

**New England Jesuit
Oral History Program**



**Fr. Normand A. Pepin, S.J.
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THE IMPORTANCE OF ORAL HISTORY

Oral histories are the taped recordings of interviews with interesting and often important persons. They are not folklore, gossip, hearsay, or rumor. They are the voice of the person interviewed. These oral records are, in many instances, transcribed into printed documentary form. Though only so much can be done, of course, in an hour or sometimes two, they are an important historical record whose value increases with the inevitable march of time.

For whatever reason, New England Jesuits, among others around the world, have not made any significant number of oral histories of their members. Given the range of their achievements and their impact on the Church and society, this seems to many to be an important opportunity missed. They have all worked as best they could for the greater glory of God. Some have done extraordinary things. Some have done important things. All have made valuable contributions to spirituality, education, art, science, discovery, and many other fields. But living memories quickly fade. Valuable and inspiring stories slip away.

This need not be. Their stories can be retold, their achievements can be remembered, their adventures saved. Their inspiration can provide future generations with attractive models. That is what Jesuit oral history is all about.

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Interview with Fr. Normand A. Pepin, S.J.
by Fr. Paul C. Kenney, S.J.
June 14, 2009

FAMILY AND EARLY YEARS

PK: Welcome. Let's begin with your early years.

NP: I was born February 26, 1933 at Norwood Hospital, Norwood, Massachusetts. I grew up in Walpole, the next town.

PK: What were your parents' names?

NP: My father was Joseph Amedée Pepin, and my mother was Laura Héléne Southiere. Both came from Quebec and did their schooling there. My father was born in Valcourt, and went to high school in Granby, where my mother was from. I don't know whether she went to high school.

HIS FATHER

PK: What kind of person was your father?

NP: He was a gentle man, a mild man. Despite the fact that he drank an awful lot, he was never violent. He was also a heavy smoker. Sadly, he really lacked ambition. For many years he worked as a freight agent in Walpole for the New York, New Haven & Hartford

Railroad. He could have got a better job on the railroad—in fact, he almost got fired once. In later years he was able to give up the drinking, and he even stopped the smoking, but it eventually did him in.

HIS MOTHER

PK: How about your mother?

NP: She was a very short woman and weighed about ninety-eight pounds. Only one time in her life did she weigh a “undred pounds,” as she would say. She always spoke with a French accent, so she could never pronounce her h’s. She had a hard time pronouncing the name of Fr. Ray Helmick; it always came out something like “Limerick.” She was a very serious person, with very little sense of humor, but she was very dedicated at the same time. She could make herself into an instant martyr.

HOME LIFE

PK: What was the religious character of your home?

NP: Well, when my father was drinking, we never went to church or had things like grace before meals. My mother, however, was very religious; she was the one that really pushed me. She insisted that I go to catechism, become an altar boy, and things like that. So it was really my mother that moved me in the direction of being faithful to the Church. She had a good mechanical knowledge of catechism, but if you pushed her on her faith, she couldn’t really explain things. She learned her faith in the old catechetical style.

HIS SIBLINGS

PK: Tell us something about any brothers or sisters.

NP: I had a sister, Cécile Marie, who was seventeen years older. She died January 18, 2007, leaving four children.

PK: Do you have contact with them?

NP: I have some contact with Carl, the oldest one. The one I'm the friendliest with is Jonathan; he lives in Oklahoma. The third son is David, but I do not see him. The fourth child is Gloria; she lives in New Hampshire.

PK: Do you have any other brothers and sisters?

NP: My other sister, Gabrielle, who is fourteen years older, is just hanging on to life and suffering from dementia. She lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire, and has no children. She spent twenty years in the Navy as a nurse and worked as a blood technician. [Gabrielle died on January 15, 2010. She received a naval burial in the sea near Hawaii.]

HOME TOWN

PK: What was it like growing up in Walpole?

NP: Walpole was about half Catholic and half Protestant. The Catholic population was heavily Irish, but we also had plenty of Italians.

PK: Were there many French Canadians?

NP: No, not many; we were the exceptions. Walpole wasn't like New Bedford or Fall River or Woonsocket, where there are loads of French.

PK: How did living there affect you?

NP: Walpole was supposed to be the No. 1 town in Massachusetts for public school education. So I think I received a very good education, even if it was a secular system. My elementary school teachers were predominantly Protestant, but I think they were also rather broad-minded. I went to Stone Elementary School for six years, and then for two years to Plympton Junior High School. I got a good education, because, when I went to Boston College High School, I wound up No. 1 in my class.

My public school education ended in 1946, when I went to BC High. I wasn't supposed to go there, but my pastor asked me and another boy, "How would you like to go to BC High?" We had never given a thought to it before, but I wound up there. I didn't even take an entrance exam.

PK: Did the pastor help pay for it?

NP: He offered to, but my father wound up paying for the whole thing. After one year at BC High I was put in the honors class for the last three years, so I graduated in 1950 as No. 1 in the class.

HIS PARISH

PK: Wonderful. What was your parish?

NP: Blessed Sacrament.

PK: Was it very active?

NP: I would say so. The priest that I remember most was Monsignor Bennett O'Brien. He was very much beloved by the people, and he really had a great influence on me.

PK: Were you an altar server?

NP: Yes, and I was in the Scouts.

PK: And the choir?

NP: When the choir started, I wanted to be in it, but the pastor said, "Sorry. You're an altar boy; you can't do both."

