you know where Sokolowski's is? Did you ever notice those brick homes across the street? Well that was originally a Civil War hospital. And those individual homes on Eleventh Street were doctor's homes. They actually had used that as a parade grounds I guess. There in Lincoln Park for a while in the Civil War. Somehow it was connected with the Civil War. That area and those brick homes were part of the setup of Veteran's Hospitals.

GL: Where the homes overlook the valley?

RB: Well, not quite, it's across the street from Sokolowski's. There's a whole bunch of row homes. That was the hospital. And behind it on Eleventh Street were individual homes, about three of them, they claimed, I was told they were doctor's homes. A long time ago they worked in the hospital. Interesting things. Go way back to that time. And of course, you know they got the University started, that's why they've got all those names there. I think where the Russian, the Ukrainian church is, the corner was originally a college. College Avenue and Seventh Street. That was originally a college. Then he had trouble with his board of directors, and the thing folded I guess. They sold off the land, but that's how the name College and Professor and all that got started. It was supposed to be a college from Wilberforce, or someplace, I guess started a college down there.

GL: In living there, did you often go downtown?

RB: Oh yes, because it was convenient. I had been in Berea before that and anytime you needed something downtown, you had a long ride before the freeways. So it was real nice, you could zip downtown for anything. We did a lot of different things, downtown, places we dealt with, bought stuff downtown. There are religious goods stores downtown, and other kinds of places. There was State Chemical, where we'd get our cleaning supplies down there. It was very convenient to be near town. You could get whatever you wanted to in a hurry. Or when you had a festival, you could go down to some of the food places, there on Fortieth Street and get all your stuff. It was nice.

GL: There's Saint Augustine's also in the neighborhood. Are there other Catholic churches?

RB: There's five Catholic Churches in three blocks. Saint Augustine's and right next to it is Holy Spirit, that's Byzantine Catholic. At one time, Holy Spirit, that school across the street that's now for retarded, Saint Joseph's. That was built by Holy Spirit and they had a school there. But then they transferred that parish to Fifty-Fourth Street. So then they only had a remnant of older people there. I guess they were going to close it at one time. Then they sold it to the diocese, and the diocese uses it as part of a school for the retarded. Then you have Our Lady of Mercy, right on the Park. It's a Catholic church. Then you have down on Seventh Street, Saint Peter and Paul, which is also a Catholic church. It's Byzantine. And now you have Saint Andrew's, right across from the hospital, which is a Korean church. It used to be a Polish National. So you have six parishes in about three blocks.

GL: They serve specific communities...

RB: Right, well, Saint Augustine is supposed to be the territorial parish, but actually they mostly serve, the father there is the chaplain for the deaf and blind, I think. And then, of course, they started that hunger center a number of years ago for Saint Vincent de Paul. They serve the indigent. That is a little problem because those people come from all over, they don't just come from that neighborhood. They were a little bit of a problem; in the park they would leave clothes and junk. They'd sleep in the park in the summertime. It made some people a little leery about using the park after dark.

GL: I know that they sign mass at Saint Augustine's. Did you find that the parishes worked together?

RB: There really wasn't too much. Once in a while we'd have something together, but by and large each one had it's own constituents depending on their nationalities. We were the only ones left with a school. At one time, Our Lady of Mercy had a school and we joined together for a couple of years. Then the sisters left Our Lady of Mercy and so they just pulled out of it. We were the only ones left with a grade school after that. Saint Augustine had a school, but that was a long time ago, I don't remember. When I came to the neighborhood, it was closed already. That was in 1969, so when they

closed it before that, I don't know. That was the old Pilgrim church. Originally it was built as Pilgrim church. Saint Augustine's. Then Pilgrim church built a new place and Augustine's was in a storefront down on Jefferson and they bought that parish. Pilgrim church started there so that's an old structure. Been there a long time.

GL: So the Augustine parish started in a storefront?

RB: Yes, there used to be a bakery there on Tremont and Jefferson. There was a bakery right around the corner. Some of the people from our parish eventually had that bakery. That's where Saint Augustine's church started. Father Ralph Coletta bought that building. He was pastor there for a while. He wanted to restore it and make it an historic place. I guess he couldn't come up with financing, so he finally sold it to somebody.

