

**New England Jesuit
Oral History Program**



**Fr. John W. Keegan, 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 some times 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 oral history is all about.

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March 2008

Interview with Fr. John W. Keegan, S.J.
by Fr. Richard W. Rousseau, S.J.
June 14, 2006

FAMILY

ROUSSEAU: Welcome.

KEEGAN: Thank you.

RR: We'll proceed with a more or less chronological structure, beginning with your earliest years. Could you tell us where you were born as well as something about your father and mother?

JK: I was born October 15, 1937 in Dorchester, Massachusetts. My dad was a repair person for the Boston Gas Company. And my mother was a stay-at-home mom. My dad died in 1970 of a heart attack, and my mother died in 1988.

I'm the oldest of four children. I had a brother and two sisters, and we grew up in Dorchester. My sister, Joanne, who's still alive, is eighteen months younger than I. My brother, Fran, who died in 1982, was about two-and-a-half years younger than I. My sister, Mary, was fourteen years younger than I, and died of cancer when she was eleven.

RR: I assume that your father worked for the Boston Gas Company for many years?

JK: Oh, yes, for about thirty-five years.

GRAMMAR SCHOOL

RR: Where was your first school?

JK: St. Peter's School in Dorchester, Mass. It was run by the Sisters of Charity of Halifax. I had a great education there. The sisters were very, very good. They encouraged us to take the exam for a scholarship at BC High. So I did, and went to BC High in 1951.

HIS PARISH

RR: And I understand that St. Peter's was close to where you lived?

JK: About a fifteen-minute walk.

RR: Were you able to help the priests out with Masses and other services?

JK: Oh, yes. I was also an altar boy. And I was in the sanctuary choir for about three years until my voice changed.

RR: And did those priests make a strong impression on you?

JK: Well, I think life in those days was very different for all of us, and the parish was the center of our lives, socially and even regarding athletics. I was never very athletic, but I was involved in other activities. Fr. Cornelius Mason was one of the priests to whom I always went to confession. He was a lovely man.

RR: Did he influence you personally, in an indirect way?

JK: In an indirect way, yes.

BOSTON COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

RR: Could you tell us more about your experience at BC High? As you well know, a lot of the Jesuits in the New England Province have been either students or teachers there. It's even created a kind of mystical reputation about itself.

JK: When I first went to BC High in '51, we were over in

the South End. Then, in '53, when I was a junior, we moved over to Morrissey Boulevard. I was impressed with the impact of the Jesuits on us as we came through the door in the morning.

And I had some very good teachers. BC High was a good experience for me. I was never in what we called the "the brain room." I was a good student, but never in any way outstanding. Fr. J. J. Ryan taught us Latin in my senior year. He was probably the one Jesuit who took any personal interest in me. I'm not saying the others didn't take a personal interest in us, broadly speaking, but he was special. They were all good teachers. I did what I was supposed to do, but J. J. was very good to me. He helped me in clarifying what I might do after BC High.

RR: Did anything especially interesting happen to you during those years?

JK: No, not really. After school, I worked in a supermarket to be able to help my family. I was the oldest of the four kids, and my folks didn't have a lot of money. So I helped by working in the supermarket. We all went to Catholic schools and shared the same experiences.

FRESHMAN AT BOSTON COLLEGE

RR: Yes. And at the end of your years at BC High, what did you do next?

JK: I wanted to go to college at BC, but I didn't think I would be able to do so, what with two other children in the family still in high school and my sister Mary in need of medical attention in a hospital. But I decided to at least apply to BC and see what would happen. And I was accepted! So I was in pre-med for the four years at Boston College. And it was during that time that I considered becoming a Jesuit.

Even when I was at BC, I continued to work in the supermarket. And I also did some work in the sum-

mer time at Boston Gas Company, where my father worked. All I had to do was to walk around delivering gas bills. So, by myself, I had a lot of free time. As I remember, in those days churches were open to everyone. I would make a visit and ask God, "What do you want me to do?" And little by little, it came to me that he wanted me to be a Jesuit and not a doctor.

RR: Did you complete your four years at BC?

JK: I did.

RR: So you had a very good foundation in pre-med studies?

JK: Yes, and also in natural science.

RR: And has that foundation in medicine been a help to you over the years?

JK: No. An important discovery of mine was that I wasn't cut out to be a scientist.

VOCATION

RR: So what was your next step?

