

**New England Jesuit  
Oral History Program**



**Fr. Joseph F. Brennan, S.J.  
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Interview with Fr. Joseph F. Brennan, S.J.  
by Fr. Richard W. Rousseau, S.J.  
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**RICHARD ROUSSEAU:** Let's begin our session today with a little bit of family background.

**JOSEPH BRENNAN:** I was born in Charlestown, just over the bridge from Boston, in November, 1925. My parents married in January of that year, and their first order of business was to purchase a house in Medford. Both Mom and Dad were immigrants from Ireland, so that my brother, Vin, and my sister, Eileen, and I were first generation Irish. Vin was born in 1927 and Eileen in 1929. The times, as we learned in retrospect, were extremely difficult for the family and for most of those we knew. "Depression" must have been one of the earliest words in our vocabulary. The two-family house my parents bought at great sacrifice we lost through foreclosure, as did so many other friends and neighbors. By 1930 or 1931 we returned to Charlestown as one more defeated family. Yet I do not recall periods of anxiety or fear, nor a sense that we were at all singular in this defeat.

As for schooling, there was a brief period at St. Clement's in Somerville on the border of Medford for the first grade, but until 1935 I attended the parish school of St. Mary's in Charlestown, conducted by the Sisters of St. Joseph. Mom had already begun quietly saving for the purchase of another house, and scanned the papers until she found what she was looking for in Arlington. She talked little of her plans, so that when they came to pass, we were all caught up in the surprise. I remember clearly at this time that my father went out daily to look for work and his returning home with little money from some few temporary jobs. In the face of this discouraging situation that was the lot of so many of our neighbors, Dad's persistent example and Mom's trusting faith kept inspiring each of us to save what little money we could earn doing odds and ends in a variety of chores.

I still remember my delighted surprise when she broke the news of the purchase of the new house. As much as I regretted leaving Charlestown, filled with so many positive memories of friends, the "Y", which was open to us for swimming and games, Arlington Heights was destined to become my first strong experience of parish and schooling.

My friends and I were happy to get to church on Sunday morning to hear the priest's sermons that centered largely on apocryphal stories from his own career. We were mesmerized, and I can remember quite clearly articulating a desire to follow in his footsteps, so that one day I could stand at the same altar and do what he did there so well. Mom and Dad encouraged me each in their own way. Nothing seemed impossible to me despite our depressing eco-

nostic environment. Priests visited our classrooms or church in Charlestown to share stories of their missionary careers in China. They fired me with the desire to walk in their footsteps. Magazines from Maryknoll appeared in the mails, and the parish library surrounded us with their books on great saints, usually outstanding missionaries. They compared favorably with the adventure stories that were my usual reading fare then.

RR: Was life out in the suburbs much different from what you had been used to?

JB: Very much so. Wide open spaces, woods and streams for rafting and fishing, cross-country treks on skis or snow shoes, new friends that were limited to the Irish neighbors that I had known in Charlestown. The big difference was that I was now in the public school, and my teachers were no longer Sisters, but mostly Yankees. I still remember their names, how they introduced me to subjects outside the usual curriculum by taking us into the wetlands for birding or to the Harvard museums to view sculpture and painting to supplement what we were doing in classroom studies. Their style of teaching was more laid back and the demands of discipline were so relaxed that within a short time in this easy-going atmosphere my grades started to drop, much to Mom's annoyance. Three years of this descending spiral was more than enough to impel my mother to quietly visit the parochial school in North Cambridge and enlist me as a student at St. John's Grammar School, and later, the high school.

I returned to the careful supervision of the Sisters, this time Dominicans out of Kentucky. The school could best be described as a red brick building, tiny compared to what I had known for three years in

Arlington Heights, but it provided me with a new atmosphere of caring and personalized interest. Later, when I was to enter the Jesuit novitiate in a class of 21, of which 13 were graduates of B. C. High, I wondered how I could possibly compete academically as one of the very few from a Sisters' school. However I found such fears groundless within a few short months. My tuition for grammar school was \$10 a year and for high school \$25 a year. To this day I am grateful to the Dominican Sisters, who played such a large role in my life.

