Interview with Father Dominic Grassi

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Paul Brennan: So, this is ( -- ) an interview regarding the Democratic 1968 Convention. My name is Paul Brennan. I am the interviewer. Your name is?

Dominic Grassi: Dominic Grassi.

PB: And the date of this interview is ( -- ) April 24, 2015. ( -- ) We are at St. Gertrude’s Parish in Chicago, Illinois. And how many years did you work as an activist?

DG: You know, I never used that term. I was a seminary student and so, it was just a part of who I was. It was a time in the world where you, in the country where you showed what you believed and how you felt, so if we were on the streets, the hard hats waved at us with their American flags, it was just people felt they were doing what they needed to do, so I never ( -- ) when you use the word activist, I smile because I’ve never been called that before.

PB: Okay. What would you call yourself?

DG: I’d call myself a Christian, a priest, an American, ( -- ) and it was an interesting time because that was ‘65 was early in the sixties. The sixties really didn’t start till about that time and then they ran into the early seventies. That’s really the period of time when a lot of this happened and so, it was something that we were all new to.

PB: Mm-hmm.

DG: We had grown a little bit out of the civil rights movement and marches, and ( -- ) that was happening when I was in high school, and I can remember being involved, again, in the periphery of some of those things. You know, going to different gatherings in old town Chicago. ( -- ) Meeting people, wearing the ( -- ) button that preceded the antiwar button, it was the antiracism button, that kind of thing. It was almost for some of us white folk ( -- ) a training ground for what would happen later about Vietnam.

PB: Great. ( -- ) That’s great. So, ( -- ) let’s just start with some general questions. ( -- ) Preceding the sixties. ( -- ) So, as far as how many years you worked, you know, just in protests and things, how many years would you say?

DG: You know, I didn’t do much before the Vietnam War came, like I said, so I was busy being a high school student, a college student and then I think my first awareness would be when one of my classmates ( -- ) left high school, graduated, did not go on to college, to take care of his mother, got drafted and got killed in Vietnam. That’s when it started to become real.

PB: Great. So, what year were you born?


PB: And where were you born?
DG: Chicago, Illinois.

PB: And where were you raised?


PB: And, ( -- ) who was your father?

DG: My dad’s name was Rufino Grassi. He was an immigrant from Southern Italy. He and his brother’s opened a grocery store, another grocery store, a little bigger grocery store and by the time I was born, the year I was born, they opened up the fourth largest grocery store in the North side of the city, one of the first self-service stores. Two immigrant brothers without much education, took a big chance and ( -- ) That was where I grew up in the sense of learning how to deal with people, the customer’s always right, learning the work ethic, watching my dad ( -- ) get grief because he welcomed ( -- ) down the street there was a factory that had mostly African-American employees and my dad welcomed them to shop and had items that had been stuff that were bought in those days that weren’t common in those days that we see in grocery stores all the time now, like hot sauce and chitlins and things like that. He sold that because there were customers buying it and some of the neighbors were upset with him and I remember him turning and saying “Money isn’t black or white. It’s green. And I’d be a fool not to ( -- ) invite them in the shop.” Very pragmatic, very practical, but in a sense very courageous, too, in what he did.

PB: Mm-hmm. And where was he born?

DG: He was born in a town called Carrejo. It’s a farming village down the hill from a larger town called the Baribello in South Central Italy, in the region of Puglia. If you’re Italian and you say you’re from Bari, everybody goes “Testa Dura” Hard-headed, and that would be my family and I would be representative of that as well. A kind of a sense that we dig our heels in if we feel something is right.

PB: Mm-hmm. And who was your mother?

DG: My mom’s name was Imaculatta Martolata, “mouthful”. Tiny woman of great stature. Mother of five. Came to this country with her father, to take care of him at the age of ten, so he could make enough money to bring the rest of his family here; it’s a common story. Adfgd She worked in a shoe factory, doing piece work, took care of him. He was going to bring his wife and other children back, the stock market crashed. He lost everything, started over, got enough and brought the rest of his family here. My mom and dad lived in a town in New York State.

PB: And where was she born?

DG: She was born in the town up the hill from Kinnego in Barabello.

PB: (Laughs)

DG: Both beautiful places. I’ve visited them.
PB: And, what were some of your pastime interests as a child?

DG: Uh, let’s see. Well, my brother used to take slides. The first slide he took was me
dressed as Hopalong Cassidy. I’m being stabbed and my brother playing an Indian. Um, I grew
up with everything little kids liked. Davy Crockett was a big thing; I had my coonskin cap like
everybody else did. TV was just kind of coming into its own. We had an empty lot next to the
house; we played fast-pitching baseball and all that other stuff. Somewhere in there I learned to
like to read. There was a big public library right next door to our school, and reading became an
important thing for me as well, so, just the normal stuff. Go down to the lakefront; we’d fish.
We’d go to the beach. It was a good life. A good urban life.

PB: What kind of problems at the time were you able to ascertain?

DG: I probably would identify with. Being the youngest, I watched a lot of things. I saw
prejudice against Italians by some of the Irish priests. And one in particular, my brothers as
adults, we talk about it and can identify it now. But we didn’t see that as much. We just didn’t
understand it as kids, as most kids wouldn’t. When we saw some of that, you know, being called
the wop, dago. You know, didn’t quite know what that meant and why we should even be upset
by that. You know, uh, but we were. We saw the need to really get an education. My dad didn’t
have an education either, and he said “Any college you want, as long as it’s a Catholic school,
we’ll pay for it.” He really, he wanted us to have an education.

PB: Mm-hmm. And how did you learn to show tolerance to the people who disagreed
with you?

DG: Well, tolerance came in a couple of ways. I’m probably not as tolerant as I should
be, so I don’t always do well with people who disagree with me. But because of all the sewing of
leather my mom did as a child, she had some real problems with her hands and she had to have
some serious surgery. While we were not anywhere near a wealthy family, we’d be considered
part of the emerging postwar middle-class family. My mom needed help, and when I grew up,
there was an African American woman that came and did the heavy stuff my mom’s hands just
couldn’t do. Her name was Lucille. And she ate at the table with us. She was one of us. There
was no thing about her being black or white. At the same time, right across the alley from me,
my first girlfriend Merle. We met when we were about five or six years old and one of the early
slides is with her head on my shoulder. She was Jewish. And so I had Jewish friends and
neighbors. We were the only Italians in the neighborhood out down on Broadway where we
were. So, it was a great melting pot, and in that process we learned to treat people for who they
were. There was a rabbi and his family that lived across the alley and if she, if the mother had
not, if Mrs. Davis had not turned off the stove when it got dark on the Sabbath, she’d call me and
I’d turn off the stove. I had to open the tin myself to get the great sugar cookies she laid out. ( -- )
It was just, that’s how we learned, by the openness that was there. But I do remember feeling,
you know, an Irish priest took me off of an assignment of serving the mass for one of our
teachers getting married. I remember feeling that was unjust. And I think maybe that’s a
hindsight, I remember that. Somewhere along there I began to realize that people are people like
my dad would say, so I just didn’t sense that it should be any different.