GL: Does Saint John Cantius still have a school?

RB: No, they closed it about two years ago. They use all the buildings because they have two different PEP schools. Parents for Educational Progress. They're troubled kids. They use what used to be the high school, because we had a high school until 1969. Then Central Catholic came in and took it over. They amalgamated four different Catholic schools into one. They had Saint Stan's, Saint John Cantius, Our Lady of Lourdes and Saint Michael's. They made it into one, but they had four campuses. Eventually, slowly, their enrollment dwindled and they went down to two campuses and now they're down to one. They turned it back over to our parish in 1979 or something like that. We had the grade school in the other building, we moved it there. Then Spanish-Americans came and used part as a daycare. It was open to everybody, so they're still there, in the other building. There's a Head Start and there's two different programs, they call it... It's privately run and they have an office on Euclid Avenue and they have a few of these campuses around town. They bring kids from all over to go to those schools, by taxi, and they work with these kids that are problem kids. I guess nobody else can afford to treat them or whatever. So they're using all the buildings at Cantius. Then we had that halfway house for alcoholics, Matt Talbot came in where the convent used to be. So they're using that building. So all the buildings are taken but no longer a school, grade school or even a high school. They all closed down.

GL: Any interaction with any non-Catholic churches in the area?

RB: Yes, on Easter we used to have a walk from all the churches. Stations, we would call them. We had a little prayer and sing a song. They'd go from church to church on Friday or Saturday. I think it was Good Friday we'd go. Mostly that was the one time of the year that we'd have that. And then after that there was a soup and sandwich, and there'd be a devotion in the church. So that people could see the other churches. So they did that for a few years. Whether they still do that, I don't know. We used to try to get them together that way.

GL: How about Lincoln Park?

RB: That had a funny history, there's a history book out on that. Originally some lady started and bout that and made a school for girls. Then something happened to the school. Eventually the property was deeded to the city. That's when they made it a park. If the army used that as a practice ground, I don't know. Supposedly it did, there is some literature you can find. It tells you when the school was there, not very long. What happened to it, I don't know.

GL: Were the families in the parish large?

RB: The older families, yes. At one time, they had four priests at the parish. In 1929, when I had to go check some records, they had 1000 boy and 1000 girls confirmed the same day.

[Laughter]

RB: With one sponsor per person, they couldn't have possibly put that many people in church. That was a tremendously big parish at one time.

GL: What are your thoughts on the decline of the church?

RB: Well, like I said, part of it was the highways, social engineering, they were nice homes that were torn up. Even Fourteenth Street, if you ever go in some of those homes, they're beautiful inside. They have beautiful oak woodwork, really some nice things. Even that Pelton, we bought that for a while. The apartment house across from the park. It's a rest home now. But the hospital bought it for a while and they were going to tear it down I heard. Make a parking lot for the hospital. So when we found out, we got some people together, we bought that, we kept it going. Those are really nice apartments the way they're built. The only thing common between two apartments would be the kitchen wall. They were built in such a way that all the walls are freestanding. There was an alcove, this big and then you'd have an apartment here and an apartment there and a hallway in between. The two apartments that were up against each other, only the backs touched. There were actually two different buildings, joined together. It isn't one building, even though it looks like one. They were built together. There were thirty-two apartments, sixteen and sixteen. I think there were sixteen on each side. Very nice inside. Eventually some fellow bought it off of us and made a rest home out of it. The same ones that own Aristocrat. The one on Pearl and some of those places. One of the guys, he later on died, he wasn't very old. The whole Aristocrat family didn't buy into this, just he did. He did a real nice job with it. It's really nice in there. And the idea was that they could go right to the hospital. When you live there, you live in your apartment, assisted living. Next door is like a rest home. You could live on the top floor of the hospital. You could go right from one to the other. It was really interesting how he set that up. At one time it wasn't far from town and there were some rather affluent people living in the neighborhood. Judges and everything else. Rockefeller lived on Fourteenth Street. Right across from the Greek Church where the freeway is now. Rockefeller used to have a house there. The thing that's next to the hospital now, the brick building, that was originally owned by the Gold Bond family, they made the beer. You probably don't