RR: What experiences stand out in your high school years?

JB: Good teachers and fine discipline; sports, debating, dramatics, in an environment that catered not only to youngsters from North Cambridge but also to many other students from Arlington, Dorchester, East Cambridge and Somerville. I learned at an early age how to work as a member of many communities. St. James in Arlington featured a great club life for altar servers as well as a "Pro Parvulis" library with more books than I could ever hope to finish. My discovery of public libraries influenced me then in a way that held me enthralled even up to today. I am ever their most enthusiastic supporter. Librarians and older people that crossed my path encouraged me to spend much time there when the weather was not right for games and hikes or bike rides. Books, caring adults, committed teachers, all provided support, so that my aspirations towards priesthood continued to deepen. I began to narrow down my perception of priesthood to include both missionary life and religious life. I was not always sure how all these dreams would come to pass, but figured that, if they were to happen, they would somehow work themselves out.

RR: If I remember correctly from my own experience, our high school days corresponded to the same years as the war on the European continent that had already begun. And Pearl Harbor was not too far into the future. How did these events impact your young life?

JB: December 7th is a day I remember as if it were yesterday. Times sped up and lives of many around me changed fast. After my junior year in high school my friend at the parish library told me about the new B. C. Accelerated Program open to high school juniors whereby one could enter Boston College in February of his senior year of high school. In conjunction with that possibility, since I was 16, I was also free to take another government exam, and if successful, be employed in the Charlestown Naval Yard as a “shipfitter’s helper” for the astounding weekly pay of \$37.50. That was big money in 1942, a larger salary than what my father was receiving as a postal clerk at the South Postal Annex. I had earned money at small jobs before but this windfall opened up another future for me. I gave everything I earned to my mother as a step towards this new program at B.C. I was able to enter Boston College for freshman year in February of 1943 and complete my first semester and then revisit St. John’s High School to graduate with my original class of 1943. The entire experience was exciting, but everything was moving faster than I liked at the time. But there were many compensations for which I am grateful today.

At B.C. I knew only Jesuits as teachers, and they came through to me as both competent and caring. The turnover among this Jesuit staff, however, was rapid, because they were leaving almost weekly for assignments as chaplains in the Armed Forces. The

positive side of this experience was that I got to know many Jesuits in a short time and this familiarity put the final touches on my aspirations to priesthood. Since they were teachers and religious and missionaries, I forgot the diocesan priesthood or Maryknoll or anything else. The negative aspect of this fast-changing state of affairs was that I either had to enter Jesuit religious life immediately or be drafted on my eighteenth birthday, which would force me to defer my vocation until after the Second World War. At that time we did not know when this would happen. I vacillated between joining the Jesuits immediately or joining the Navy in the V-I Program that would have guaranteed my becoming an ensign in ninety days and give me a free college education. It was a difficult time to make the right choice, but I finally opted to enter Shadowbrook on the next scheduled entrance date of July 1 along with twenty novices, all of whom were under eighteen years of age. I saw four Jesuit examiners within two hours one afternoon at B. C., met with the provincial, and entered the Society in July 1943.

RR: So you began to experience another style of education as a Jesuit entering the full course of studies at what was then Shadowbrook and Weston. What are your memories and thoughts of those times?

JB: Shadowbrook from the beginning, even the novitiate itself, inspired me with love for reading spiritual books and later in the juniorate with the ancient Classics and English. My enthusiasm found support in some wonderful teachers that I remember with affection and gratitude. I sought them out at Shadowbrook and later at Weston. Where they did not inspire me, I made other provisions by way of self-study in those areas that struck me as particularly important for the future as I then conceived it.

The Greek Classics and English literature were my primary interest at the time, which would broaden out later to include works of theology and Scripture.