PB: How was religion observed in your house?
DG: We were traditional Southern Italian. I call it the “peasant spirituality”, peasant religiosity. The tradition of the hometown saints prominent on the wall. My family always sent some money back to the hometown for town feast day processions, so members of our family still there would have the privilege of carrying the statues part of the way. We went to Catholic grammar school, we were taught by an incredible group of nuns, the sisters of mercy. And they were bright, they were compassionate, and they were challenging, and they not just taught us the academics; they taught us to be Christians as well. And, there are a few of them still alive that I still know and am in relationship with them, and I honor them in their old age. They’re just really, incredible, incredible women. So, that’s really where it came from. And you know, my mom, if we were altar servers and I’d get up and serve the early mass at six thirty, mom made sure we were there. I watched my mom and dad volunteer in the parish, my dad not so much ‘cause of work hours, but my mom was always there and always helping out, and taught us that we had to do that as well. Plus, my ( -- ) the oldest of my siblings, the only girl, died ten months before I was born at the age of seven of the polio epidemics of the time. And, you know, I grew up as kind of the replacement child. I saw the grief. I saw the faith necessary to deal with that grief, and the solace that religion could offer in those difficult times. And then, the last thing was there were really incredibly priests assigned to our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, that were really, really, good role models to work with, with not just kids, but with families and teens, and they were one of the reasons I decided to go into the seminary and become a priest.

(The interviewer paused the interview to check on the equipment)

PB: Okay. ( -- ) So, what was your attitude toward school during your early education?

DG: It was drummed into us that we needed a good education. It was really important; we were expected to go to college. We were expected to do the best we could, and to excel where we could excel and do as well as we could in everything else. So, I liked school, it wasn’t ( -- ) I did well enough; I wasn’t the brightest kid in class, but I did well, and I enjoyed it. And again, the teachers, for the most part, there were one or two across the nine years of grammar school that made it a little bit tough. They were a little bit, you know, different, but by and large, it was really good.

PB: How did your relationship to religion change during high school?

DG: Like everything else, you start to grow up, and I began, because it was a seminary high school, it was a little different. We went to school on Saturdays and had Thursdays off. That was to keep us away from the girls. So, you developed a lot of friends. They were from all the different parishes. So, I got to know the city a little bit more. I had friends in this parish even though I was at Our Lady of Mount Carmel. And in that process, you were expected to do service, so, a group of us would go down to the Cabrini Green Projects, and work there with the nuns, taking the kids when they came out of the public schools and bringing them over to Saint Joseph Parish for religious classes on Thursdays, and we were there with them then. And I got to meet again with some incredible women who worked really hard in the project, and I just got an opening to a different part of the world, so we did that and other things happened that we did then that the seminary allowed us to become involved. The whole idea was not just kneel on your knees and pray, but helping people. And that’s really what hit me in high school more than anything else. I liked helping people, and this was getting the opportunity to do that.
PB: What were your aspirations when you graduated from high school in 1965?

The choice had to be made to just go to college or go to a college seminary and continue the studies for the priesthood. My three older brothers were all in the seminary before me. One left after his fourth year of high school; one left after his third year of high school, and then the one, Tommy just older than me went one year to the college seminary and then he left. So, it was time for me to make a decision. I decided to go to the college seminary, which was Niles College. It was originally a junior college. By the time I graduated, it had affiliated with Loyola.

PB: Mm-hmm.

DG: So it was Niles College of Loyola University. That’s where I got my undergraduate degree in Literature. At that point we could either get just philosophy or literature, it used to be only philosophy and when they affiliated there wasn’t time to do much else, but I didn’t want to do philosophy, so I did literature.

PB: Okay. When did you know you wanted to be a priest?

DG: ( -- ) Depends on how I wake up every morning of my life. Been that way then, still that way today, you got to decide when you get up today if you’re going to do it or not, and in terms of sticking out the training and studying, I just, you just didn’t know when. You know, you saw guys leaving all the time. Once you decided you didn’t want to be a priest, there was no reason to stay. You went on, finished up at Loyola or () school. So, I mean I do remember in my, in the middle of second year there, I filled out an application for the Peace Corps, signed it, stamped it, put it on the side of my desk and said I’ll mail it tomorrow, mail it tomorrow, and tomorrow never came.

PB: Mm-hmm.

DG: I decided to keep going. And there were times when, you know, man, this is really what I want to do and there are times when, do I really want to do this? But I kept scratching the itch.

PB: So, what were your religious convictions like before your training?

DG: Well, you got to remember, I was in training from freshman year of High School and on up, so I didn’t have much before then.

PB: (Laughs)

By the years though, I kind of grew to a realization that I didn’t, you know, the priests I knew were great guys. They made people smile and laugh. They preached well. The kids liked to hang around them, you know. That was my first image, just to be a well-liked popular person and help people. As I went on, I began to, like everybody else, mature and understand the complexities of our world; the issues, the concerns. And how did I want to deal with those in my life? I could have been a teacher; I knew that. I could have gone into psychology in some way; I knew that. My brothers were all going to business world, with kind of a people bent, human resources, things like that. I could have done that. A lot of ways I could have worked with people. I thought about being a doctor. Again, I, I never bothered to pursue it to point of saying, “Could I handle
blood”, things like that. But then I began to realize from going to Cabrini Green and the projects, and getting involved in other ministries, (-- ) that being a priest unlocked a lot of doors for me, in people’s lives. It was on a level that was for me, deeper and more profound than any of those other things I could be doing. And that fascinated me; the human person fascinated me, and their needs, and their concerns, and their relationship with God, and their issues. That fascination has never left me. I wasn’t an overly religious guy. I didn’t pray anywhere near as much as my classmates did. I wasn’t all excited about the rubrics of the liturgy and how to say mass, as much as other people. What excited me was the people of God, you know, just being a part of their lives. And thinking I could make a difference with this in my life.

PB: So, who was your favorite mentor during your religious training and why?

DG: Early on, there was a priest at Our Lady of Mount Carmel; his name was Father Gene Faucher. He was a resident priest there, so he was assigned just to live there, and had a full time job as teaching in the High School seminary. And I got to know him, with the other guys that were in the seminary from the parish. He was a (--) Looking at him then, he was just a neat guy. And he didn’t try to be cool like some of the young priests did. He was truly himself, and he was kind, he was gentle, he was strong, he was helpful, a couple of times when I got into trouble in the seminary he was always there for me, you know, and (--) just a really good guy. And I think (--) I wanted to be like him, and over the years, you know, as I grew in my training in the preparation for the priesthood, I always said I’d like to be a priest like Father Gene Faucher. (-- ) And there were other priests after that, that add to that list.