JK: I applied for the Society during my senior year at BC. Actually, I had applied during my junior year and spoke about it in May with Fr. Henry Callahan, the BC student counselor. But it just happened to be the year that the new Jesuit novitiate at Shadowbrook was reopening with a smaller class moving in from Gloucester. The provincial suggested I wait till I graduated. And I'm glad I did wait. By that time the changeover was complete.

NOVITIATE AT SHADOWBROOK

RR: Just when did you enter?

JK: August 14, 1959. That was the year Vatican II was called, if you remember, in January 1959. It was a very interesting time.

RR: So you were able to follow closely what was happening in the Church and in the Society. Now the new

Shadowbrook opened in November 1958. Could you tell us something about your time there?

JK: Yes. Those who entered at Gloucester made their long retreat there and then went to Shadowbrook that November. My class, however, was the first one to make our whole novitiate at the new Shadowbrook.

RR: The rebuilt Shadowbrook was quite impressive. It was sad for it to be in use for such a short time.

JK: Yes.

RR: Did anything of special interest happen to you at Shadowbrook?

JK: In a sense, a whole lot of things happened. Obviously, it was a new experience for me, because of my newness as a young Jesuit. In my first year I had Fr. Post as a novice master and then Fr. Gerry O'Callaghan during my second year. I got to know my classmates well and really enjoyed Shadowbrook. I enjoyed the regularity of our life and, above all, learned how to pray. And I loved the Berkshires.

RR: Including the great view of the lake from the front porch.

JK: Oh, yes.

RR: What about your juniorate years?

JK: I didn't have any juniorate, because I had graduated from BC. So I came to Weston for my philosophy.

PHILOSOPHY STUDIES

RR: Anything about the philosophy years that stands out in your mind?

JK: Actually, my first year at Weston was very difficult for me and the other seven novices who had come there directly from the novitiate. Fr. O'Callaghan impressed on us our need to discern what God's will was and follow it, something, of course, easier said than done. We were asked to speak Latin the day after we arrived. However, we soon discovered that, despite that, hardly

anyone there spoke Latin. So when we newcomers did speak Latin, we were branded as novices, because we were speaking Latin.

RR: Had you had Latin at BC?

JK: Sure. I had four years of it at BC High and two years at BC. So it wasn't something completely new for me. But being quasi-ostracized by the majority of philosophers, who did not speak Latin the way we felt we were asked to, was difficult for us straight out of the novitiate. We felt strongly that we should follow the rule, because we saw our superiors saying that it was God's will. We felt it was something important that we needed to do. However, we were the only ones who were doing that.

RR: That must have been quite difficult for you and the other recent novices?

JK: It was. But I got used to it. I understood it as just the way things were.

RR: How about the philosophy courses? What did you think of them?

JK: I thought they were repetitive, given the fact that I had taken eight courses in philosophy at BC. I had to take some of them over again. That's not to say that some of the faculty were not very good teachers. I thought Paul Lucey was fine. Dan Shine was good. And the courses were all in Latin. Some of the courses were good and a number of others were repetitive for me.

REGENCY AT CRANWELL

RR: So where did you go at the end of those two years?

JK: I went to Cranwell for my regency.

RR: I heard that at the time Cranwell was a pretty thriving operation. Is that right?

JK: Yes, in those years, it was.

RR: My brother was a student there around that time, but

it may have been just before you got there. Tell us a bit about your teaching experiences there.

JK: I started off teaching mathematics, even though I had not been a math major. I taught it anyhow. Interestingly enough, I was told I would be teaching senior math at a time when the new math was just starting up.

I taught a course in elementary functions, though I never had it myself. It was a challenge, and I had to work every night to get my head around enough material for the next day. And, all the while, I was living in the dormitory with twenty-four young people. I had class six days a week and seldom got out of Cranwell.

One result during my first year was that I felt I was just a total failure as a teacher. I was working so hard and teaching courses I really wasn't familiar with. However, by my second and third years I was more comfortable with the students and courses, and actually enjoyed being at Cranwell.

I enjoyed my involvement with the students, because we lived in the dormitory together. We also had a very good Jesuit community. And there were three other scholastics there with me, even four at one point. Our intermixing with the priests created a nice community. But it was still a tough life.

RR: Was it the isolation out in the country?

JK: No. It was just the pressure of having to be up for Mass at 6:00 AM, serving Mass at 6:30, acting as a prefect at the student Mass at 7:00, doing room inspection in the dormitory at 8:00, and then teaching our classes.