RR: Now, I'd like to just take a quick look at the course, if you will. It was generally the same for everybody. Although different people have somewhat different experiences, by and large, the studies and training were all pretty much the same. Was there anything in the courses at Shadowbrook or Weston that stands out as a particularly important part of your development as a Jesuit?

JB: Studies in the juniorate were a delight, and I was focused on finding the time and the places where I could continue my academic interests. Philosophy and theology left me largely uninspired, but I did what I had to do with a basic pragmatism so as to be sufficiently proficient to pass the exams for whatever the future might have in store for me. My options were very much open at this time. Special Jesuits took an interest and tutored me in subjects that still continued to turn me on. In philosophy I did a fair amount of reading in Thucydides, Demosthenes and Plato, and did an informal course in Greek prose composition under Carl Thayer.

I would follow a similar pattern when I returned from regency. But then it was not so much Classics that interested me, but theology with emphasis on Scripture for possible future work in the "new theology" at one of our colleges in the States. Central to my discernment at the time was either life in the States or life on the Missions. Again, special Jesuit friends became important to me in working through this question. Finally, just before my ordination in 1956, I decided to offer myself to the provincial for a two-year assignment in Jamaica to test the waters to see if

I wanted to make a definite option for missionary work. He found my proposal agreeable, and in 1957 I joined the staff at St. George's College in Jamaica. Although there I was involved in the heavy schedule of teaching both in the day and evening schools, I accepted a lot of outside apostolic tasks to find out my strengths and weaknesses. I did eight-day retreats to many communities of religious Sisters and parochial work all over the island on weekends and holiday times! I was trying to collect, as it were, a lot of data to process later in tertianship.

One positive development from this biennium in Jamaica was the chance of doing tertianship at St. Bueno's in Wales, which would provide opportunities for travel and a European experience. At Bueno's I became a good friend to another "special" Jesuit in the person of our tertian instructor, Peter Paul Kennedy, who was instrumental in preparing many Jesuits throughout the States who were later to become the pioneers in the new understanding of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. It was all very rudimentary then, but I had a sense then of being in the right place at the right time.

After tertianship I returned to Jamaica and to St. George's, but by now I knew I wanted something different from being largely limited to secondary school teaching. New Jesuit friends in Jamaica, such as Jim Barry and Bob Burke as well as Bp. John McEleney, inspired me with their own vision of church and the implementation of Vatican II. The Vatican Council was challenging Jesuits to see themselves not so much as an "exempt religious community" but as a "community at service to the local church." Bp. McEleney, former New England Pro-

vincial, now Bishop of Kingston, made his first priority the establishment of a “native” seminary as the best way of encouraging local vocations to the priesthood. This goal interested me more than anything else that I was doing at the time. His hope was to train students for the entirety of their studies in Jamaica rather than outside the country for reasons based upon the Jamaican church’s previous experience. Fr. Bob Burke worked closely with the bishop and brain-stormed possibilities for him. I was interested in this goal and wanted very much to be part of it. In December 1961, I left St. George’s and went to Mannings Hill to live with Bob Burke, a community of two Jesuits, at St. Michael’s Seminary. In February 1962 we began the new year with four new students in addition to three or so already in residence. The challenge of teaching whatever subjects were needed tailored to individual needs among these seminarians challenged me. I knew that philosophical studies had to follow in preparing for a major seminary some time in the future. From 1961 when I made this move I felt that I was working outside of the traditional parameters of religious life but doing a kind of work that Jesuits could do better than others.

RR: So this new seminary provided you with an interesting vantage point for testing out many of the changes that were being incorporated into the new post-Vatican II Church?

JB: So I always felt. What was immediately clear through my friendship with Bob Burke and the visits of Bp. McEleney to St. Michael’s Seminary was that the Bishop saw his seminary, as small as it may have been at the time, as a workshop of sorts for the implementation of many diocesan projects for the local church through the implementing of degrees of Vatican II

which Bp. McEleney wished to implement as soon as possible. First he wanted the married diaconate, and the seminary staff was to provide their training. Three years of training were established for the first set of candidates. This task alone made us at the seminary conscious that our work concerned not only our students but the wider work of the diocese. I felt that I was a privileged priest and teacher for the local church, who also happened to be a Jesuit.