PB: Mm-hmm. Would you like to name some of them or-

DG: Well, you know a lot of it didn’t happen till after ordination. And if I look at the real mentors in my life, what it means to be a pastor. Father Bill (--) what I mean, to be involved in the mission, the social mission of the church, certainly Monsignor Jack Egan whose statue is outside of DePaul University. He’s a really incredible human being. Taught me a lot.

PB: That was later, correct?

DG: (-- ) Later.

PB: We’ll get to that. Let’s see.

So, what was a typical day like in the seminary?

DG: The seminary was undergoing an incredible amount of change. Four years of high school, we were a traditional high school seminary, like I said. School on Saturday, no school on Thursday; expected to pay a visit in the chapel between classes, expected to be prayerful, expected to go to mass every day, expected to go to confession once a week. That was a traditional seminary. We got to the college seminary, it started out that way. We were there the two years, and then affiliated with Loyola, and so the last two years, they didn’t have room for us there, so you know, (--) morning prayer, evening prayer, the great silence, couldn’t talk after 9:30 at night, you know, things like that, very regimented, very dictated. Then we went up to the
major seminary, St. Mary of the Lake, the seminary in Mundelein, Illinois, and we were for the
last two years, the young class finishing up college before going to the four years of theological
study. And that was when the Second Vatican Council was happening, and everything was
exploding. The seminary was changing; a lot of the faculty were leaving the priesthood and
getting married. The academic picture was changing when, (--) I was looking to having to take
all my classes in Latin, and panicking about that. But by the time I started the theological study
that was all gone. When we were up there, you couldn’t have cars. Then we were able to bring
our cars there. It was just, it was a very changing kind of thing. And, so, in the six years I was
there I went from the very old school seminary to where there are very few structures. We had a
great rector, you know the guy in charge of the place, Monsignor Jack Gorman, who really rolled
with all the punches. He really trusted us and believed us. The beautiful thing that came out of
that was, he was trying to bring in the best professors to teach the stuff of the Second Vatican
Council and things. But he also was allowing us to learn how to learn, and to be self-starters.
And I look at classes like mine, that, we made the best priests, because we learned how to do it
ourselves, to be self-starters. You, know other guys worked real hard, but (garbled) we need a
team program will do that. Not coming to the parish and saying, “We got to do something with
the teens” if you want to look at the start of activism, that was that where you learned, you know,
that you (--) took charge to control things, to do, and the seminary, just by going through all
these changes, that’s what it taught us to do.

PB: So, do you think the church was changing with the times, or (--)?

DG: Oh, yes. You know, it was (--) Pope John XXIII, the (--) opening up the windows and
letting a new era in. Unless you lived through the old, and into the new, it’s hard to imagine how
radical, it was a different way of looking at church and looking at God, and looking at what it
meant to be the people of God. The documents at the Second Vatican Council. Gaudium et Spes,
the church in the modern world, was a landmark document that talked about the people of God,
the joys, the hopes, the dreams of the people of God, and what it meant then, to be church with
them, what it meant to minister to them. Those were, incredible, incredible times. And those
times coalesced right with everything happening in Vietnam, the convergence of everything.
(Car drives past) John XXIII only wrote like two encyclicals, John Paul II wrote many more than
that. But his encyclical Pacem in Terris was an incredible document: Peace on Earth, right as
Vietnam was hitting and everything. He got up and said, you know, “No”, and his successor Paul
VI, first Pope to get in front of the UN, he looked at every delegate and said “No more war. War
no more.” Those were incredible and fascinating times, as my training and my vision of church
and vocation of ministry, and what was happening in the world, Vietnam and everything else,
kind of dissect or crossed paths, and it was almost a tsunami kind of thing, everything coming
together at one time.

PB: So, what were your feelings about being in school while conflict like the Vietnam
War was happening?

DG: Really complex, because (--) beginning of the Vietnam War, you had a student
deferment. And then when that deferment went away, it was the point that larger American
society decided the war was not a good thing, `cause their children were not getting deferments.
They were fighting and dying. We continued to get deferments; it was technically wasn’t a
deferment, because we were student ministers, so we were exempt because we were minister,
'cause we were student ministers. And so, when guys would leave, they decided not to be priests, you didn’t stay in the seminary, some of them got picked right up and when right into the military. Some of them got injured, maimed for life; some died. There was some guilt there. ( -- ) Just making sure I’m not hiding here, there was some of that. There was also a point, the moment where we could see there was something truly wrong, immoral, evil about the Vietnam War. When Walter Cronkite, the most trusted man in the United States, came out against the war, you really had to stop and think, “What is going on here?” and “What can we do here?” and “What needs to be done here?” and it was, it was an incredible, incredible time. It was. Hard to describe if you didn’t live through it, but it was fascinating, and when Bobby Kennedy ran for president. We can talk about that, how I nearly left the seminary to work on his campaign, Gene McCarthy, because Bobby, the much more viable candidate, was shot and killed obviously, so, just incredible things that happened. One after another, after another, listening to Bobby Kennedy the night that Martin Luther King was shot, to the people in Indiana, “Don’t riot”, watching it on TV up at the seminary, watching the streets of Chicago burn when King was rioting, and my brother was in the National Guard. King had just come out against the war; it wasn’t just civil rights anymore. He realized that the war was affecting everybody’s civil rights. Just so much going on, so much happening, that you know, the feelings ran deep, and you also had the countercultural, the hippies, things like that. I grew my first set of sideburns, my first set of bell-bottom pants. I let my hair grow, like everybody else did. Those were just incredible days. They really were. They’re almost cliché-ish now. But they were honest, incredible days. People talk about baby boomers, you know, reminiscing about the good old days, the sixties. They were good, they were tough, they ( -- ) We grew. We grew.

(The interviewer paused the interview to check the equipment)

PB: So, why did you decide not to belong to any particular group? Or activist group?