RR: How many hours a day would you teach?

JK: In those days we taught four hours a day.

RR: Would you be teaching the same course to four different rooms?

JK: No, I was teaching freshman algebra and then the se-

nior course in probability and elementary functions.

RR: So you were really into mathematics.

JK: Oh, yes. And in the afternoon we had to drive the workers home and then be in study hall in the evening.

RR: Then start it all over again the next day.

JK: That's right.

RR: I understand that you even had classes on Saturday?

JK: We did.

RR: And since there were many boarders, did you have to plan things to keep them busy?

JK: It wasn't easy to find something for them to do when they were not in class. But, as I look back over the three years, I find that I enjoyed it very much. The work we were doing was good and important.

RR: So you felt that you were able to do well the task you were asked to do?

JK: Yes.

THEOLOGY STUDIES

RR: You were at Cranwell for three years and then returned to Weston for theology. Tell us something about your being at Weston a second time.

JK: I have to say that they were very, very tumultuous years. I went back there in 1966. By then, Vatican II had concluded. The war in Vietnam was going on. Civil rights and the whole Martin Luther King activities were happening. John Kennedy had been assassinated. Then Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were assassinated during my theology years.

RR: Yes, it was a very difficult time all around.

JK: We spent what we considered an inordinate amount of time talking about things that didn't have much meaning, like celebrating Mass without a server. We didn't understand why—with all that was going on in the world, people being killed because they were black and others being killed in Vietnam—why we were

spending our time wondering about the morality of celebrating Mass without a server. We were confused by the fact that the war was not being supported by everyone, with the country in some upheaval.

RR: Hard choices. And there were even some upheavals in the Church.

JK: It was due in part to “*Humanae Vitae*.” Our moral theology professors were very much in line with the pope’s teaching, as they should have been. But being students, we thought we should be able to consider a few other options, because other people like bishops, priests, and theologians were considering their applicability.

RR: Yes, there was a lot of diversity.

JK: Yet we were caught up in a theological milieu that applied more to twenty years before. And, to complicate things, there was a lot of talk among us about moving the school to Cambridge.

RR: Let me try to situate things. Were you here at Weston during a two-day open conference of the provincial and his staff, professors, and theologians about the future, including the possible move to Cambridge?

JK: Yes, I was.

RR: I mention it, because I chaired one group and spoke on the opening morning of that meeting. I don’t know how much I contributed to the decisions, but it was all very exciting and interesting.

JK: Yes, it was.

RR: Am I correct in saying, then, that in this tumultuous period, much of the actual teaching at Weston was not properly taking into account the serious changes that were happening?

JK: That’s right. It didn’t.

RR: It wasn’t that it was bad, but rather a question of not quite fitting the current situation.

JK: Sure.

RR: The decision was made to move to Cambridge. Were you still here then?

JK: Yes. But we were like Moses. We saw the Promised Land from afar, but we ourselves couldn't enter it. I was here at Weston for three years. During what would have been my fourth year, Weston School of Theology moved to Cambridge. And a strange thing happened. Bob Richards was supposed to teach us a course in Christology, but he died suddenly.

RR: Yes, that was a tragedy.

JK: Yes. And part of the tragedy was that our class never had that important course in Christology. And then, there was a lot of upheaval among the faculty. Some felt it was terrible that we would even think about leaving Weston to go to Cambridge. On the other hand, there were some professors, like Paul Lucey, who supported us students about the move. Then Bob White became rector, and he and George McRae both strongly supported the move. George was a wonderful Scripture teacher, and we were lucky enough to have him for six classes. During all this tumult, five men in our class left the Society during their third year.

RR: It was a confusing time.

JK: Yes. Each one of them had their own story why they left. And the confusion didn't help.

ORDINATION AT CRANWELL

RR: After three years you were ordained?

JK: Pat Cafferty and I were ordained in 1969 up at Cranwell, because Fr. Frank Mackin had built a beautiful chapel there in 1967. In a way, I was going back home.

RR: Who ordained you?

JK: Bishop Samuel Emmanuel Carter of Jamaica. There were two of us and our family, friends, and all the students. We hoped that it would spark some of them

to think about a vocation.

RR: If I am not mistaken, the national television news had a story on the Cranwell chapel.

JK: That's right. Maybe it's because they put the steeple top on with a helicopter. It was a kind of crowning.

RETURN TO CRANWELL

RR: So let's turn quickly to tertianship.