Just as seminaries were being reorganized in the States, so, too, these changes challenged us in ways specific to our setup in Jamaica. Bp. McEleney had built a new seminary on Mannings Hill, and within the short space of four years sold this newly-built seminary in order to build another seminary adjacent to the campus of the University of the West Indies. Jesuits like Reggie O'Neil joined us from the U.S. to work both at St. Michael's Seminary and to teach philosophy courses at the University of the West Indies. Our students were taking their philosophy courses at both places, and this arrangement alone suggested another location and base for seminary studies. In 1967 Kingston became an Archdiocese with the elevation of Bp. McEleney as well as with the appointment of a Jamaican, Samuel E. Carter, who succeeded him as Archbishop of Kingston. He was the first Jamaican bishop, and was assisted by Bp. Edgerton Clarke of Montego Bay, formerly a diocesan priest and member of the first class that had graduated from St. Michael's Seminary.

RR: Before you go on, let me just situate this a little bit. Am I correct in assuming that this was a time of new beginnings not only in the Church but also in the seminary?

JB: In a word, yes. And the reason for this was the

impact of the new spirit of ecumenism coming out of the work of the Vatican Council. The spirit of ecumenism became a driving force that spread through the Church and its people not only in Jamaica but also in the Caribbean. Visitors from the World Council of Churches said on their arrival to us that Jamaica and the Caribbean was a “showcase” for the work of ecumenism. This fact also made it imperative that there be created on an ecumenical level a regional seminary to accommodate all the various denominations. In a nutshell this goal, which found support throughout the Caribbean, led to the setting up of an ecumenical regional seminary in affiliation with the University of the West Indies that would extend from Jamaica in the north to Trinidad and Guyana in the south. All the major seminaries would be tied into one another through their affiliation with the University.

In Jamaica there was St. Michael’s Seminary, which was now contiguous to the University of the West Indies. On the adjoining property there was the United Theological College that comprised about fourteen denominations. In Barbados there was the Anglican Seminary and in Trinidad there was St. John Vianney’s Seminary. In 1969 the deans of the four theological colleges came together in Trinidad, in Barbados, and in Jamaica and began to work out the academic programs of studies towards the formation of an ecumenical syllabus to meet the requirements of the University of the West Indies for the establishment of an arts degree in theology. In actual fact, after much collaboration between the theological colleges and the University on the three campuses a degree program was put in place so that candidates from each of the theological colleges could obtain a

B.A. degree in theology from UWI. The theological colleges thus became the theological department of the University. Courses in theology, scripture, and pastoral studies were taught in the individual colleges or in collaboration with one another in the separate island countries. The examinations were set by examiners appointed by UWI common to the entire Caribbean. The theology staff at each of the affiliated colleges not only taught the courses common to all in the Caribbean but also set the examination which each college took to meet the requirements of the University. In time this program was to grow into a master's program consonant with the English university system.

RR: Are you able to give me an indication of how so many of these goals were implemented in the light of limited personnel and large geographical distances?

JB: Bob Burke founded St. Michael's Seminary. Alwyn Harry, a Jamaican Jesuit, succeeded him, and served from 1962 to 1972. Fr. Donald Reece, a Jamaican diocesan priest, today bishop of Antigua, served for another ten years, and in turn was succeeded by Fr. Charles Dufour, today bishop of Montego Bay. Over the years the staff has grown and involved many priests and Sisters on a full-time or part-time basis. Members of different religious communities as well as deacons and lay people offered their services. As the degree program got under way, Jesuits, Dominicans, diocesan priests and Sisters, trained in liturgy or theology or scripture, also joined the ranks.