remember that. But Gold Bond used to be a big beer company in Cleveland. That was their family home there. There were important and affluent people on Fourteenth Street. In fact, I was told that when the church was built, Saint John Cantius, the poor people weren't allowed to go past what was called Ninth Street. The poor people didn't go past there because the rich people lived there. There used to be homes down in the valley. We had people who could remember when the steel mills weren't there. Those steel mills weren't always there. That came in much later. The steel mills originally started down on Thirtieth and overlooking the lake. Originally that's where they were and out in Cuyahoga Heights. Cuyahoga works. And then they spread all over in the valley. But I had guys when they died told me they remember when there were cows down in the valley. There were no steel mills there. The neighborhood changed and now it's changing back now.

GL: Had the Valley View homes been built when you moved to the neighborhood?

RB: Those were built in what, about 1936. They were built, and a Monsignor made a study that they were better off knocking down these old homes and getting rid of them for economic reasons and building projects. That was one of the first projects built. That, and the one off Twenty-Fifth Street, above Washington Avenue. And the ones on Fifty-Fifth Street. The one in Tremont was the first one built, I think. That's where some of the homes came from also, a few of the homes, when they were building the projects; they moved the homes out of there. When I came there, those projects were beautiful. We had doctors, and a lot of the interns lived there from Metro. When I came there it was real nice. We had a good number of parishioners living there. The all of the sudden they changed, they started letting anybody into them. They became a problem for a while.

GL: Was there a turning point?

RB: It was all this stuff about, integration or something. They wanted to help people get ahead or something. I don't know. All of the sudden, you know, it just changed, the whole complex changed. I remember I used to go and visit some of those people for Communion on first Fridays, and there were a number of ladies that lived in those apartments at that time. They were very nice, and they still are nice apartments basically, if you go inside, they're modern built apartments inside. Just that, unfortunately, so of those that live in them don't take care of them.

GL: You mentioned that homes burnt down in the area...

RB: Oh yes, all the time. One guy went to jail. You probably heard about him, Nader, Joe Nader. He owned a number of the properties right across from the church. They finally got him because he tried to insure one home twice, by two insurance companies, but they didn't go for that. When it burned down, he tried to collect on both. Then he had another one, he owned property across from Lutheran Hospital and he tried to bribe an inspector. He was inspecting the place or something. I don't know if he's out of jail or not, but he owned over a hundred properties at that time. There was something

fishy. I don't think the guy could afford it, he was from Lebanon. All the homes were in the general area. He owned homes in other places too. I don't know, it was funny, whether he was a sort of front man for somebody that bought the property. What they would do, whether he did it, what was going on was, you'd buy the property for \$10,000, sell it to your brother-in-law for \$15,000, buy it back for \$20,000, then it burned down and you got twice the money you pay'd for it. So there was some of that going on. People are still doing those things.

GL: Did you see the homes being rebuilt?

RB: Oh yes. The fellow that's rebuilding those homes, along Railway Avenue. He built some homes and he lived in it. He built a number of homes in that area that were pretty well burned out. That used to be, like I said, there used to be homes and homes there. We used to go on house visitation, and it would take me a day for each one of those streets, there were so many people living there. There was Sixth Street and Seventh Street and Thurmond Alley they call it now. That's how many people we had down there, but eventually some of them moved out and some of them the home next door would burn and they would get burned. We had a housekeeper whose house got burned because the guy next door. Now I don't know if he was goofy, and set his house on fire, but she lost her house that way. There were two families in that house and that was two families that had to go someplace else. So there was a lot of that going on.

GL: Did it seem that after the fires there was a decision made whether to stay in Tremont?

RB: Yes, I guess. Originally when people came back from World War II, there just weren't enough homes in the area. Some of the younger people started going further away. The other people, a lot of the homes burned down. There just weren't that many homes available in the area that they could move into.

GL: What were the occupations of the parishioners at Saint John Cantius while you were there?

