

Interviewee: Msgr. Charles Meter
Interviewer: Peg Gibbons
Date of Interview: 1990

Parents lived in Chicago, near 12th and Newberry, then on Newgard in Rogers Park near St. Ignatius. Six children. He was born 1911, moved to Wilmette, 1917.

Father worked for Lyon and Healy, then in business for himself. They lived on Fourth, 114,. Notes Evanston golf course ran clear to Fifth Street on south side of Isabella. They searched it for golf balls; before Dyche. Old wooden stadium then. Tells of many uses of that land.

First grade at St. Francis, graduated 1925; then to Quigley; "Charlies" (Him, Patterson, Buddinger) thought they'd go, but only he went. Took El and cut through Moody Bible as shortcut.; boys there from far south to Waukegan; still knows them 65 years later.

While house was being built they came up from Rogers Park on the El with big basket of lunch, notes sidewalks around trees; few stores at 4th & Linden; many things delivered; mailman Schaefer; gas lamps; notes Chicago was electrified; Market days with stands for growers from West Wilmette; kids loved it; notes difference between Wilmette and Gross Point.

Story of Armistice Day there...marching around with effigy of Kaiser.

Chores; going home for lunch with 1-1/2 hours to do it; Laurel School had a branch of public library; recalls tornado; Geusecger family lived in tent afterwards; went to St. Joe's in 1963 and his home had always been the house on Fourth during all his years. Ordained 1936, studied music in Rome 3 years, back to teach at Quigley; came up here Thursday afternoons and after Mass on Sunday; unusual to be appointed pastor in his home town even if a different parish.

Home movie of his ordination process ion; at St. Francis mass; knew St. Joe's people from childhood; started boys' choir; had directed Gregorian Chant choirs at cathedral, 22 years. There were then 1150 children at St. Joe's; 3 rooms for each grade;

Story of apartment on 3rd floor of south building; done for lay teachers, but none used it; retirement home for him.

Story of his learning of assignment; 85 boys in choir; story of how school declined in numbers at parents' boards put in the expensive programs available in public schools and tuitions went so high.

Stories about Ridge Road in early days of taverns; tells that Cardinal Mundelein wouldn't allow midnight mass on Christmas; story of Christmas preparations at home; and Fourth of July parade in Evanston; going shopping in Chicago; Stearns-Knight car; summer vacations.

Story of Civil War cannon and swimming at Wilmette Beach twice a day and swings out over the water; also replica of Columbus' boat in harbor; sometimes allowed aboard

Meter continued

Perch fishing in harbor; using biddy-type basket to troll for golf balls in canal; spend proceeds at ice cream parlor, at 4th and Linden; Greek.

Stories of No Man's land; parents went to big annual dinner at the big house up there; mentions plans that turned into the theatre era; he and his father at first performance at Teatro.

Story of Early St. Joes, only church between Evanston and Waukegan; mentions Trier and Luxembourg, discovering they were so close in Europe; farms; sense of difference between the Wilmette and Gross Point people in lifestyle and mentions how glad he is that the old Village Hall remains; wishes the old Wilmette Hall did, too.

Story of theatres in downtown Wilmette; and the public garage that was where present theatre is; that was where St. Francis carnivals were held.

Story of pastorages at St. Francis; the Extension founding; books written Mexican clergy who'd fled the "persecution" in Mexico; the chain of events leading to his almost going to Oklahoma to be missionary priest; and how the new building for St. Francis was a gift of benevolent former pastor! Says that tape has the whole story.

Story of going to symphonic concerts at New Trier, perhaps CSO which did go out in those days. The music department was superb at New Trier; also went to Ravinia where there was a symphony concert afternoon on Sunday and opera that evening. Operas and concerts adjusted in time to suit schedules; many stayed only one act and then gave tickets to him and friends waiting out on the rail; .

Father German, Mother Austrian. Irish in St. Francis, but the founders were German extraction; but English only; St. Joe's still using German.. But he loved languages, learned Italian, French, Spanish, German.

Stories of Rome years, and that was '36 to '39. Munich, last minute change; instead of sailing on Normandie sailed on Ile de France; and events leading up to escaping day before war began.