DG: The lines were pretty blurred there. In terms of civil rights, there were groups; there was, you know (SNICK) and the NAACP, and Congress of Racial Equality. ( -- ) The war, ( -- ) the protesting was coming from lots of different directions. And I was in one of the directions it was coming from. [There was an element in the church that really started speaking out against the war. The immorality of it, and what it was doing to the heart and soul of the country. So, we marched as priests, as seminarians. I remember, there was a march of priest and seminarians, back when there were a lot more seminarians, a lot more priests, downtown to the Holy Name Cathedral, and the TV Stations filmed it, and evidently did a close-up of my face, you know, just one of the shots, and I wasn’t picking my nose, so it made it on the news that evening, and within a week, my draft board called me in. And they challenged my status as a seminary student. First of many, many times that I had to present the case that I was in the seminary and should not be classed by this 1A and draftable.] And this kept happening all the way until I was ordained a deacon, in which I was a real minister, not just a student minister, and there’s no way they would draft you then. I remember I started joking on the forms, you know. “Describe your work.” “The work of the lord,” “Whose your boss?” “God.” You know, because by this time, nothing was going to happen, but it wasn’t ( -- ). There wasn’t a need to join a particular group or organization, in that sense. By that time society, it was a groundswell. And, you know, it got polarized. Nixon did a great job, you know, the moral majority. “These are a bunch of long-haired hippies that don’t speak for the country, we’re the moral majority.” But the tide, that time, had turned.
PB: So, what was your reason for becoming an activist?

DG: I just believed that the war was immoral. I felt that Lyndon Johnson had lost the mandate he got being elected because JFK was killed. I waited for Bobby Kennedy, and sweated over the fact that I thought he could beat LBJ and thought then that he could win the election. Bobby Kennedy had really been bringing everybody together. You know, we know the stories about his issues and things after his death. But at that time, you knew that he could bring the races together. He was able to do that. And he could bring blue collar whites and blacks together. He had something about him that his brother didn’t have. A passion, maybe. His brother was the consummate politician. Bobby was a little wilder, a little bit looser. And an incredible passion. And another thing, he was very human, you knew he grew. The death of his brother, he grew with that. The pain in life and everything, and so when he announced he was running, I went downtown, ‘cause he had money, he opened up a campaign office, in Chicago, and in the summer, I’m thinking, I just may not go back to the seminary. I may just go out and campaign for him. And I remember the clock radio going off in the morning and hearing he had been shot. And, just said, “Where the hell is this world coming to?” And so, that’s just how everything started to happen and just, you just felt ( -- ) Now, I had a brother who was in the National Guard, which made it all very interesting. And, that particular summer, my brother was head of the Headstart Program for the Archdiocese of Chicago. And I was hired to deliver supplies to the Headstart classrooms with a classmate of mine. So we’re driving through the inner city, there’s that element to everything in our lives, with carload supplies for the kids in the community, and so my brother’s my boss, and he gets called up by the guard for the Convention, and I plan on going to the convention, and then he basically, I don’t know how joking he was. (The end) But I got a different perspective of it from him. The movement wasn’t one thing. There were some that were much more militant than others; people were really ( -- ) there were militants and then there were peace activists, and they were different; they were much more pacifistic, in their activism. And so, there are all these different mentalities and mindsets there. It was fascinating. Just fascinating. And, I just wanted to make ( -- ) there was a sense for the first time after with Kennedy, tied up into a bow fifties, everything in a neat package, that things could get messy, and you could make a difference. You could make a difference. And it was taken very seriously. That a difference could be made.

PB: So, what was your first experience as an activist?

DG: ( -- ) I can’t remember the first march. But one that sticks out in my mind was, we were seminary students at Mundelein, and we were holding a march. Might have been a day when there was going to be marches everywhere. From the seminary to a park, Kracklauer Park in Mundelein. And we made the signs, and we invited anybody in the community that wanted to join with us. And as we marched out of the seminary, we marched past a ( -- ) strip mall, and in this strip mall there was a little liquor store where we used to buy all our beer and booze from in the seminary. And they were, on the other side, was where they had all these American flags, and you know, saying that we were being anti-patriotic and everything. After that we boycotted that liquor store. And it went out of business. (Laughs) We must have been buying a lot of beer and booze. We were marching to the park, and a little old lady had come out of the grocery store. I can still remember, it was a Piggly-Wiggly grocery store. And she had her two little shopping bags, and she looked at the signs. She was walking toward us; she looked at the other sign, looked at the third sign, turned around and started marching with us.
PB: Oh.

DG: And I just remember taking her two bags, and walking them, so she wouldn’t have to carry
the bags. Said hello to her, she said hello to me, ( -- ) she never told me her name, I never told
her mine, marched to the park, and then asked her if she needed help getting home, she said no.
That was just a moment that hearts and souls can change, and there are voices out there that need
to be heard. So, that may have been the first time, but it was probably the first time it did
something in my heart to me that really made me believe that we can make a difference.
Something I would learn a lot later in life, with Monsignor Jack Egan.

PB: So, how did the manifestation of 1968, sort of begin for you?

DG: It was such a crazy year. You didn’t want to turn on the news, but you had to turn on
the news. I mean, the body count in Vietnam was like the baseball scores at the end of the day,
and we always, we always killed off more than our guys died. You know, it was goofy, and like I
said, Walter Cronkite changed his mind. I don’t know if it was 68, he changed his mind, but that
was incredibly meaningful. And all these things were just starting to happen, and you know, I
remember we couldn’t have TVs in the seminary; we had one TV in the rec room, and we had
just had a talk. A peace activist came and talked to us at the seminary. And he came down to
watch with us when LBJ announced that he wasn’t going to run. And this guy jumped up and
screamed out “Oh, that’s great, you son of a bitch.” And I was so conflicted. You know, here
was a guy that could have been a superb president, you know, with what he did with race and
everything, got caught in this quagmire. Yes, he lied about things and yes he escalated things.
But there was a part of me that said, “It ain’t going to get much better quickly.” You know, and
so that was the time when we got to start doing something. You got to start doing something. So,
many years later, at a conference, there were a bunch of priests that were in the seminary with
me at the same time, and one of them got up, and said, “You know, I watched those guys in my
class go downtown to those marches. I’m thinking I’m going to be a priest. I shouldn’t be doing
that. I go to chapel and pray for peace.” He sat down very self-righteously. And usually with
that, you want to be a gentleman; you don’t want to argue with him, but it ticked me off, and I
just got up and said, “What makes you think we didn’t do both? What makes you think that
prayer wasn’t an integral part of what we’re doing? What makes you think when we were
marching, we weren’t praying. What makes you think there weren’t times that we were kind of
scared? When we, the day we marched in Kracklauer Park and I was handing out leaflets on the
street, and the Mundelein Police said ‘You’re going to be arrested if you don’t go on the
sidewalk. It’s the law.’” And the director of the seminary, he said, “Oh, you should have been
arrested; it would have coalesced us all around you guys.” I said, “No, no, that’s okay.” So, it
was interesting times.

PB: You’ve answered a lot, let’s see. (Ruffling of paper) So, how did you feel about
Johnson’s resignation?