PK: How about sports?

NP: I have always been just an average athlete. I did a lot of sports for exercise, and I was somewhat athletic, but not a star in any sport.

BC HIGH SCHOOL AND VOCATION

PK: Were there influential teachers at BC High?

NP: The most influential teacher for me there was Fr. Francis Gilday.

PK: What did he teach?

NP: Back in those days they had the home room system, and so you took Latin, Greek, and English with the home room teacher. Well, I did that for two years with Fr. Gilday. Then there was Fr. Francis “Frank” Krim and Fr. Robert Sheridan, our French teacher.

PK: Were you in any extra-curriculars?

NP: Yes, in drama.

PK: What play do you most remember?

NP: In “Arsenic and Old Lace” I played Dr. Einstein, the drunken doctor. [Laughter]

PK: Any other memories of BC High?

NP: Well, I had some unpleasant memories. I guess I was naive and didn’t realize that not everybody likes brain boys, so I suffered for being one. Actually, some of the others in my class did, too. One of them was Alfred Hughes, who became archbishop of New Orleans, but I think he handled it better than I did. Smart boys were not always appreciated.

PK: How did that affect you?

NP: I think it influenced the way I dealt with such students later on. I could understand the students who were in the same boat that I had been in. After all, there were a lot of brilliant students at BC High when I was a teacher there.

PK: What changes did you make?

NP: Well, it affected my attitude toward such kids. I knew how students like that would suffer.

I was never a great athlete, but I used to play on the faculty teams at BC High and also later on at Cheverus. For several years I was also the intramural director of quite a few sports: street hockey, basketball, soccer. Maine was an ideal place for hiking and camping, so I often organized hiking trips into the White Mountains. When we really had the time, we would go all the way to Mt. Katahdin.

VOCATION

PK: What helped your vocation develop?

NP: I think my mother applied a lot of pressure, but not my father. He didn't practice his faith at all. So much so, in fact, that I used to think that saying grace was something that only Protestants did, because we didn't do it in our house. But my mother may even have put undue pressure on me. She died just before I was ordained. Some people were afraid that I was going ahead because I was afraid of mother, but I was very much influenced by the whole spiritual ambiance of BC High. Fr. Gilday helped me more than anybody else.

PK: How was he helpful?

NP: He was a very, very dedicated man. I had him, first of all, as a teacher for two of my four years there. Then later on during my regency, when the Society was not encouraging music, he gave me permission and even encouraged me to study the organ with Rudolph Pepin—no relation. Actually, while I was in high school, my mother had told me, "You should study the organ; it's going to be helpful to you when you go to the seminary." One day she saw the name of Rudolph Pepin, who was at the Mission Church; I studied with him for the rest of that year. He used to teach me in English. When I went back to him later during regency, with Fr. Gilday's permission, he started to teach me in French, so I got double my money's worth. So I am very grateful to Frank Gilday.

PK: You began studying organ as a student at BC High?

NP: That's right.

PK: Wonderful. Were there any influences from the parish to become a priest?

NP: Back in those days I think they did a heck of a lot more to encourage people to become priests. In general there was great respect for a person who became a priest.

We had several vocations in my parish around that time, and not only to the Jesuits: we had at least one diocesan priest and two Passionist priests.

ENTERING THE JESUITS

PK: When did you actually enter the Jesuits?

NP: July 30, 1950.

PK: How did your leave-taking go?

NP: Well, it was a big thing, of course. My father didn't show that he cared, but for my mother that was a big thrill.

PK: How about your sisters?

SP: They accepted it. By the way, my oldest sister went back and forth between the Catholic religion and Christian Science. She was a very spiritual person. I think what brought her back to the Catholic Church were things like the Trappistine Sisters and the Divine Office. Then later on she discovered a place in New Hampshire that brought her back into the Catholic Church. In fact, I'm going there tomorrow to make my retreat.

When she was living in Oklahoma, she lived very far from a priest. She was living with her son, who was not a Catholic, but he was just amazed at the effect of the Sacrament of the Sick on her, how she brightened up before she died.

My other sister, Gabrielle, has always been a faithful Catholic. I had one other sister, named Gloria, but she died in 1924, before I was born.

EARLY STUDIES IN THE JESUITS

PK: Tell us about your novitiate.

NP: Our master of novices was Fr. John Post. A lot of people found him overly scrupulous and very legalistic, but he was very devoutly spiritual. In the March 1956 Shadowbrook fire, he had to jump out the window.

He fell onto the clotheslines in that cement area, and ended up with a bad limp, but he became “more human,” some people say. But he was always very strongly devoted to the spiritual life. In later life he used to say, “Don’t pay any attention to what I taught you.” But actually he taught me the importance of the spiritual life, even though I couldn’t agree with everything he recommended, like walking in a certain way and keeping modesty of the eyes.

PK: How was your first exposure to the Exercises of St. Ignatius?

NP: I went through them not understanding everything. It would be quite a while before I got a clear idea of how the whole sequence of meditations go together. [Laughter]

PK: What influence have the Exercises had on your life?

NP: Oh, a heavy influence. I may not have always been very dedicated to the spiritual life, but the Exercises have been very important to me.

PK: How about the other novices?

NP: Donald Plocke was over at BC with me. Some have left the Society, and some have died. Bob Daly was also with me; we entered the very same day.

PK: How about novitiate life?