JK: Actually, I was at Cranwell for five years before I did tertianship. I was ordained in 1969 and went to Cranwell. I taught math, coached cross country, and lived in a dormitory. I then became the assistant headmaster when Jim Benson became the rector.

RR: Did you find your second go at teaching math somewhat easier than when you were first there?

JK: Oh, yes, because during the summers, like many others, I went to Wesleyan University in Connecticut to get a degree in mathematics.

RR: Do you remember anything from that time worth mentioning?

JK: Sure. When I went back after ordination, we had that beautiful new chapel. And it was great to be able to preside at the Eucharist in that chapel, especially because of all the changes in the liturgy that came out of Vatican II. Though we were not involved in making the changes, we embraced them wholeheartedly. They were really great. And this was connected with my helping out in local parishes on weekends.

RR: Did you get to know that area in western Massachusetts well?

CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

JK: Very much so, because I got involved with the charismatic renewal groups. After I finished at Wesleyan, I spent a summer in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I had gotten involved with charismatic renewal and other prayer

groups in Pittsfield. I made many friends in Pittsfield, and am still in touch with some of my Cranwell friends.

RR: Did you stay in touch later on with these charismatic renewal people?

JK: I did. First were those connected with Cranwell and later with those at Cheverus. During my six years there, I met with a prayer group every Tuesday. I also went to some of the local conventions. I found it very helpful spiritually. I was also able to get some training to give the Spiritual Exercises. And for four years in the summer time, we had a house of prayer at Cranwell.

RR: How would you define “a house of prayer”?

JK: I would say that it’s simply a place where people come to pray and make the Exercises. It could also be a weekend of prayer. It could be just a day of prayer. We had a regular routine. We said prayers from the office of the day in the morning, as well as liturgy, prayers, and counseling in the evening. We had a very helpful setting in the beautiful Berkshires. We could use the dorms for a number of the lay people, sisters, and priests who came to make retreats. We offered a number of choices: weekend retreats, eight-day retreats, and even some thirty-day retreats.

RR: I imagine that you also had some individuals who came for a day of prayer?

JK: Yes. We called it “a day of recollection.”

RR: How did this tie in with your other responsibilities as a teacher and administrator?

JK: Most of this was during the summer. I didn’t teach in the summer, but I was still headmaster at that point. But I was able to balance this with my work in the office, such as, scheduling, transcribing, and listing classes.

RR: How did you like being an administrator?

JK: I enjoyed it. It helped me to develop gifts and talents that I was able to use later at Cheverus.

RR: But at the same time, you weren't a full-time administrator, since you were still teaching classes.

JK: I was busy teaching, living in the dorm, and coaching the cross-country team. And I helped out on weekends in the parishes.

PASTORAL WORK

RR: Did you go to any of the parishes in neighboring towns?

JK: I'd go to Pittsfield parishes some seven miles away. I occasionally went to Connecticut and even New York State.

RR: And what was your overall impression of the Catholic communities in these places?

JK: Oh, they were great communities. Of course, all of them were getting used to the changes of Vatican II, particularly in the Berkshires, where the people were very, very supportive of the council. That was true of priests as well. Those people just getting used to the changes loved the Jesuits because of our training at Shadowbrook. And, due to Cranwell, Jesuits were very much in evidence. Fr. Pat Sullivan had done great work in terms of his ecumenism and Bible study courses. So we had good rapport with the parishioners, and they had a great deal of affection for the Jesuits.

TERTIANSHIP

RR: Let me come back to your tertianship. Could you tell us something about that?

JK: Yes. I had been ordained for five years, so it was time for me to go to do tertianship. At the time, I was not impressed with the New England tertianship, because it consisted of six weeks one summer and six weeks the next summer. And I didn't think that would be effective enough for me.

RR: To say nothing of it being spread out over two or more years.

JK: So I got permission to go down to Our Lady of the Holy Cross Abbey in Berryville, Virginia. I had gone there a couple of times to make a weekend retreat. And I had talked to the abbot about possibilities of living there. So I went to the abbey.

My hope had been that I could stay for about eight months, and have a Jesuit come down to give me the Spiritual Exercises, but that didn't work out. And so I stayed there for four months with the monks. This meant getting up at 3:15 AM and doing regular work and reading.

I spent time reading about the Jesuit Constitutions and history of the Society. It was a very good time for me spiritually, because I came to realize that God was the one who was doing whatever good work I was doing.