DG: ( -- ) I was confused. Something like that never happened before. He was a guy who
I was proud of in signing the Voting Rights Act and things like that into law. He was a
consummate politician. You kind of sensed JFK would have never gotten those bills passed.
LBJ, you know, just knew how to get stuff from the congress, and, you know, who was going to
replace him then? The country, there was a strong divide in the country. And the only guy I
could think of was Bobby Kennedy. I just knew that Gene McCarthy couldn’t win, even though he had the college students, “Clean for Gene”, you know, cut your hair, get your beard cut and trimmed, dress good and go door to door, in the states, and get some votes for the primary; he was never going to be able to win. But I though Bobby Kennedy could, and of course, the other side, you knew it was going to be Nixon and even, that scared us even then. You know, so it was kind of Shakespearean. Kind of “King Lear,” the fall. You know, he was blinded to what he was doing, the fact that he had to win an unwinnable war. And everybody knew people who were dead because of Vietnam. It was incredible. You know, and some of the parents were angry at us for protesting. They thought it was disloyal to their sons. And others joined with us in the protests. And you had brother against brother, and mother against son. It was, these were, they were tough times. They were. And you wondered if the country was going to pull through. You know, it was really turning into a military state or whatever.

PB: So, was it strictly the Vietnam War that changed your mind about Johnson, or ( -- )?

DG: (Brief pause) Yes. I would have to say yes. You know, you read, retrospective history’s always interesting. And you read, the different things now and you see the way he’s portrayed in different movies and things, and you know, the tapes that are released after a certain number of years. It’s all fascinating. We tend to lionize our politicians. Turn them into bigger-than-life, and then we see that they’re human beings with their own pettiness, their own fears. But I have a feeling that as the years go on, history will treat him better than they did, that he found himself in a situation he probably couldn’t get out of. And the country wasn’t really ready for the country to get out of at that moment, so I think the protests really brought the country around. ( -- ) You remember at that time, the US Bishops were all supporting the war.

PB: Mm-hmm.

DG: You know, Cardinal (Spelman), who was the one in charge of the military; he would do six midnight masses on Christmas, one time zone after another, and the patriotism of the American Catholic is very important, because the American, you know, some people thought Catholics were ( -- ) The pope was the leader, and a foreign one. So, we had to show our Americanism and our patriotism, so, protesting like that went against the grain for a lot of Americans and a lot of church leaders.

PB: Mm-hmm. So, what was your first reaction to Martin Luther King’s Assassination?

DG: Again, I remember watching it on the TV, in one of the priest’s rooms in the seminary. And staring at the screen, and seeing Chicago go up in flames, the west side. Roosevelt Road, I remember, and feeling totally powerless and helpless, and so I got up, and they said “Where are you going?” I said “I’m going to chapel. I don’t know what else to do, so I’m going to pray.” And everybody followed me. I mean, there was nothing else to do. I couldn’t watch anymore. We couldn’t have phones; there were no cell phones, obviously, we couldn’t have phones in our room. There was one payphone in the rec room, and at least now you could use it. Before you had to have permission to make calls. I called home, and my mother was just sobbing, because my brother had been called up in the National Guard.

PB: Mm-hmm.
DG: And she was watching on TV the city burning. And she just, she was scared out of her mind. So, all of a sudden, it hits close to home. I didn’t know he was in the army, so, you know, he never got called out, and he was mad that he was stuck there, and he told some funny stories about that. But, it was ( -- ) Here’s a guy who won the Nobel Peace Prize, and he’s killed, in a Southern city, by a white man. It’s everything that could be wrong. Because we’ve heard his speeches a million times on TV, the electricity of when he first spoke, you know, just incredible to have had that experience. To see the march on Washington, to, you know, to gather with people and just realize that this man was a man of God. He’s right up there with Gandhi, you know, and this is how we treated him. It was a time where it was really easy to lose some hope. It really was. And then you drive through the city afterwards in Chicago, it was like a war zone.

PB: So, along with prayer, how else did you try to reconcile the tragedy?

DG: We did some workshops in the seminary; ( -- ) I recommitted myself to working at Saint Joseph’s parish at Cabrini Green. We went down there and we continued to help in that parish, with the kids and the Cabrini Green projects. I was also helping out at old St. Pat’s Parish, now the big Irish gentrified parish. There was a small African American community there. And one summer, I spent the mornings in old Saint Joes and the afternoons at old Saint Pat’s, working with the kids, just saying we got to do something for these kids, and so, that’s what you did, you did what was available for you to be able to do.

PB: So, what fueled you, exactly, to work for Bobby Kennedy’s campaign?

DG: ( -- ) His passion was just incredible. Many years later, when Ted Kennedy had this run for presidency, Ethel Kennedy came to where I was teaching. I was already a priest, teaching at Quigley South, came to talk to the student body. And I had a chance to go up to her afterwards and talk to her, and I told her, I said, and it just kind of came out, I said, “I ( -- ) base,” or “I do what I do, a lot of what I do as a priest, based on what your husband was and did as a man. He had that kind of impact on me. That sense of integrity, what I want to do, what I want to be, what I want to say.” And she stopped dead in her tracks and said, “Nobody’s ever said anything like that before.” It was really true. He made that kind of difference for me. Passion. Passion was the word.

PB: So, how far did you get working on his campaign?

DG: I just, you know, he died shortly after his office was open in Chicago. I had buttons, I had materials, I had signed up for one mailing thing we did at the office, that’s all. ( -- ) Everybody was talking about how they were taking off from school. I still wasn’t ready to make a commitment to leave the seminary; that was a really big step. And I knew my family wouldn’t understand that at all. And one I left, I wouldn’t be able to go back; they wouldn’t take you back, “Make your decision” kind of thing. So, before I made any final decision, the decision was made by a gun. Sirhan Sirhan’s gun.

PB: What was your first reaction?

DG: It was total disbelief in the sense that the world was coming to an end. You know, Jack Kennedy is dead, and Martin Luther King is dead, and now Bobby Kennedy is dead. And the war’s escalating, and the country’s more divided than ever. What the hell is going on? It was
beyond belief. I got used to seeing rioting in the streets when Kennedy was president and
Johnson for Civil Rights. Rioting in the streets when King was shot, rioting in the street when
some of the antiwar marches were getting pretty violent. And there were now, just the start of
things like the Black Panther Party, and the antiwar stuff getting mixed up with Black Power,
and all sorts of other things going on. It was an incredible time. It proves the strength of our
country that we survived all that.

PB: So, now that Kennedy had, you saw Kennedy as a great hope, what did you think was going
to happen next ( -- ) now that Kennedy was gone?