NP: In those days the novitiate was very confusing. We were kept going constantly—half an hour on this, a quarter of an hour on that. When the bell rang, you stopped the letter of the alphabet that you’re on and you had to jump to the next thing.

PK: How about the juniorate?

NP: Juniorate was the most pleasant part of the course. I remember studying the classics, especially during the first year, which focused on poetry. The second year was devoted to studying rhetoric. I remember Fr. Mulcahy, who died in the fire. In his class in rhetoric

he was a terror. We called him the bear, because he looked like a polar bear when he sat down. He gave us a class you won't see the like of these days. He went into all the details—figures of speech, errors you commit, perorations, and all those things.

Then we studied rhetoric in Latin with Cicero, in Greek with Demosthenes, and in English with Daniel Webster. I don't know when you'd ever get a course like that today. It wasn't so much about the delivery, but about how to put a speech together. He gave us a class we won't forget.

PHILOSOPHY AT WESTON

PK: In 1950 you went to Weston for philosophy.

NP: I lived right here in this building. I did not enjoy those years, yet I'm going to wind up here in a very short time when I retire to the Health Center.

PK: Do you remember some of the teachers?

NP: The one that really stood out the most was Paul Lucey.

PK: How so?

NP: He was clear; he presented the matter well. There was also Reginald "Reggie" O'Neill, who did a fairly good job. But then you had other teachers whom it was hard to pay attention to.

REGENCY AT HOLY CROSS AND BC HIGH

PK: Where did you go for regency?

NP: My specialty during philosophy had been math and physics. At first Fr. Coleran, who was provincial then, wanted me to teach physics at Holy Cross, but that did not work out.

PK: What did you do then?

NP: Fr. Coleran assigned me to Boston College High School, but from then on I became more focused on mathematics, not so much on physics.

PK: Was that a function of the needs of the students or of your interest?

NP: It was something in between. I did teach some general science at BC High at first, but eventually I changed to just teaching mathematics. For many years, I was a math teacher.

PK: Did you moderate any sports?

NP: No, but I enjoyed playing basketball with the kids. When I was a priest, I did much more with sports.

THEOLOGY

PK: When you went back to Weston for theology, how did you find it?

NP: As during philosophy, we had good classes and bad. One teacher I especially remember was Fr. Phil Donnelly. From time to time he could give a brilliant class. But one thing that eased the years here was going to Cranwell every summer. I loved that.

PK: What did you do there?

NP: I was a counselor at the summer camp. My first year I was with the older boys, but then during the winter they convinced me to work with the younger ones. The other counsellors said, "You'd be great with the little kids." They called me the "Chickamo" counselor. That's what the little kids were called.

My first summer was a nightmare, because I wasn't at all used to the mentality of seven-, eight-, and nine-year olds. Eventually I became a specialist at it, and they kept calling me back year after year, long after I was out of Weston.

ORDINATION

PK: Who ordained you?

NP: He was supposed to be Cardinal Cushing. I was confirmed by Bishop Cushing, I was given minor orders

by Archbishop Cushing, and I was to be ordained by Cardinal Cushing. The problem was that the pope died, so he had to go over Rome for the conclave. As a result, Bishop Reilly, his auxiliary, ordained me.

TO BRAZIL FOR TERTIANSHIP

PK: Where was your tertianship?

NP: I did my tertianship in Volta Redonda, Brazil. The tertian master was a man I greatly admired. Fr. Cardoso was very open. He always went around in a cassock himself, but he let us wear just sports shirts, which was amazingly liberal for Brazil.

PK: Did you learn Portuguese before tertianship?

NP: Yes, I went to a Jesuit novitiate in Brazil. We studied in the morning with one novice and worked in the afternoon with another. They were from different parts of the country, so I heard two entirely different accents. They used to contradict each other on how to pronounce words!

PK: How did your long retreat go, since it was all in Portuguese?

NP: Fine. I understood every word Fr. Cardozo said; he had a very clear accent. From the conference, it was just like English to me.

PK: Wonderful! What was your experiment for tertianship?

NP: We were sent out to work in parishes in Santanesia, a mill town with paper factories. We would go every weekend.

TEACHING AT BC HIGH

PK: What did you do after tertianship?

NP: I moved directly into BC High for the 1965-66 year.

PK: Did you resume teaching math?

NP: Yes. I don't recall that I taught any French that year.

PK: Where did you go after that year?

NP: I made another attempt to return to Brazil. Some people, like Fr. Jack McCall, felt I shouldn't return; they felt that I couldn't adapt to the place. Anyway, I tried it and I guess they were right. I came back to the States in February 1967 and went to Cheverus High in Portland.

PK: How come?

NP: I got sick, but it wasn't really a question of health or the climate. I just didn't adapt to the whole ambiance. It was culture, maybe. So I realized my main job was going to be in teaching. I was at Cheverus for half a year, but instead of just staying there I asked if I could get my master's degree. They wanted all the high school teachers to have a master's degree. So I went to BC during 1967-68, studying in the math department with Fr. Bezuska. It was a master's degree especially for math teachers.

PK: How did you enjoy working with him?

NP: We didn't see much of him actually. He did teach us one class, and he'd come in with his dog Rusty. Otherwise, he didn't deal with us directly, but the program was a good one.

PK: Did you study the new math?