RB: Some of them worked in the steel mills down there, a number of families. Gee, they worked all over the city. One fellow worked for one of these, they delivered meats and stuff like that. There were all kinds of people. A couple of them were carpenters, a couple worked for plumbing outfits, I don't know if they were plumbers, but they worked in a plumbing outfit. Selling stuff to stores and stuff like that. All kinds of occupations. It was hard to say. There were some policemen, a number of policemen that lived in the neighborhood. It was just a variety of things. Some teachers.

GL: Growing up Catholic, I've noticed that priest only stay at a certain parish a number of years, then move. How was it that you were at Saint John Cantius for so long?

RB: Maybe no one else wanted it? I don't know.

[Laughter]

RB: Right after I was assigned, a parish opened up in Lorain, the personnel board at that time asked me if I wanted to move, I said well, it looked sort of funny. You come to a parish and you're there two years and you're going to move to another parish. I was all by myself there and I would have been all by myself at the other parish. I really didn't see any advantage, and that place was near the steel mills too. I really didn't see what the point was of moving, so I told them not to. Maybe after that they put me on a different list, he doesn't want to me, I don't know. I've inquired a couple of times about other parishes, but I never made any moves. Why, I don't know, maybe because I turned that one in Lorain down. And then the personnel board and everything changed how they did those things. You had to apply for it. I suppose maybe, I don't know, they wanted younger guys to go out to these other parishes.

GL: You mentioned the Polish bible from the 1600s and were able to read it. You can read and speak Polish fluently?

RB: Yes, I'm not great, but yes, we had sermons in Polish. How much the people got out of it, I don't know. I had mass in Polish all the time. It was a very nice parish. There were a lot of good people, like in most parishes I think the same people do all the work. Certain people are interested and the rest sit back and applaud or condemn. One of the two. There were a lot of nice people. I was surprised, when you look back now, people were pretty good. We got a committee with the Greek Church; they used to have a festival. They were the ones we had dinner with once, with Mrs. Marvis. She convinced us that we should try to have a festival. Now that parish festival is more of an ethnic festival. We used to make \$10,000 to \$12,000 a year from the parish festival; we changed to having it a Polish-ethnic festival with the church being in the background, not even mentioning it. We went up to \$35,000 we made eventually when I left there. It was a big difference. It attracted people, they went for that ethnicity, a lot of people who weren't necessarily ethnic like to come and eat. The Greeks still have their festival and they make a lot of money. That was a big thing. We were able to get enough people to work, it was hard a lot of the time. Some of them were people who came back; parishiners would come and help their family run things. It was interesting how we could do that.

GL: What were some substantial differences you saw from the time you arrived in Tremont to the time you left?

RB: Night and day, the neighborhood turned around. When I got there it was just an ordinary neighborhood which was going down hill. Eventually it hit rock bottom, I would say, with all those homes burning. We had three or four businesses, we had a hardware store. The place dwindled, you didn't have the people around at that time. In fact, I was getting a haircut in the barbershop one day, right across the street, right down the street from the church. There's a drapery place now, across the street from the church. Right next to that there was a barbershop. A guy came in, their house had burned down across the street and he wanted to know if I wanted that lot. He would give it to me, because the rest of the family wasn't interested in it. I guess they had moved out and the

one guy that was living there died and there was a guy sitting there, who had another barber shop across the street, but I don't think he ran it as a barber shop, but he lived there, he and his wife. He happened to be there and I told the guy, why don't you talk to him. He owns that building next door, he'd probably be glad to take it off your hands. So I guess that's what happened, eventually he got the lot. Another guy wanted to give, and he actually did, they moved out of the neighborhood and they gave me their house. Just like that.

[Laughter]

RB: They were giving homes away.

GL: What year did this happen?

RB: Well, it was maybe around 1969, late 1970's. I gave that house away. I sold some guy my car; he claimed he gave me more money to buy the car than to buy the lot. That house is still standing, it's been remodeled and it's a nice house. We had other people asked me if I wanted their house. I said No, I don't want houses, I don't have time for that. That's how bad it was at that time. Now if you have a house with four walls, you can get \$40,000 for it, even if it's uninhabitable. They'll tear it apart and remodel it; it's the in thing. It's changed that much. It changed dramatically. People were coming in, not necessarily to the church, but it improved the neighborhood one hundred percent. There were a lot of people who were interested in the neighborhood and wanted to live there. Big change.