I spent my sabbatical year in 1967 at Fordham; I audited philosophy courses to enrich the philosophy courses that I wished to introduce or continue on my return. In 1977 I studied moral theology at Oxford to concentrate my efforts in Christian ethics and

moral theology at St. Michael's on my return. My focus was largely to support ecumenism at this level of seminary by attracting to my own classes in philosophy and Christian ethics students from the United Theological College. Most of the staff at St. Michael's were operating out of the same matrix. The ecumenical aspect of this work challenged me constantly. Bill Guindon, Provincial then, had invited me to join the Jesuit International Ecumenical Association to attend meetings in Montreal and Oxford. I soon realized at these meetings that much of what this body was aspiring to achieve in their own respective countries had already come into being in Jamaica.

It was exciting to have in my courses, in addition to our Catholic seminarians, students from non-Catholic denominations. When these students from the affiliated colleges were ordained, they began their priestly career with a close knowledge of one another in Jamaica that made the teaching and practice of ecumenism at the parish level easy to implement. Each denomination, of course, had to make its own particular provisions for their own denominational students. Catholic seminarians had to be prepared to hear confessions, for example, and needed special courses to prepare them for the confessional examination required of our own men. Other denominations faced similar requirements, and dealt with them in similar fashion.

**RR:** I suppose that there were developments and changes here as time went on. Just the list of bishops and archbishops indicates a certain variety of leadership over time. Where does all this stand now in 2006? Are there any other ecumenical ministries involved?

**JB:** There were many new developments in a rapidly growing church in Jamaica and the Caribbean. Of interest to me were the workshops, in which I had the privilege of working closely with Maurice Walsh. He was a leading resource person for Archbishop McEleney at the Vatican Council; he worked closely with Archbishop Sam Carter for the various Universal Synods that took place periodically. He was the advisor for many religious communities when they rewrote their constitutions and rediscovered their original charisms. To me his primary interest was to establish throughout the Caribbean effective marriage tribunals to deal with marriage breakdowns. I worked closely with him in this area as well, and was particularly interested in extra-canonical solutions to marriage breakdowns, such as the “internal forum solutions” for broken marriages. In addition to my working in ecumenical and academic programs for the laity, it was important to make sure that I was also training the seminarians as the future local clergy throughout the Caribbean to be able to do what Jesuits were doing then but might not continue indefinitely. Maurice Walsh and I often visited Trinidad, the Bahamas, or Barbados to present workshops for the local priests and their pastoral assistants.

**RR:** It appears that most of your seminary apostolate involved your teaching a number of courses along with ecumenical leadership. Does anything else along this line come to mind?

**JB:** The other significant program, to my way of thinking, was the establishment of a theology certificate program for leaders in the various parish communities. The pastors asked that we provide this service, and the seminary staff was glad to comply with their wishes. Courses were proposed in theology, scrip-

ture, liturgy, and pastoral studies, which ranged over a two-year program. At its conclusion, selected candidates would return to enrich their own pastoral programs in their own churches. The candidates for the certificate training program came from the parishes in Kingston, and some came at great sacrifice from the rural areas on a weekly basis for this two-year program. Priests, Sisters, deacons, lay leaders, etc., were all a part of this seminary program. Allied with these courses were programs established by the Jamaica Center of Religious Development [JCRD] that were a follow-up to the “academic programs” as their way of “marrying” the academic with the spiritual.

Probably as a result of the number of Sisters who entered courses either in the university program or in the evening pastoral courses, Archbishop Carter appointed me as Vicar of Religious Women, a post that I held for ten years. At that time not only in the U.S. but also in Jamaica many religious Sisters were leaving religious life, and the Archbishop was particularly concerned for his own diocesan community, the Franciscan Missionary Sisters, to have someone on hand for counseling and spiritual direction. I was available to these local Sisters, and later moved into the work of helping them in the process of updating their constitutions for their chapters. This experience lasted for more than ten years, and it prepared me for further work in spiritual direction when I left the seminary for pastoral work in the Archdiocese. The transition from counseling to spiritual direction and finally to the 19th Annotation retreat work with individuals or small groups was to occupy a large part of my time at Patrick House and Campion College during my last decade in Jamaica.