DG: There was a little bit of hope that the democrats could still nominate somebody that could, ( -- ) carry the peace banner. And Humphrey came out and supported all of Johnson’s policies.
And you knew, in his heart, he didn’t believe that. He knew that was the only way he was going
to get the nomination. You saw the sadness in his eyes, in his acceptance speech. There wasn’t,
you know, that heart in it. And you knew at that point ( -- ) and by this time Grant Park is burned
and Mayor Daley is saying the F-bomb to (Large car drives past) Stuart Simonton the senator,
saying the young are being murdered in the streets, and that was the day, we were on our way to
Grant Park. My brother was in the National Guard, got called up for that, and we saw it on TV
and we said, “You’re not going. This is a riot. You’re not going to go to a riot.” And it turned
into what the Kerner Commission called the “Police Riot.” The police did the riot; they took off
their badges and their nametags, so you couldn’t tell who they were, and beat the crap out of all
the protestors. It was a mess. And the protestors, some of them got violent in response. It served
no good purpose, and everybody chanting in the street, the whole world is watching, ’cause the
cameras went from the convention to that. And you then knew the democrats had lost their
chance. A month later, the Republican Convention, there’s Richard Nixon with other, pretty,
little blonde-haired girl and guys in their blazers looking All-American and not looking like
Hippies, with signs that said, “Bring us together.” You know, that was going to be his motto, and
he was going to run away with the election. And he did. He didn’t run away with it, but he beat
Humphrey, really close actually, but he set the stage for really trouncing McGovern and
everything else.

PB: So, how did you continue your activism? What were your goals after?

DG: I think, like a lot of people, the goals were just to be heard. There’s a growing sense
of, “This may not work.” You know, the hope of, the euphoria of thinking you’re making a
difference, changed into much more of a sense of, “This is going to go on for a long, long, long
time.” ( -- ) And you got to decide if you’re in it for the long haul or not. ( -- ) The other thing
that happened, by 1973 now, we’re ordained priests, so we got our ministry to do with the
parishes and things like that. We’re new at it, we’re learning on the job, and we’re altogether at
the seminary, so we got spread out and things changed.

PB: Mm-hmm.

DG: They really did.

PB: So, tell me your story of what you experienced during the Democratic National
Convention.
DG: Well, (--) you know, you look at it now and you’ve got cable TV, and you’ve got the Internet and stuff. Take that out of the equation. You’ve got the major stations, you know, NBC, ABC, CBS. Most people are watching CBS because of Walter Cronkite. And the news came to us that way. And (--) there was a sense of (--) detachment. Protestors, these were the big names, these were, the, you know, the Chicago, Seven, was it? I forget the number, and they eventually went to trial, and, it was one of my classmates from the seminary, who left the seminary and (--) became a cop and went undercover, as a spy, and testified against them at the trial. You know, Abbie Hoffman and Tom Hayden and those guys. They were the professional protestors. You know, they really were. That was what was there then, and that would change as the war wore on, and the years wore on, we started getting more, what we call soccer moms, families, because it had touched so many lives. At that point, it was still a pretty radical thing. And the (Brief pause) radicalism, it was tough, it was tough to wrap around, yourself around. I mean it was so tied-in with the counter culture, tied in somewhat to the drugs, tied in to the music of the times; it was very different than anything I’ve experienced since, so it was a matter of just kind of saying, “Okay, let’s see what comes next.” For me, unlike some of those real activists who threw their heart and soul into it, they were activists. We were re-activists. We would react. Something would happen, we decided if we wanted to join a march about it or something like that. That’s about as far as I got; that’s all that I unfortunately had the ability to do.

PB: So, what were you doing during the summer?

DG: During the summers, there were two things; you needed to make money ‘cause you couldn’t work when you were in the seminary, so you had to have the money to live on, and I wasn’t going to ask my dad for it. My dad felt you weren’t a man until you were on your own financially. So, here I am, college and post-college trying to make as much money as I can in the summers, so, there were always summer jobs. By this time, the family grocery store had closed, so I couldn’t work for them, so I did everything in the summer from road construction to unloading stuff from the docks, but we also did a lot of work in the streets, and things. So, right before (nation), we, four of us lived off-campus and had a teen drop-in center in Waukegan, and a place to come and pray, talk about the war and other things as well. There was a lot going on. But primarily, I was just trying to make enough money to get by, and then again, like I said (horn), I’m not sure I’m proud of it, but we reacted. If we heard there was going to be a gathering here, or a march here, a demonstration there, we would then decide to join it. We were the ones who assured them they had the numbers they wanted or needed rather than be the leaders. That changed a little bit under Monsignor (--) Jack Egan, and that changed as time went on. He taught us to be more real activists.

PB: So, to the extent of your participation, what was your greatest fear?

My greatest fear was, was this going to bring about the changes necessary? An end to a war, and end to the slaughter, the killing, and then (--) I mean, then all of a sudden, it’s Nixon bombing Cambodia on Christmas Eve. You know, it’s just getting worse and worse. Is what we’re doing going to bring about change or is it just going to divide the country, weaken the company, so factions like that, you know, the war factions can stay in control? It was a great fear. And then the violence in the streets, the neighborhoods, who else is going to be killed? It was not good.
PB: So, in regard to the convention, what did you think of Daley’s behavior?

DG: Daley’s behavior was ( -- ) he showed his true colors. A boss, a bully, a bigot who was used to being in control, having everything his way, who would then appear with his wife and children at mass on Easter Sunday, as polite as he could be. He was progressive in some of his politics, but on the war, and things like that, not so much, because it all got tied in race. Of course this was when Jesse Jackson was just starting up as well and, they’re going to have an alternative delegation, at one of the conventions eventually. It was a mess. It was an embarrassment. He was an embarrassment to the city, an embarrassment to me as a Catholic. An embarrassment to lots of boys. He wore his Catholicism, on Ash Wednesday, he would have a news conference, even if there was nothing to say, so everybody could see ashes on his forehead. You know, he used that, so that’s another reason it was an embarrassment, and all his political cronies hanging around to, you know, decree his favor, and things like that. ( -- ) It was not good.

PB: So, how were your own goals different from the general consensus of the protestors?

DG: ( -- ) Probably differed in intensity. Because of being in the seminary, and the strictures in the seminary, and the fact, you know, I was tied to it, if I left it, I left it. I had to do whatever I did within those strictures, and I didn’t feel I wanted to move out of that, ‘cause I would lose the opportunity to be a priest. So, I think it held me back a bit, or maybe that was an excuse, I’m not sure, I’ll be honest. But it ( -- ) but it also, it was part of the whole training thing we did. You know, we were searching to find a way of communicating what we believed, and that’s what priests do. So, we had turned an old science lab in the seminary into a coffee house, named George, after George Cardinal of Mundelein, and we would have poetry readings, we’d invite the girls from the other college, it was nice to have girls on the seminary campus and things like that. And we would do different things, and we did a seminar on Vietnam, and I got some of my classmates so mad. We did a thing where we made it sound like, in the middle of it, when we were having this heady discussion about war, somebody knocked on the door and called one of the guys out who came back sobbing, saying he just word his brother died in Vietnam. Which wasn’t true. It was just a terribly manipulative thing to get the group to realize the immediacy and the reality of the issues. And it was pretty juvenile; people got really, really ticked at us. But, it made a point. So we were searching to see how we tie all this in to what our vocation and our calling was going to be. And it wasn’t all of us up there; there were some guys up there that didn’t buy into what we were thinking about the war at all. So, even with our own little isolated world there were differences.