And I remember when the Abbot of St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Mass., came down to Virginia. I was chatting with him, and he said, "It's a little strange to have a Jesuit spending time in the monastery. So, how's it going?" And I said, "It's OK, but my prayer is not as good as it should be." And he then said something to me that has stuck with me over the years and which I've used a number of times in retreats. He said, "How would you know?"

RR: A good question!

JK: Yes. Because I think sometimes I, as well as a hundred thousand others, think they can determine just how things should be. So I've learned to use the word "should" as little as possible. I use little phrases like, "Thou shalt not should on thyself," and "Thou shalt not should on others." "Thou shalt not let others should on thee." [Laughter] I think the "shoulds" in our life can get us into a real mess.

The monastery was a good experience for me. It made me realize my powerlessness in many ways. Of course,

I knew that I wasn't going to be there for life. There was a lot of silence, so I just followed a regular routine of prayer and work.

CLOSING CRANWELL

RR: What did you do during the other four months?

JK: After I left Berryville, I made the long retreat at Columbiere in Clarkston, Michigan. Then Ray Swords [S.J.], a good friend of mine and president of Cranwell, asked me to come back to help him, because it looked like the school was going to close, which it did. He needed help placing kids in other schools and finding jobs for faculty. I went back to Cranwell, and was there helping out from March through June.

RR: You were involved in the closing? That must have been somewhat traumatic?

JK: Yes, it was very painful, because I really enjoyed my time there. I enjoyed the kids and felt that we were doing a good work. But it was clear that we just couldn't continue without a major influx of money, which we never got. It was understandable that the school would have to close. But it was painful nevertheless.

RR: My understanding is that Cranwell was not alone in closing. A number of other prep schools in that general area, both for boys and girls, were also in the process of shutting down. Apparently the interest in that kind of school had been declining in general. Is that what happened?

JK: That's correct. There were seven boarding schools in Lenox, for example, each of which closed within two to three years.

RR: Do you have any thoughts as to how it all happened?

JK: These school closings and changes happened around the country. The Vietnam War had something to do with it. Racial problems were widespread. And something else was involved that most people would not

have been aware of, namely drug use. It became a real problem in these boarding schools. Parents began to realize that their children in these prep schools had the kind of money that allowed them to buy drugs for themselves. And they were easy prey for those selling marijuana and other drugs to them.

RR: So it was a broader, deeper problem than appeared on the surface?

JK: Yes, these kids were being expelled, and the net result was that parents were less willing to send them away to school, even though so many of these young people were not involved in drugs themselves.

RR: Were such problems at Cranwell, too?

JK: To a certain extent, yes, because the moral climate of our country in the early '70s was very, very difficult. The Vietnam War was going on. During Johnson's years as president things were very tough. It was a time of ups and downs in the country.

RECTOR AT CHEVERUS

RR: After being identified with Cranwell for so many years, it must have been difficult for you. It must have been stressful for you to now be identified with the closing of Cranwell? So, after all that, where did you go?

JK: Well, I actually stayed there for another year, because the provincial asked me to be the superior of the four Jesuits living there while we cleaned the place up as best we could. We had to deal with such things as returning money and endowments to those they belonged to. During that year, I continued to work with the charismatic community that I knew well. We also continued Masses in the chapel.

Then, at the end of that year, the provincial came for a visit and said that he would like me to go to Cheverus as the rector of that community. I said that I thought I'd be better off doing some kind of pastoral

work. But he repeated, "I want you to go to Cheverus as rector."

RR: For you both Cranwell and Cheverus seem to have been connected in various ways. You obviously did a good job in both places.

JK: Thank you. So I went to Cheverus as rector and taught a couple of math courses. Then, after four years, Bill Russell, the Jesuit president of Cheverus, resigned. So we set up a search committee, and the members of the committee thought I could do the job, because I had been headmaster at Cranwell. Also they seemed to think that it was an easy enough job to be president of Cheverus! So I became president of Cheverus along with being the rector of the Jesuit community.

RR: Wow! That was quite an accomplishment.

JK: At the time, I was teaching a course in theology. I was rector from 1976 to 1982 and president from 1980 to 1983.

RR: That was quite a time spread. I didn't realize that you were there all that time. If you had to make a comparison between Cheverus and Cranwell, what would you say about their differences and similarities?