NP: Yes, we did, very much so. One interesting person there was Dr. Bennett—he was brilliant, brilliant, brilliant. He was Prof. Emeritus from Brown University, and his class was like a stream of consciousness. One day he walked out of the class saying, "We're going to have to have a test tomorrow. I don't know what it's going to be on, but I'll think of something." With that he just walked out.

PK: And that was it?

NP: That was it. There were some strange things there, but I think it was a good program to prepare us for

modern math. Fr. Bezuska especially stressed the modern math.

PK: So you got your master's degree in math?

NP: Yes, and then I went right back to Cheverus, but with the tools to teach math well. But besides the regular teaching, I got involved in the Model Cities program in Portland.

PK: Can you describe that?

NP: It was a specially funded program for kids. In the summer we had buses bring them to school; there would be tutorial work in math and English, and then they would have time for sports. During the winter, the program continued on Saturdays. It was a kind of ongoing enrichment, but we did run into problems. Remember that Maine was not all that friendly toward Roman Catholics. Some people protested about the program: "You can't have the kids go in there with that cross on the wall." Eventually they cut the funding, but that was a good program.

PK: While you were at Cheverus, did you teach anything besides math?

NP: Yes, there were some religion classes and a few music classes.

PK: Music appreciation?

NP: Mainly, but there was one class on creative music: we did some composing.

PK: That was new in your teaching career, because you had kept up playing the organ, right?

NP: Correct. At that time I was much more active in music, which I'm not now, unfortunately. I was also involved in other things like extracurriculars and intramurals.

TIME TO RECONSIDER VOCATION

PK: How long were you at Cheverus?

NP: I was there 1967 to 1972, and then I took a leave of absence.

PK: How so?

NP: During those days everybody and his brother was leaving the order and getting married, and celibacy was an issue with most people. So I just felt like I was getting ripped apart. I decided to take a leave of absence and get a secular job for a year.

PK: Where did you work?

NP: I worked in Denver, Colorado, with a large corporation.

PK: What kind of work was it?

NP: I was a computer programmer; specifically, I made programs for auto dealers and bankers. I found out how they rip you off—or at least get a lot of extra funds from people. That's something I would never have known about.

In the end, the big thing it taught me was that I had a choice. I could continue to do that and be a good Catholic, if I wanted to spend my energies there, or else I could go back to what I did before and spend my life in service to others, but I'd have to pay the price of celibacy. I came back calm and at peace.

PK: And it's been that way ever since?

NP: Yes, and it has grown ever since; it hasn't just remained static, it has grown.

TO THE ALASKA MISSIONS

PK: So there you were back at Cheverus in 1973, teaching math again?

NP: Yes, math, but there were also some French and music classes.

PK: What did you do in 1977, after those four years at Cheverus?

NP: I really wanted to go back to the missions. I had learned

my lesson from Brazil: vocation to a mission doesn't mean just willingness to go there and clench your teeth and do something that you're not happy at. A mission vocation means going to a place that may be difficult in a way, but that will make you happy and help you thrive. I realized that Brazil was not the place, but I thought Alaska might be, and it was.

PK: Where did you go in Alaska?

NP: My first year I was in Fairbanks teaching math at Monroe High School. I honestly did not like the high school work there, because there were a lot of very high-class kids who really despised the others. And they were very defiant with the teachers.

PK: Those were difficult years in the schools.

NP: It was a difficult year for me, but not because of Alaska itself. So I requested to go to St. Mary's School in St. Mary's, and there I had four very happy years, mostly with the Eskimo kids.

PK: They were poorer?

NP: Yes, much poorer. These were native kids.

PK: And you were in the remote areas?

NP: Very much so. I could rattle off the names of the villages, but they wouldn't mean much to you.

PK: Besides teaching math and religion there, did you have any extracurriculars?

NP: Yes, I worked with a service club. The members helped villagers who needed some assistance with laundry or cleaning or things like that. They did all kinds of things to help the community.

PK: Was St. Mary's closer to the Arctic Circle?

NP: No, actually it was farther away. Even though it was Eskimo country, St. Mary's was slightly south of Fairbanks.

PK: How was your relationship with the native peoples?

NP: Oh, it was wonderful. They practically adored me.

PK: Really? How about you towards them?

NP: I really loved them, too. They were much more courteous in class than the students in Fairbanks. The Eskimos don't sass you or talk back at you, but they have no intention of doing what you want! They all agree with you, and then they do what they want! But they are wonderful people.

PK: Did you learn any of the language?

NP: No, their language is especially difficult. It's one thing for me to learn a romance language, but theirs is so totally different. Just the sounds are extremely difficult. They go to confession in their language, and I can say enough to absolve them and all, but when you try to learn the language, they laugh at you.

PK: You felt close to them all the same.

NP: Yes, and people remember you even after you've been gone many years. This year I went back up to St. Mary's to visit the people, and it was a delightful experience, like homecoming. However, I distinguished myself by falling into quicksand as I was walking along by the water. [Laughter.]

PK: You really did?

NP: Yes, and I couldn't get out. I had to take off my boots, and then I rolled over and jumped out of the quicksand. Later on, we got a shovel and dug my boots out of the quicksand, and I was able to clean them up again. The people were very glad to see me, so I know that I really hit it off in St. Mary's.

PK: Is St. Mary's actually its name?

NP: Yes, the name of the town and the school.

PK: Who named it?

NP: St. Mary's was originally called Akulurak and situated on a river that silted in. So they looked for another place and finally found its present site. St. Mary's is on a boundary between the tundra and the taiga.