GL: Any final comments?

RB: Like I said, our biggest problem was with the city for a long time. They neglected the whole neighborhood. I think, I don't know what the thoughts were, maybe they neglected more of the city that just Tremont. That was part of the problem. Eventually, services got better. People started getting interested in going back to the city. It was a whole new movement; I don't think it was due to people in the neighborhood, it was just a new movement to go back to the city.

GL: Do you think the lack of services from the city was due to the people that lived in the neighborhood or it's location?

RB: I couldn't tell you why, but I thought they were our biggest problem. We'd have inspectors come around and give us a hard time. We had an outside incinerator and they made us close it. We weren't allowed to burn our trash from the school, which were mostly papers. I told the guy, why don't you go down to the steel mills, and look at all the smoke we get. He said I don't have anything to do with that. I don't think we were all being treated equally. The steel mills were polluting like crazy. Then he'd come around and tell us we had to close the incinerator. Maybe there was some point to it, I don't know. They would give older people a hard time, these inspectors. And yet slum landlords, they would get away with it, I guess they still do. There were a lot of lawyers

that had homes in the area and they'd put a new piece of siding on the house and say, we're fixing it up and get an extension for another year. They just ran those places into the ground. They didn't care whom they rented to.

GL: Did you notice the effects the steel mills had on the church physically?

RB: If you opened the windows, every couple of days you had to dust the pews. There was a lot of dust and dirt from the steel mills. They might have improved it. At one time they had a clergy conference, north of Youngstown along I-480, there's a little town, people go there to buy shoes. They've got a nice building there, I can't remember why it was built or by whom. It was like a school dormitory with a big cafeteria, you could eat there. They had business executives coming there, giving you the inside dope on all this stuff. I guess they wanted to, they felt the clergy needed an education. I told one of these guys, I know a way we could clean out these neighborhoods. They should make a law that all executives have to live within Two miles of the steel mills. He wouldn't talk to me after that.

[Laughter]

RB: Then we'd see how you like it. Sure you've cleaned up the smoke thirty percent, but you've built on another fifty percent. So I said we've lost ground. So the guy didn't want to talk to me.

GL: It definitely had an impact on living in the neighborhood.

RB: I think that people were used to it. I guess that they couldn't prove that it affected people's health. At least there were no studies that I knew of that people had more health problems in that area than they did in others. Although I could see why they would. Asthma and breathing problems. They did have a problem with that company down there, and finally closed it that claimed there was lead, down on West Third Street. They finally had to close that thing because we had a woman who was cooking for us and she had a daughter that had high lead in her blood. She'd have to go to the hospital every once in a while. I don't know, but I don't think you ever get rid of that. You get that into your blood and it infects people, even can affect your intelligence if you don't catch it. Mostly the get it from lead in paint and stuff that kids chew on. This company was polluting the air in the area because they were reclaiming lead. There's a lot of that land down there that is contaminated. There was a company that used to reclaim oil down there, again I don't know what they did with the other stuff, if they poured it in the river, or what. There were a number of industries that weren't well regulated down in that area. That was a little bit of a problem.

GL: Fond memories?

RB: Oh yes, thirty years went by real fast. People were nice people, by and large. Many of them still live around there. Like I say, since the neighborhood's changed, people who before, they would have a house that they bought fifty years before for \$3000

and when they were selling it, they said all I can get is \$6000 for this house. I thought to myself, what can you use for fifty years and then get more money than you paid for it? And they never put a penny into it. I thought they did pretty well, even though they were complaining. But now, heck, anything is worth money there. Some people aren't going to be able to afford to live there, because they can't afford the taxes as they go up.

GL: I think that's a current issue in the neighborhood.

RB: Gentrification, that's what they call it. Yes, that's a problem that happens, but it happens all over too.

GL: Thank you for your time Father.

RB: You're welcome.