CRANWELL AND CHEVERUS

JK: Cranwell demanded total involvement just about every moment of my day. I was living in the dormitory with the kids. I was coaching cross-country. I was teaching in the classroom. I was also active as a priest on campus and in the parishes.

At Cheverus the kids arrived at 7:30 AM and left for home by 4:00 PM after sports. But at the same time I also had the responsibility of being rector of a community of twenty-six Jesuits.

RR: That's a fairly large community. How did you like being rector?

JK: Actually, I enjoyed it, because I was able to be helpful

to my fellow Jesuits. At least I hope I was helpful. We had a happy community that cherished spirituality both individual and communal. And we worked hard together.

RR: Also it sounds like you had a well-focused community in Portland.

JK: My main focus, of course, was the Jesuits in the Portland community as well as the Church in Portland.

RR: All interconnected, of course.

JK: And I became a representative in the Portland Priests' Senate. And, for two years, I was the vice president of the Portland Priests' Senate. They wanted me to run for president, but I said I didn't think it was appropriate for a Jesuit to be the president of a diocesan priests' senate. It was a great opportunity to get to know a number of the priests through the Priests' Senate. I also helped out in parishes and did a fair amount of spiritual direction for sisters as well as some priests and lay persons. These were happy, happy years.

CATHOLICISM IN PORTLAND

RR: Great. Now let me ask you, as I asked you earlier, for your own evaluation of the Catholic spiritual situation in Portland, Maine.

JK: Well, it seemed to me that at that time Portland was not as Catholic a community as, say, the Berkshires. But Catholicism was strong. They are very good people. They had integrated the changes of Vatican II, whereas for those in and around Cranwell, that kind of experience was just beginning. The Vietnam war was over and it was a more quiet time politically. The spirituality and morality of the people were excellent. I continued my parish work, gave retreats, and did spiritual direction. All seemed to work well.

TEACHING EVANGELIZATION

RR: While you were rector, did you do much teaching?

JK: I taught a couple of math courses. Then, when I was rector-president, I taught a course in theology called “Evangelization.” I drew on Pope Paul VI’s encyclical on evangelization. And in the diocesan Priests’ Senate, of which I was a member at the time, evangelization was an important concern. So that’s why I taught a course in evangelization to sophomores, juniors, and seniors. It was a mixed class to present the idea of evangelization. It was great to have the opportunity to do great things like that. And we did a number of such good things.

RR: And so this wasn’t merely a run-of-the-mill course, as it were? It was more of a movement. It must have been an interesting group to work with?

JK: It was, because it included some of the student leaders on the football team as well as others who were academically gifted. The students—sophomores, juniors, and seniors—would help us in choosing people for the next year. And we discussed as a group of young people what a Catholic-Jesuit school was and should be.

RR: So looking at that student body and the things that you were doing with them, do you see a transitional period building itself up and solidifying itself? Would you say that those later students were somewhat different from the earlier ones at Cranwell, due, perhaps, to the changes in the Church?

EFFECTS OF VATICAN II

JK: Yes, yes. It was obvious that Vatican II brought a real sea change. And these changes, for the most part, were positive. I think we moved from a passive involvement in religion to a more dynamic, quasi-free involvement. There were some people who thought that if you missed Mass on Sunday you might die the next day!

When I first went to Cranwell, before Vatican II, in some ways there was an attitude of fear. When I was at Cranwell, from 1960 to 1963, the kids had to go to Mass five days a week. When I went to Cheverus in 1976, there was a quite different attitude there. I found these kids to be wonderful on several levels—social, psychological, religious, and emotional.

RR: And the Jesuit presence was valuable and important for all this?

JK: Yes, Joe F. McHugh, a scholastic at the time, helped in that evangelization class. And I am still in touch with some of these students.

RR: Wonderful.

JK: We had a lot accomplished without a lot of structures. Some of these helped the individual student a great deal.

RR: Very genuine but not a lot of structure, right?

JK: Yes, very genuine. Once in a while we would get together on a Sunday night. The kids would begin by playing basketball, backgammon, or cribbage. Then we'd pray together and finish up with a pizza. It was a very important time for all of us, including myself, but especially the young people. In some ways we were building up what might be called a useful model for ourselves and others. The model was somewhat similar to, but somewhat different from, the Kairos retreat model in high schools.

RR: Did you introduce some aspects of that model into yours?

JK: Not exactly. At the time, I had never heard of Kairos. But we had the same kind of religiousness or spirituality that the students could talk about comfortably and enjoyably. They enjoyed it in a way similar to the way they enjoyed sports. We also used to have weekend retreats for the kids.