PK: What is taiga?

NP: Taiga is a boreal forest of stunted trees and rather skimpy vegetation. The Evensk people live in the taiga in Siberia. They are the native people in Russia, just as the Eskimos are the native people in Alaska.

PK: Did you ever go seal hunting?

NP: No, but I have gone on skidoos and boats to visit the villages to say Mass.

PK: Have you ever had to say a funeral for someone who fell through the ice?

NP: That happens a lot, but I don't recall doing a funeral for such a thing. We've had Jesuits who died that way.

PK: Especially in the spring?

NP: Yes, as it gets warmer. You fall in the river, and it just carries you away. You get stuck among all the trees and debris, and sometimes they never find the bodies.

SOUTH TO FLORIDA

PK: After those four years at St. Mary's, what did you do?

NP: In 1982 I was asked to break out of Alaska and go down to go to Florida. The New England Jesuits felt that I wasn't doing enough with music, and it happened that Fr. Harold Bumpus invited me down to Florida. Harry entered the Jesuits with me and was ordained a Jesuit, but he eventually became a diocesan priest. He was a genius at building organs.

PK: Where was his parish?

NP: It was St. Theresa's, in Spring Hill, Florida.

PK: You worked with him in the parish?

NP: Yes, I helped him, although I also did quite a bit of work in the music. But I never dreamed when I went down that I'd get so involved musically.

PK: Did you play the organ a lot?

NP: Right. There was one Mass I used to play at every week, and then I'd turn around and say the Spanish Mass. At that time I had to read my Spanish sermons; I

couldn't just preach them freely, as I do today. Also, I worked with the choir and so many other things. I had regular visits to two hospitals and a lot of funerals. Florida is an area where many people die.

BACK TO ALASKA

PK: And you enjoyed that work?

NP: Yes, in some ways that was one of the happiest years of my life, but I did want to go back to Alaska. Besides, Fr. Bumpus was leaving that place, so really there was no place for me to go except to return to Alaska. I got reassigned to Monroe High School, where I found it particularly challenging; there were many difficult things there. From 1983 on I was a regular teacher of religion, math, music, and French.

Then in 1995, the bishop said, "You've spent enough time at Monroe High School. I'd like you to do some adult education." It seems that a certain priest who had done that work was close to death. So I took up the challenge and gave an awful lot of Bible classes to adults. I was also a chaplain for the school.

TEACHING SCRIPTURE

PK: You had a lot to do.

NP: Right. There were two young teachers who were panicked after they were assigned to teach sophomore religion, which is mainly scripture. So they asked me to help them out by going to their classrooms once a week. As a result, I started re-developing a very personal relationship with the kids by doing that.

Once a week I'd have some activities for the class, and then I'd coach the teachers on what they would be doing for the rest of the week. I was working with both the teachers, but we were doing the same thing in both classes. At the end of the year, the same final

exam went to both classes. I realized that staying in the classroom that way was pretty good, so I've been doing that for quite a few years.

PK: What age group are you teaching?

NP: This last year it was freshmen and sophomores. Those are the ones that I regularly work with, but I can also be called into individual classrooms. I'm the chaplain of the whole school, so sometimes I go over to the grade school. For example, they might ask me to go to the kindergarten to demonstrate baptism by baptizing a doll. As a teacher I also taught a lot of eighth grade, and that's how the eighth grade got involved in the Stations of the Cross.

PK: So the school includes an elementary school and a high school?

NP: Right, starting with pre-kindergarten.

PK: What is the name of the elementary part?

NP: Immaculate Conception Grade School. And the high school is Monroe High School.

PK: And they're both Catholic?

NP: Yes.

PK: Who teaches there?

NP: Right now we don't have a single religious. There is a religious sister that retired from teaching and continues there as a tutor. Technically I'm the only one there, and I'm not a teacher either.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

PK: You mentioned the Stations of the Cross.

NP: They began at St. Mary's with a sister who put them on using tableaux. That was as far as it went. They would have me come and read a standard version of the Stations of the Cross. There was no music or anything. When I was working with the eighth grade, we started with what she had been doing, but I quickly elaborated on it.

We had different individuals read the Stations, and then we included some music. It took years of development, but it was a good idea. So they became much more sophisticated.

PK: Do the upper grades also get involved?

NP: Yes. There's one performance at 9:00 AM for the grade school and another at 10:15 AM for the seventh grade and high school. All the eighth-graders are involved in the program, because I began working with them after I came from St. Mary's. But then the seventh and eighth grades got moved into the high school, and other classes got involved. So it became more an activity of all the school. The kids still respond very well.

ADVENT PROGRAM

NP: I also do an Advent program. For a while we used a tableau called the Advent Tableau or the Service of Light. I do a different one each year. But now, since we have to finish our exams by the end of December, I'm forced to do it more quickly.

We do it in the chapel in the middle of December at 8:00 AM, because it's still pitch black outside. During the Service of Light everybody has an unlit candle. Then we have prophecies about light and darkness, like Isaiah: "The people who have lived in the darkness have seen a great light." At the end of the service, they light their candles, and the choir sings something like "Light One Candle."

I have different themes each year. Sometimes they'll put up the "O Antiphons" on the wall, one after the other, and of course there's music and a reading that goes with each one. Last year we had a service where one boy was Isaiah. He explained in plain, simple English what the prophecies were about, and then a reader gave the Bible version. After that we sat and listened

to appropriate music.