PB: So, you didn’t have as much a role in the protests.

DG: No.

PB: What were you doing while the protests were happening?

DG: I was going to school; I was getting the master’s degree in Theology. And, if it fit into the timeline, I mean, most of the protests happened downtown Chicago. When we finally could get cars, we could drive down there; if we didn’t have cars, there was no way of getting down there anyway, ‘cause you had to be back at campus at a certain time, you had to sign in and sign out, and then those restrictions fell, like I said early on, all these changes were happening, that
allowed us the freedom to do some of these things.

PB: So, how did you witness the protests and the convention?

DG: Pretty much on TV.

PB: Mm-hmm.

DG: Yes, pretty much on TV. With the other group of people that decided not to go, downtown, in front of the Congress or the Hilton Hotel. That’s pretty much where we saw it. My brother was also in touch with me, saying, “You don’t want to come down here. This is out of control.”

PB: Mm-hmm.

DG: “At any second, it could really explode.” And my brother knew that. The National Guard were not professional soldiers. They were people like my brother, business people, and people that got into the guard so they would not have to go to Vietnam. We had a contact who worked for the VA, that got my brother into the National Guard, and got my oldest brother into the Air Force Reserves, so he wouldn’t have to go, and fortunately he was done before all the Vietnam stuff started, but my brother Phil got out of active duty by getting into the Guard. At that point the guard had only been called up for floods and things in Illinois for the last ten years. Now, you get called up during the King Riots as they called it, and got called up for the anti-Vietnam stuff, and these are guys holding rifles (Mumbling) And he said, it got bad. There were bottles being thrown at them, bags of crap being thrown at them, by the peace protestors and things. Like any protestors, you get some crazies in there that want to turn the protest into something else. You see that today even in Ferguson, you know. (Church bells chime) People using the time to start shooting guns off and stuff; it’s always the problem with these kind of things. So ( -- ) We tried to have some study days at the seminary, we certainly did a part of our life in prayer, we’d go to events, but that was about as far as we could get through. We also had to be a little bit careful, because, Cardinal Cody was the guy who was going to ordain us and we didn’t want to get him riled about anything. If we did anything in the seminary that looked bad, we’d have to be careful. That was part of the reality of it.

PB: So, what kind of resentment did you have with your brother being in the National Guard and sort of, being on sort of a side of ( -- )

DG: Yes, I didn’t really have any resentment, because he didn’t want to be there. He had no choice. He didn’t know when he got into the guard this was going to happen. And that was the case with a lot of these guys. And so, the image of all these guys with their guns drawn, they’re following orders. You know, they were in a bad place as well. Were some of them gung-ho about it, oh, I’m sure there were, but he wasn’t. He had strong feelings about the war, too, but what’s he going to do?

PB: So, what do you think was the perception of the policemen? Do you think that they were happy about ( -- ) I mean, do you think that they were more fueled to do what they were told?

DG: I think the police in Chicago at the time were very blue-collar, you know, many of them were ex-military, they supported the war. People saw the protestors as a bunch of long-haired,
dirty hippies, who are shacking up together and smoking up, the stereotypes. And, they wanted
their city to look good, and they were upset with what was going on, and they were let loose.
They didn’t have to wear nametags; they were let loose. And it got pretty vicious. You’ve seen
the pictures, the films. Guys, you know, lying limp and just being plummeted with the night
sticks and things like that. A lot of that stuff happened. And it was out of control. Was it every
cop, no. Was it too many cops; one would have been too many. Yes it was. And it some ways, in
a very strange way, you can see they were victims too, they were put in a position where they
were almost goaded to act that way. I mean, they were told to get the people out of the park,
because the park had a law that it closed at eleven pm. That law was never enforced; people stay
up all night in Lincoln Park and Grant Park. But Daley found this old, obscure law, in there and
started cleaning them out. And, you know, people didn’t stand for it and it got crazy. Got crazy.

PB: So, how did your religious convictions affect your behavior around that time?

DG: Well, I started reading a lot of Thomas Merton, who was very much a peace activist
monk. (Horn honks) He didn’t have the full blown reputation he had now, he has now of being
one of the most incredible writers and his take on society, he was meeting with people who were
antiwar and dealing with these things. When you read his writing now, it’s incredible, but
starting to read his stuff then and seeing what was going on. Seeing that Gene McCarthy was a
committed Catholic, and just seeing that end. But there were Catholics now who were saying,
“Yes, Catholics can be conscientious objectors.” And beginning to try to define what that meant.
Conscientious objectors of all wars, the government didn’t allow for conscientious objectors for
a particular war, you had to be one or not. That was just starting form, just starting to happen.
And as I was doing the rest of my theological studies, I was just beginning to realize that certain
things were not compatible with the Gospel. And when we turn patriotism into a religion, a
religion into patriotism. That’s really dangerous.

PB: So, how did you feel about the way these events were being depicted in the media?

DG: Media was very different in those days. The most trusted American during those
times was Walter Cronkite ( -- ) Like I said, when he went up against the war, that was the
turning point. That really was. You know, we listened to them, we believed what they were
saying. We believed what the newspapers were saying. In some ways, things were a little bit
more nuanced. You know, It wasn’t MSNBC versus Fox, and you know when you watch those,
what you’re getting , what particular point of view you’re getting. It was still, you still had the
honest newsmen that had grown up in the Second World War, you know that knew how to tell
the real story, and hadn’t gotten too old or died off yet, so they did an incredible job of reporting.

(The interviewer paused the interview to check the equipment)

PB: So, what was the most turbulent memory, oh, I’m sorry.

DG: The most turbulent memory.

PB: Of the Democratic Convention.