RR: I understand that you spent a lot of time in parish work in Jamaica?

JB: When I returned from England after my sabbatical in 1977, I decided it would be better for me to live no longer at St. Michael's Seminary but to commute to the seminary from another base in either a parish or a Jesuit community. I had passed on my former duties as Dean of Studies to another staff member, Sr. Lowe Ching, RSM, lecturer in systematic theology. Fr. [William A.] Connolly at SS. Peter and Paul Church had lost the services of George Nolan, who used to reside with him and manage the mission station at Gordon Town. I volunteered to take his place at the "price" of living in his rectory. My suggestion met with his approval and I did this work for two years, discovering to my surprise, that parish work satisfied me much more than I had anticipated. Archbishop Carter then asked me to become the "priest in charge" at Aquinas Center, which was close to both seminary and university. We shared the understanding that my primary focus would remain the seminary, and he informed the parish of this understanding. I was also chaplain of the University Hospital of the West Indies.

The hospital chaplaincy had to deal with twenty-one wards and catered to the needs of the entire Caribbean. It could have well been a total ministry in itself. There was a deacon, who worked five days a week in the hospital, while I limited visits to two mornings a week, concentrating largely on the "danger list patients." This experience made it so clear to me that the faculty for final anointing and the Sacrament of the Sick should be extended to deacons and selected lay persons as a result of the many times my deacon assistant had to leave his rounds and seek me

out at the seminary to anoint a dying patient to whom he had been ministering over a period of weeks. When I collaborated with Maurice Walsh in the revision for the New Code of Canon Law, we both made a strong proposal that this faculty of anointing be also extended to deacons for the obvious reasons based upon experience. Both of us made submissions individually, even though we were fairly sure in advance this change would not be found acceptable.

RR: Did you maintain this relationship with the seminary right up to the time you left Jamaica for the Bahamas?

JB: More or less but with diminishing presence. My pastoral work at Gordon Town and later at Aquinas Center and finally Immaculate Conception in Stony Hill, a church with four mission stations that were spread out between Kingston and the North Coast, were making larger demands on my interests. The area was large and I had to spend much more time traveling to the various mission stations which comprised both churches and attached schools. A typical example of the unexpected and unplanned was the 1988 hurricane that battered all the churches that belonged to Stony Hill and left two of the church buildings as well as the surrounding communities in ruins. This meant not only damages to the schools and churches but also devastation for many of the people, who were cut off from Kingston in all kinds of ways. Just in Stony Hill alone, the people were deprived of electricity for more than seven weeks. The very nature of the situation meant that I had to work out how to fulfill my responsibilities both as a pastor and as a seminary lecturer.

RR: I suppose these changes in seminary, parishes, and the country at large were also being reflected in the

Society of Jesus.

JB: Yes, very much so. In 1991 after nine years at Stony Hill, Bob Manning, Provincial from New England, visited Jamaica and arranged for a number of changes in personnel. Fr. Tom Schneider [McMurray] replaced Fr. J. J. Bresnahan as regional superior, and Fr. Richard Roos replaced Fr. George Nolan as rector of St. George's. In the same meeting Fr. Manning asked that I assume responsibility for Campion College, which would involve my surrendering my post at Immaculate Conception, Stony Hill, to begin the work of establishing, if possible, Patrick House, as a "Jesuit Jamaica Retirement Community." Jamaican Jesuits had spent more years in Jamaica than they had lived in the States, and were reluctant to return to the States even for hospitalization. So after thirty years of my living outside of a Jesuit community I returned to Campion College and Patrick House.

I continue to maintain my connection with the seminary as my first love either visiting them periodically or having them visit me for informal sessions at Campion. It was a critical time for the Archdiocese in that there was pressure from Rome to limit the regional seminaries in the Caribbean to one regional seminary, which would be St. John Vianney's in Trinidad. I had negative feelings about this development inasmuch as I had come to know through personal experience the contribution of a major seminary to the local Jamaican church.