PK: How do the kids respond to this?

NP: They respond quite well. There's another service that ends up with the seventh-graders dressed up as shepherds. They come in with flashlights covered with red so that you get the effect of torches as they stand around the altar. We do a lot of stuff like that.

PK: So that's quite effective.

NP: Yes.

COMPOSING MUSIC

PK: How about your own musical compositions?

NP: My big piece was a kind of "Nunc Dimittis," the prayer of Simeon: "Now you dismiss your servant."

PK: You set those words to music?

NP: Not those words exactly. What I mean by a "Nunc Dimittis" work is something that represents your whole life. That's what Simeon means when he says, "Now you can send me away in peace."

PK: What is the theme of your work?

NP: Called "Obedient unto Death," it is an oratorio about the death of Jesus, using passages from Isaiah. It was done with a really good choir, an excellent organist and organ, a brass quintet, with oboe and flute parts, when it was performed once in Fairbanks and twice in Pittsburgh.

PK: Why Pittsburgh?

NP: Because I've been very involved in the Fairbanks Choral Society, and the director knew a director from Pittsburgh, who became interested. She gave him the tape of the Fairbanks performance; he listened to it and wanted to do it.

PK: How was it received in Pittsburgh?

NP: It was received very well.

PK: Has it been performed since?

NP: No. Then the people in Pittsburgh asked me to write what might be called an opera, but the work, "Hadassah," based on the story of Esther, actually came out to be something in between an opera and a show. It was definitely too serious to be a show like "Fiddler on the Roof," but it wasn't big enough to match one of the big operas. Anyway, the director loved it and it was well received by the people, although the critic panned it.

PK: Did he pan it for the music or for the acting?

NP: I think the critic in Pittsburgh just panned me and said I was no good. The libretto was written by a local lady there, and they criticized her too, but the choir people told me, "Don't pay attention to that guy."

I was later asked to compose a requiem for a group that lives in Delta Junction, a hundred miles from Fairbanks. It was a religious community of Protestants, who lived at Whitestone Farm. They live together in families and have a fine choir. One day a guy walked into the house of prayer and said to me, "Would you write me a requiem?" Just like that. I said, "Well, the last guy who got that kind of request never got to live to hear his requiem!" [Cf. Mozart] I wrote the requiem and it was performed at Fairbanks in November 2002.

PK: Are you composing anything now?

NP: No, I mainly do it in response to requests. The only thing I didn't do by request was "Obedient unto Death," my "Nunc Dimittis" oratorio. In other words, that was my idea. If there's anything I've written that could be called a masterpiece, that would be it.

PK: People can get copies of this from you?

NP: The New England Province has it in the archives.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE

PK: Over the years, have you sensed God's providence leading you?

NP: Oh, very much so!

PK: Would you spell that out a bit?

NP: Yes. The most important thing is what's happened since the leave of absence. I had two courses open to me in life: I could go back and work for a big corporation, be a good Catholic and the father of a family. I guess a lot of our people who left at that time are still happily married. The other option was come back and serve, which was more difficult but worthwhile. And that's what it's been, but my life has been much richer since then, especially my experiences on the missions and in the apostolates that I do now around town.

Each one is small in itself, but when you put them all together, they add up to something: the Tridentine Mass, the Spanish Mass, and what I'm doing at the school. The bishops are most grateful about the work in the school.

PK: Say a bit about your work with the Tridentine Mass.

PK: Around 1999 a lot of people started requesting the Tridentine Mass. The bishop was very reluctant, but he allowed it. Now, of course, the Pope has said you can't deny the people this Mass if they want it. The people have kept the rules, and it's a very happy community. The only thing I feel a little bad about is that sometimes you sense a certain degree of isolation, because they tend to stay together and not mix with the other Catholics. After the Mass we often have lunch and benediction.

This group is very, very faithful. Next Saturday night I leave here, and I'm going to arrive in Fairbanks at 1:30 AM on Sunday morning, that is, if I'm on time! That morning at 10:00 AM I have a Tridentine Mass and that afternoon a Spanish baptism at 1:00 PM.

PK: Tell us something about your Spanish ministry.

NP: It started about 1999, when a priest who had been say-

ing Mass once a month for the Hispanics, went back to Washington. So the bishop said to me, “You talk Portuguese, therefore, you talk Spanish.”

PK: Are the Spanish people migrants who harvest?

NP: No, the agriculture in Alaska is not done by Hispanics. They come up looking for better jobs. Remember they have the pipeline there. The jobs there pay better than in the lower 48. There are quite a few of them, and they work in many different things. A lot of them are in the military. We have a lot fewer Hispanics now, because many of the soldiers we knew have been deployed in Iraq or Afghanistan.

OFFICE AND ROSARY

PK: Do you have a favorite prayer?

NP: I’m very faithful to the rosary. It started off with the stupidest of reasons. I never pray for the success of a sports team, but once, when I was a sophomore, I said, “God, if you have the Red Sox beat the Yankees today, I’ll say the rosary.” Well, the Sox won 1 to 0, so I said the rosary that night, and I’ve said it every night since, though here have been maybe three or four times in my life when I’ve forgotten or wasn’t able to do it.

PK: So your favorite prayer would be the rosary?