RR: Thus avoiding their seeing religion as isolated?

FAITH AS INTEGRAL TO LIFE

JK: That's right. They now saw it as a real part of their lives, whether they were on the football team, the baseball team, or the drama club.

RR: A representative group.

JK: But the wonderful thing about many of the students at Cheverus was that many of the student community accepted this approach to religion, which made our work with them much easier.

RR: Were you able to follow up with any of them in later years?

JK: Oh, yes. I'm still in touch with them.

RR: And do they still maintain this new spirituality?

JK: I'd say yes, but in different ways. Some are married, some are not married. But they all feel that they had a very good experience. Two of them are teachers at Cheverus right now.

RR: That kind of follow-up indicates a good foundation. And most of that happened during your six years at Cheverus as rector. Do you feel that this had some impact on the school itself?

JK: Yes, as I said earlier. I don't remember all that I did during those years. One thing we did do was to increase the involvement and giving of our alumni. Mrs. Miller, who was our chief benefactress for quite a time, along with her husband, still continued to help Cheverus. And we increased the giving of other donors as well.

BACK TO CHEVERUS BRIEFLY

RR: Why did you leave Cheverus in 1983?

JK: The provincial thought it was time for me to leave Cheverus.

RR: Weren't you thinking that you might stay on there after you were rector?

JK: Yes. Or that I could even have stayed as president. But

the provincial thought it would be good for me to move. And, of course, he called the shots. So I went to Weston School of Theology to take a couple of courses, and Ray Swords was named president of Cheverus. But I did tell the provincial office that I thought that Ray Swords would die in that job. And after only four months, that is what happened.

RR: Had he been visibly sick?

JK: No. But I knew that he was sixty-five when he took the job. I had worked with Ray at Cranwell. It was when he was president and I was headmaster. And I knew Ray as very conscientious, very spiritual, and a very hard worker. Then he died tragically of a heart attack after only four months. It happened during the Jesuit community's evening preprandial gathering. As I said, I was at Weston when the provincial called and asked me to go back and be president for the rest of that spring term.

RR: I wasn't fully aware of all this at the time. If I remember correctly, he had been president of Holy Cross College.

JK: Yes, at Holy Cross, Cranwell, and Regis High School in New York.

RR: It sounds like it was just too much for him?

JK: I think it was, and, as I said, I told the province office, "He will die in that job." I was giving what I thought was a warning.

RR: Of course. You were afraid it might happen.

JK: And it did.

RR: So you then went back there for a few months?

JK: Yes, it turned out to be six months.

RR: Did you find those months difficult?

JK: Yes and no. I knew how to do the job, but it was tough for me nevertheless. Ray was a wonderful administrator. I learned a lot from him, but I was never as good an administrator as he was. And I had to face the fact

that some people there had been obviously happy when I left. On the other hand, there were others who were happy when I went back. I guess that's life.

HOUSING DIRECTOR AT FAIRFIELD

RR: Then what happened?

JK: I wanted to stay, and I think it would have been better if I had stayed, just for continuity's sake, but the provincial thought otherwise.

RR: Who was the provincial at the time?

JK: Fr. Ed O'Flaherty. So I left, went to Fairfield University, and became director of housing. It was an awful year for me.

RR: Why?

JK: Because I was dealing with things rather than people, even though I was living in a college dormitory with students.

RR: I lived in those dorms myself for a while. [Chuckles]

JK: I was there for one year. It was a great Jesuit community to live in. But my job was merely being a paper-pusher. If the kids misbehaved, it was my job to make sure things were repaired. I also had to deal with some of the disciplinary problems. Generally, however, the students were very good. And later I kept up my relationship with some for a while.

RR: What was the size of the Jesuit community at that time?
I was there in the early '60s, and there were over a hundred Jesuits in the community.

JK: The community included, of course, both the Prep and the University. I would say that we were about sixty.

RR: Whatever the numbers, that community always had, and still has, an excellent esprit de corps, flowing out of the founding group in the '40s. Where did you go after that year?

PARISH WORK IN HOLYOKE

JK: Actually, I asked to get out of that job. At that time, Bob Manning was the provincial, and I said to him, "I'd like to do something pastoral." I had some friends in Springfield from the time I was in the Berkshires. One friend there, Bishop Leo O'Neill, was the auxiliary bishop of Springfield and had made the Exercises with me. I talked to him about helping out in a parish of his diocese, either in Holyoke or Springfield. And he asked me to go to Holy Cross Parish in Holyoke, which I did.