At the Episcopal Conference in 1992 to deal with this question the bishops were persuaded to continue St. Michael's as one of two regional seminaries. Later an apostolic visitor from Rome was appointed, the

Bishop of Virgin Islands, Sean O'Malley, who interviewed everyone in Jamaica connected with the seminary. But the die was cast. St. Michael's was closed as a regional seminary and all diocesan seminarians and candidates from some religious communities in Jamaica were transferred en masse to Trinidad. St. Michael's Seminary has managed to maintain its identity as St. Michael's Theological College but in my estimation much of the work that used to be done at the seminary level and in an ecumenical context were no longer continued.

RR: Are you aware of any other consequences of this move?

JB: I think I might better leave the answer to that question to others who are serving today at St. Michael's Theological College. Although I think the vocation situation deteriorated dramatically, it is unwise to draw hasty conclusions. I am grateful for what had been achieved and I remain confident in the future, but I leave these possibilities to others. As the superior of the Jesuit community comprising about a dozen Jesuits at full capacity, I recall fourteen Jesuits who came and left this community in the space of my time there for one reason or another. Either they returned to Weston, because our limited facilities could no longer provide for their needs, or some of them died in Jamaica, which had become their home as well as their apostolate.

Patrick House remained at a constant size of a dozen men, but St. George's was broken up into a number of small communities. I continued to work closely with Maurice Walsh in the tribunal and by being available to Archbishop Clarke as he prepared for the ongoing Roman synods. I intensified my efforts in retreat work with small groups in my office at

Patrick House or with 19th Annotation retreats. I visited local churches to present workshops and Lenten courses on Scriptural themes.

RR: Where are we today with respect to this “Jesuit retirement home”?

JB: It is hard to say. The work of Patrick House continues today under Don Larkin. Many Jesuits have returned to the States. Many stayed, and there is still a retirement community, although the number of personnel is smaller.

RR: Before returning to the Province, you spent a period of time in the Bahamas after you demitted office at Campion. How did this change of affairs come about?

JB: In 1997 a new regional superior was appointed for Jamaica. It also was the year in which I would be leaving as superior of this community. I considered other works in Jamaica while entertaining the possibility of transferring to the Bahamas. Bp. Lawrence Burke of Nassau at that time was preparing a class of candidates for the married diaconate, and they were about half way through their program. The tribunal in the Bahamas was extremely busy, and I thought I could make a contribution there. My other interest was in providing workshops in Nassau parishes in Scripture, as I had been doing in Kingston. I talked to the Provincial and the Regional Superior about each possibility. At the end of my term, I arranged with the Regional Superior to visit the Bahamas and look into the situation there. I went just before Christmas in 1997, visited a number of parishes and one or two islands, and then spoke to Bp. Burke. He invited me to take on the work of priest in charge at St. Cecilia’s Parish, where I would work closely with the Sister who had been managing that parish for a number of years. He also wanted my assistance both in the diaconal program and in the tribunal.

It was a difficult decision to leave Jamaica, but the Jesuits in the Jamaican Region were looking into setting up a wider Caribbean Antillean Region. After this input, I decided to make this change in my work. The proposal was agreeable to the Regional Superior. Just before Lent in 1998 I left Jamaica for the Bahamas. I lived at the Hermitage with Bp. Burke for two years, worked as priest in charge of St. Cecilia's Church, brought the diaconal candidates to their final months before their ordination, and was on hand for work at the local tribunal, still working at a distance under the guidance of Maurice Walsh in Jamaica. I was prepared to stay there indefinitely, but in 1999 health problems developed that were better handled in the United States. It was at that time that I returned to join the community at Campion Center. I suppose our stories end only with our death. Since I have been here in assisted care, I am grateful that I occupy myself with retreats and spiritual direction under the auspices of the Campion Renewal Center. More and more I have been feeling that the times that I have had and continue to have are ongoing graces. For these I remain grateful.