NP: I don’t know if I’d say it’s my favorite prayer. I’m also fairly devoted to praying the Divine Office. I’m very careful reciting it, because I don’t just rattle it off. I try to say the different hours of the day when they’re supposed to be said. It’s not like in the old days, when it was just a question of fulfilling the obligation.

PK: [Laughter] All right. Well, thank you very much.

Fr. Normand A. Pepin, S.J.

Born: February 23, 1933, Norwood, Massachusetts
Entered: July 30, 1950, Lenox, Massachusetts, St.
Stanislaus Novitiate / Shadowbrook
Ordained: June 15, 1963, Weston, Massachusetts,
Weston College
Final Vows: August 15, 1967, Cranwell Preparatory
School, Lenox, Massachusetts

1946 Boston, Massachusetts: Boston College High School
- Student
1950 Lenox, Massachusetts: St. Stanislaus Novitiate /
Shadowbrook - Novitiate, juniorate
1954 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College - Studied
philosophy
1957 Worcester, Massachusetts: Holy Cross College -
Taught math and physics
1958 Boston, Massachusetts: Boston College High School
- Taught math, French
1960 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College - Studied
theology
1965 Volta Redonda, Brazil: Tertianship
1966 Salvador, Brazil: Pastoral ministry
1967 Portland, Maine: Cheverus High School - Taught
math
1972 Leave of absence
1973 Portland, Maine: Cheverus High School - Taught
math and French
1977 Fairbanks, Alaska: Monroe High School - Taught
math
1978 St. Mary's, Alaska: St. Mary's School - Taught
math, religion
1982 Spring Hill, Florida: St. Theresa Parish - Pastoral
ministry, organist

- 1983 Fairbanks, Alaska: Monroe High School & Immaculate Conception Grammar School - Chaplain; taught religion, math, music, French
- 1983-1985 Cathedral Director of liturgical music
- 1986-1987 Director of Jesuit Centennial
- 1988-2010 Apostolate with Hispanics in the Fairbanks Diocese
- 1995-2010 Director of House of Prayer, school chaplain
- 2010 Weston, Massachusetts: Campion Health Center - Pastoral ministry

Degrees

- 1956 Bachelor of Arts, Philosophy, Weston College-Boston College
- 1957 Master of Arts, Philosophy, Weston College-Boston College
- 1964 Licentiate in Sacred Theology, Weston College
- 1968 Master of Arts, Mathematics, Boston College

Musical Compositions: A Partial List

Vocal pieces with piano (organ)

“In Paradisum.” (Vocalist of any range with piano or organ.) A piece for the end of a funeral. Written in Spring Hill, FL. 1983. Duration: About 00:05.

Vocal pieces with instruments

“Come, Holy Spirit.” (Congregation, SATB, organ, flute, oboe, 2 trumpets). Written for New England Jesuit ordinations and used for several of them. Portland, ME. 1976. Duration: about 00:05.

“Something Springs Green: Seven songs based on the poetry of Margaret Ward Morland.” The songs were written at the request of Suzanne Summerville. Features: mezzo-soprano, piano, oboe or clarinet. Songs are: a) Something Springs Green. b) Allegro. c) Miracle. d) Grace Note. e) Breathing Time. f) The Guests Have Gone. g) Welcome. 1988. Duration: about 00:15.

Choral Pieces

“Children’s Cantata: A Child is Born.” Started out as a series of Christmas pieces for the Fairbanks Children’s Choir. Tells the story of the nativity of Jesus. Children’s choir (2 parts), narrator, one soloist, piano, violin, recorder (flute), 2 trumpets, percussion. 1985. Duration: about 00:20.

“Psalm 150.” Written for the Fairbanks Choral Society and Children’s Choir. 1986. Features: SATB adult choir, children’s choir (unison), piano, 2 trumpets, flute (optional harp), percussion (tambourine, castanets, cymbals, timpani). 1986. Duration: about 00:10.

“Obedient unto Death.” (Passion oratorio). Describes the passion and death of Jesus from his trial before Pilate to his burial. First performed in April 1987 by the Fairbanks Choral Society under the direction of Dr. Suzanne Summerville. Was nominated for Pulitzer Prize in 1987 and reached the finals. SATB chorus, soloists [Jesus (tenor), soprano, another tenor, baritone], narrator, organ, flute, oboe, 2 trumpets, horn, 2 trombones, percussion (timpani, triangle, chimes.) Movements: a) Song of the Suffering Servant. b) Trial before Pilate. c) “Father, Forgive Them” and Litany of Mercy. d) Mockery. e) Penitent Thief. f) Stabat Mater. g) I Thirst. h) “My God, Why have you Aban-

doned Me?” i) Reproaches. j) (1) Death Agony. (2) Earthquake. (3) Funeral Cortège and Lament. k) Triumph of the Suffering Servant. 1987. Duration: about 1:16.

“Te Deum.” Written for the Fairbanks Choral Soc. For SATB chorus, piano, organ, 2 flutes, 2 trumpets, horn, 2 trombones, percussion (triangle, timpani, cymbals, chimes). 1991. Duration: about 00:15.

“Maker and Monarch and Savior of All.” A fantasy based on African-American carols; written for the Fairbanks Choral Society and Children’s Choir. SAB, children in unison, organ, 2 trumpets, flute, percussion (bells, chimes, triangle, timpani). 1992. Duration: about 00:15

“Fantaisie sur Cinq Noël Français.” Written for the Fairbanks Choral Society and Children’s Choir. French carols. STB, children in unison, 2 trumpets, flutes, percussion (bells, timpani, chimes, triangle). 1993. Duration: about 00:10.