It was supposed to be for a year, but after four months there, Ed Hallen was in a car accident down in Norwich, and decided to leave the Society. I got a call from the provincial asking me to go to Norwich as pastor.

RR: I was sorry to hear that about Ed. I had taught him when I was regent at Fairfield Prep.

PASTOR AT NORWICH

RR: And that was when you were sent to Norwich?

JK: Yes, I was moved from the parish in Holyoke to Norwich, where I was the pastor for seven-and-a-half years.

RR: How did you like it there?

JK: I enjoyed it.

RR: Were there any difficulties?

JK: Yes. It was very different from the high school work I was used to, for sure.

RR: Were you alone there?

JK: No. Frank McManus, Bob Mellett and Jim O'Brien were there at one time or another. Usually there were three of us. And I enjoyed being pastor. I found it helpful for myself, and I think I was helpful for the other Jesuits and for the people in the parish. We had a little Spiritual Exercises group in the parish before it became more widespread to do such a thing.

RR: And after the seven or so years?

JK: Bill Barry, who was now provincial, came for a visit and said that he wanted me to go back to Cheverus as president. And I said, "Well, I've been there, done that." But he said, "Well, they want you there, so I am missioning you." I felt that my seven-and-a-half years at Norwich had been good for everyone. I felt that we Jesuits did some good work there.

RR: They are still doing it in Norwich to this day.

SUMMING UP

JK: It was my fourth time as president of Cheverus. And with that I think I should say that we've touched on all the high points.

RR: All right. Let me summarize. It is clear from your narrative that you made an important contribution to both Cranwell and Cheverus. You were very helpful in many original ways to students as well as to the teachers, both Jesuit and lay. And your dedication to parishes, also over a period of time, gave them a fresh vision ahead. So we want to thank you for your steady vision of God's greater glory. Thanks.

JK: Thank you.

Fr. John W. Keegan, S.J.

- Born:** October 15, 1937, Dorchester,
Massachusetts
- Entered:** August 14, 1959, Lenox, Massachusetts,
St. Stanislaus Novitiate/Shadowbrook
- Ordained:** May 24, 1969, Lenox, Massachusetts,
Cranwell Preparatory School
- Final Vows:** December 7, 1975, Lenox, Massachusetts,
Cranwell Preparatory School
- 1951 Boston, Massachusetts: Boston College High School
- Student
- 1955 Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts: Boston College -
Student
- 1959 Lenox, Massachusetts: St. Stanislaus Novitiate/
Shadowbrook - Novitiate
- 1961 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College - Studied
philosophy
- 1963 Lenox, Massachusetts: Cranwell Preparatory School
- Taught mathematics
- 1966 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College - Studied
theology
- 1969 Lenox, Massachusetts: Cranwell Preparatory School
1969-1970 Taught mathematics
1970-1972 Assistant Headmaster
1972 Headmaster

- 1974 Tertianship: Trappist Abbey, Berryville, Virginia;
Colombiere Center, Clarkston, Michigan
- 1975 Lenox, Massachusetts: Cranwell Preparatory School
Superior, minister, pastoral ministry
- 1976 Portland, Maine: Cheverus High School -
1976-1982 Rector
1976-1979 Taught mathematics
1979-1980 Taught religion
1980-1983 President
- 1983 Cambridge, Massachusetts: Weston Jesuit
Community - Studied theology at Weston School of
Theology [fall semester]
- Portland, Maine: Cheverus High School - President
[spring semester]
- 1984 Fairfield, Connecticut: Fairfield University -
Director of Student Housing
- 1985 Holyoke, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Church -
Assistant pastor
- 1986 Norwich, Connecticut: SS Peter and Paul Church -
Superior, pastor
- 1993 Portland, Maine: Cheverus High School -
1993-2005 President
1994-2005 Taught mathematics
- 2005 Sabbatical
- 2006- Milford, New Hampshire: St. Patrick Church -
Pastor

Degrees

- 1959 Bachelor of Arts, Natural Science, Boston College
- 1963 Master of Arts, Philosophy, Weston College-Boston College
- 1969 Bachelor of Divinity, Theology, Weston College
- 1970 Master of Arts in Liberal Studies, Mathematics, Wesleyan University