RR: We're approaching the end of our conversation. Let me ask you a broad question. Have you a sense of God's assistance in your life, that there were times in your life and in that of the Church, when positive things happened that seem to feel like the touch of God's guiding and loving hand? Some things that happen to us and sometimes through us, that we simply marvel at? So much so, that you could say to yourself, "I've done my best as a Jesuit priest, but there were times when I felt that many of the good things that happened to me and to those I tried to serve, went beyond my ministerial abilities and

showed the hand of a guiding and loving God?”

**JB:** Let me respond to your question in my own way. At some retreat time in the past I thought I would write out my autobiography as a way of coming to terms with what the Lord has been doing through me and in me as an exercise to bring me to greater personal awareness. It was a good exercise and I still have remnants in my computer for future review or amplification during upcoming annual retreats. I gave it a title that I borrowed from something I read in the juniorate. I think it was Paul Claudel's book, "Tidings Brought to Mary." What caught me at the time was the subtitle that had to do with a Portuguese proverb: "God writes straight with crooked lines!" This quotation fitted my thinking then and I think I can still go with it today. In his own way the Lord brings to pass what He wants of us during the span of our life. What has been achieved has been accomplished not through my own doing but through His. Either you decide what the Lord wants for you or you don't decide what the Lord wants for you. Since He is in charge, it happens. I'm grateful for this. I leave it at that!

**RR:** Thanks very much.

Fr. Joseph F. Brennan, S.J.

**Born:** November 17, 1925, Charlestown,  
Massachusetts  
**Entered:** July 1, 1943, Lenox, Massachusetts,  
Novitiate of St. Stanislaus/Shadowbrook  
**Ordained:** June 16, 1956, Weston, Massachusetts,  
Weston College  
**Final Vows:** August 15, 1961, Holy Trinity Cathedral,  
Kingston, Jamaica

1938 Cambridge, Massachusetts: St. John's High School  
- Student  
1943 Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts: Boston College -  
Student  
1943 Lenox, Massachusetts: Novitiate of St. Stanislaus/  
Shadowbrook - Novitiate and juniorate  
1947 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College - Studied  
philosophy  
1950 Portland, Maine: Cheverus High School - Taught  
Latin, Greek, English, and religion  
1952 Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts: Boston College -  
Studied Classics  
1953 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College - Studied  
theology  
1957 Kingston, Jamaica, W.I.: St. George's College -  
Taught fourth form  
1959 St. Asaph, Flintshire, N. Wales, Great Britain: St  
Bueno's College - Tertianship  
1960 Kingston, Jamaica, W.I.: St. George's College -  
Taught fourth form  
1961 Kingston, Jamaica, W.I.: St. Michael's Seminary -  
Taught theology  
1967 Bronx, New York: Fordham University - Sabbati-  
cal; studied philosophy

- 1968 Kingston, Jamaica, W.I.: St Michael's Seminary -  
Dean of Studies
- 1976 Oxford, United Kingdom: Campion Hall - Sab-  
batical; studied theology
- 1977 Kingston, Jamaica, W.I.: St. Michael's Seminary -  
Dean of Studies; taught theology
- 1978 Kingston, Jamaica: SS. Peter and Paul (1978-79) at  
Gordon Town - Pastoral assistant; Aquinas Center  
(1978-82) - Pastor; Immaculate Conception (Stony  
Hill - 1982-91) - Pastor
- 1991 Kingston, Jamaica: Campion College - Superior of  
Patrick House, the Jesuit Jamaica Retirement  
Community; minister; taught at St. Michael's  
Seminary
- 1997 Nassau, Bahamas: St. Cecilia Church - Pastor
- 1999 Weston, Massachusetts: Campion Center -  
Pastoral Ministry

#### Degrees

- 1949 Master of Arts, Philosophy, Weston College -  
Boston College
- 1953 Master of Arts, Classics, Weston College - Boston  
College
- 1957 Licentiate in Theology, Theology, Weston College