“Medieval Mary Garden.” Written at the request of the Fairbanks Choral Society with the following parameters. It was to feature medieval poems in old English and Latin and to be written in medieval style, using medieval instruments and featuring a local soprano (Janice Trumbull). Features: SATB adult chorus with soprano soloist, organ, 3 recorders, 2 shawms or krummhorns, 2 sackbuts (trombones), percussion (doubek, snare, triangle, hand cymbals and crash cymbals). 1994. Sections are: a) Dorian March. b) Of One That is so Fair and Bright. c) Mater, Ora Filium. d) The Flower of Jesse. e) I Sing of a Maiden. f) Magnificat (solo). g) A Babe is Born. h) Madrigal. i)

Lullay, My Liking. j) Jesu, Thou the Virgin Born. k)
Now Let us Sing. 1994. Duration: about 00:40.

“A Great and Mighty Wonder.” Written as a fantasy on German carols for the Fairbanks Choral Society. For adult chorus SATB and unison children, piano, flute, 2 trumpets, horn, 2 trombones, electric keyboard, percussion (glockenspiel, xylophone, claves, triangle, tambourines, cymbals). 1996. Duration: about 00:40.

“Margaret Ward Morland Christmas Bouquet.” Written for the Fairbanks Choral Society and featuring four Christmas poems by Mrs. Morland. SATB chorus, piano, flute, percussion (snare, castanets, triangle). Four poems are: a) So Simple a Thing. b) The Gift. c) The Lifting. d) Epiphany. 1998. Duration: about 00:10.

“Gloria: Let there be Music.” Written for the Fairbanks Choral Society as a tribute to retiring director Suzanne Summerville. The text was a blend of the Gloria from the Catholic Mass and a poem by Margaret Ward Morland. Features: SATB, piano, 2 flutes, French horn, percussion (castanets, triangle, bongos, woodblocks, chimes, cymbals). 1999. Duration: about 00:20.

“Hadassah.” Musical drama about the story of the biblical Esther, written for the Pittsburgh concert chorale, Clark Bedford director. Based on a libretto by Sewickley, PA poet Doris Esteban. Features SATB chorus with soloists (soprano, alto, tenors, baritone, counter-tenor), piano, flute (piccolo), oboe, clarinet, bassoon, harp, percussion (timpani, bells, xylophone, cymbals, snare, tambourine, woodblocks, triangle). 2002. Duration: 2:15.

“Requiem.” Commissioned and directed by Emerson W. Eads of the Whitestone Choir of the Whitestone Farm in Delta Junction, AK. First performed at Sacred Heart Cathedral in Fairbanks, AK on Nov. 23, 2002. Latin and English. SATB chorus, soprano and baritone solos, organ, harp and flute. Movements: a) Requiem Aeternam. b) Kyrie. c) Epistle (I Heard a Voice from Heaven). d) Responsorial psalm (Ps. 23). e) Gospel (I am the Resurrection). f) Offertory (Psalm 130). g) Sanctus. h) Agnus Dei. I) Communion verse. j) In Paradisum. 2002. Duration: about 00:40.

Instrumental Pieces

Carillon on ecce panis angelorum. Boston, McLaughlin & Reilly 1962.

Two Christmas pieces on French carols. Boston, McLaughlin & Reilly, 1962.

For organ. Noel en carillon; Sing we now of Christmas. 00:03. Berceuse: Entre le boeuf. 00:02 1/2.

Entrée pour Noel. For organ. Glen Rock, NJ, J. Fischer, 1965.

Sonata for Trumpet and Piano. Written for a former student at Cheverus High School in Portland, ME, William Picher, who has frequently used it in recitals. In three movements: 1) Vivace. 2) Andante Cantabile. 3) Molto vivo. Published by Picher Publications, which was bought by Manduca Music Publishers, 861 Washington Ave., Portland, ME 04103. (407) 773-7012. 1977. Duration: about 15 min.

Sweet Suite. For trumpet, clarinet and piano. Intended as a set of humorous pieces written for William Picher and his wife Maria, a former clarinetist. Sections: a) Sin-copation without Repentance. b) Polluted Ayre. c) The Gigue is Up. These pieces were also published by Picher Publ. and are available from Manduca Music Publishers, as above. 1979. Duration: about 00:15.

“Fanfare for the King of Kings.” 2 trumpets and organ. 1986. Duration: about 00:05.

“Sonata for 2 clarinets and piano.” Written for husband and wife clarinetists Ted and Kay DeCorso of Fairbanks, AK. Two movements in sonata form and one movement is a theme with variations. 1995. Duration: about 00:15.

“Fanfare for Fairbanks.” Written for Golden Days, Fairbanks, AK 2002. In rondo form. For brass quintet (2 trumpets, horn, trombone, tuba). 2002. Duration: about 00:05.

“Tocatta on ‘David Billings.’” This organ solo piece was written as a tribute to organist David Billings of the Pittsburgh area, who had been the organist for the Pittsburgh version of “Obedient unto Death” and pianist for “Hadassah.” It features a constant play on his initials, D-B. 2002. Duration: about 00:05.

The music listed here is at the Archives of the Society of Jesus of New England, Holy Cross College, 1 College St. Worcester, MA 01610-2395.

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