DG: ( -- ) All these images are popping to mind. One was my brother looking at me as we were
both leaving work, saying, “I had a date this weekend; you’re ruining my weekend. If I see you
down at the park, I’m going to bayonet you.” I just wasn’t sure if he was kidding. (Laughs) He was. I wasn’t sure at that moment. The other was, again, they’re images we see so often now that they don’t surprise us. But seeing cops beat up on people. Another image that comes to mind. One image is seeing Michigan Avenue, with the guard and the police here, ( -- ) protestor here, and realizing, there’s not going to be room when they meet and that’s when people were falling through the windows in the Conrad Hilton Hotel and things like that. And the delegates looking out their windows of their room, seeing this happen. I felt bad for my city at that moment. Hearing Peter, Paul, and Mary there sitting, I think they were there live, I don’t think it was a tape, and I love Peter, Paul and Mary, but I was thinking, “Is this doing any good at this point.” Part of me was saying, I didn’t know what the best tactic was, to see people get beat up or to just (Doorbell rings) be bigger than that. I don’t know, I don’t know. So, a lot of confusion, a lot of sadness that it’s come to this. You know, this is a democratic country, where we freely elect our leaders, and instead we’re rioting in the streets. (Conversation outside of the room) And I mean, I don’t mean, the protestors, the rioters, there was rioting going on by the police, and just too much happening, and, you know, Dan Rather got beat up at the convention, you know, a great moment where the Chicago delegates pushed him around and pushed him out.

PB: Mm-hmm.

DG: You know, just interesting. (Knock on door) There’s a profound sadness. I found in life, that’s kind of my normal reaction to a lot of things. I get so sad that things have to be the way they are sometimes.

PB: So, what was a moment that gave you the most hope?

DG: ( -- ) At that time, or as time progressed?

PB: At that time.

DG: At that time, not much.

PB: Mm-hmm.

DG: Not much. There was a ( -- ) I had, as I let my hair start to grow, and people would ( -- ) “F you, hippie” You know, antiwar, there was just a lot of anger. So, there wasn’t a lot of hope at that moment in history. There really wasn’t. You know, I began to realize while all this happening here, people were still dying in Vietnam, and then people would come home from Vietnam, and if they wore their uniform, they were treated like crap., You know, like “Why did you go?” People had no choice when they went. But it was, you know ( -- ) You were stuck. If you were fighting in the war, and you didn’t the support the military, now like today, there’s a difference. We may be protesting the war in Afghanistan, but you don’t take it out on the soldiers that are there. We took it out on the soldiers. And there was something intrinsically not good about that. And, ( -- ) that made it even more complex and difficult. I worry if anybody who tries to come with easy ( -- ) images, easy ( -- ) words, easy ( -- ) pictures. It was a really complex time. so, I’d like to say, “Oh, this gave me hope” or “This made sense for me” or “This was the issue for me”; It was way more complex than that.

PB: What did the turning point look like?
DG: Didn’t even see a turning point at that point. There was no turning point. And the election was it was a sad thing; there wasn’t any passion there at all. The “moral majority” and the “hard hats,” the “silent majority”; the moral majority was the the religious ones like Jerry Falwell, rather than the silent majority. It was just, it was not a hopeful time. Again, you know, in the background, there were bombs dropping in Vietnam and in Cambodia. The numbers were escalating and going up. We would start seeing headlines saying about massacres and Tet offenses, it was just, the news was filled with it was not good. It was not, there was no turning point, if anything, it was “Dig your heels in for a long fight.”

PB: So, who do you believe was the victor?

DG: Everybody lost. I can say that without hesitating. Everybody lost. The political process lost big time, because there was a reaction to open up the conventions a little bit more, so it wouldn’t be the bosses who ran things. But that led in to the special interests. And the kind of, you know, Iowa caucuses determined who going to be the champion There numbers more near carrying the weight of who they side. There was still going to be tens of thousands of American men and women who were dying in Vietnam. We never did anything for those Vets like we should have when they came home. And over my years, it breaks my heart as a priest when somebody comes to the door, homeless and hungry, and sure enough, they’re a Vietnam Vet. Now, for my age, they’re getting older, a lot of them are dead, they were scarred, scarred for life. The police in Chicago Chicago would never be the same, and maybe it shouldn’t have been; maybe it needed to be brought to light. The protestors, you know, the movement lost its innocence, lost its purity, became much more violent in some ways. If not in action, at least in words, and things like that. And it splintered, and you know, some liberation army, what the hell was that? (Doorbell rings) People were dying, it was just a mess. And, so, nothing, nothing. Nothing good came out of that I don’t think.

PB: How did you try to reconcile all this?

DG: Like some, I stepped back a little bit, turned inward, said okay. You’re going to be a priest, what are you going to do as a priest. What values are you going to bring? My first assignment as a priest was the African American community. My choice, that I wanted to make a difference, I wanted to be part of the community, do some things as a priest that I couldn’t do before I was priest. I then went into teaching and wanted to teach the generations, for all of us, that activism is good thing. That there is power in numbers, you have to make sure that the power is utilized as effectively and the best way it can be like any power should be. And you know, that’s what happened. I subsequently met Monsignor Jack Egan, when I became a pastor, this is fast-forwarding twenty years later. Jack Egan had been an activist for social justice in Chicago, and went down to Notre Dame to work with Monsignor Ted Esberg, and Cardinal Cody took his job away from here, and he came back to Chicago and he gathered some us young pastors round, and started teaching us what it meant, so the seed that was planted took decades to germinate, and part of it was going to training for the Industrial Areas Foundation, Saul Alinsky’s group, and the social justice issues there, and learning what it meant to be an activist, so it really fast forwards up to this last election, when all of a sudden the community organizer was a dirty word.

PB: Mm-hmm.
DG: I would laugh. (--) There was a reason not to vote for Barack Obama, 'cause he was a community organizer, but community organizing is the backbone of a lot, a lot of this. A lot of people protest moved kind of seamlessly into that, but Saul Alinsky and Ed Chambers and the guys who ran it, they knew how to take the idealism, the (--) energy, and train it into doing it right. So, it wasn’t just people yelling and screaming, you had an agenda, you practiced, you trained, you’d do what you were going to do. We had the discipline, the value, the action afterwards. I wish we had that in the sixties. We didn’t. Maybe we couldn’t; maybe it was just such terrible times, such different times, that it couldn’t have happened, but it would have been nice.

PB: So, (--) what did your work with Ed Chambers and Jack Egan consist of?

DG: Well, Jack Egan brought the Industrial Areas Foundation (--) back to Chicago, that’s where they started, with the (--) organization, and back in Irish neighborhood, in Our Nation of the Southwest. (--) Saul Alinsky left Chicago kind of just fed up with everything. And, (--) Jack Egan knew, back with community organizing are the churches; they’re the biggest institutions in the neighborhood, and we can make a difference. And there was a really, you know, (--) Harold Washington had been elected and died and things started to change again in Chicago, and we needed to have (--) the training, the ability to learn how to do these things. And that’s what he brought to us. And so, we, (--) at the same time, we, the young pastors, were saying, “Problems are getting too big in Chicago, we can’t handle them parochially.” And a group of young African American ministers were saying the same thing in the black community. And so Jack Egan brought Ed Chambers in and said, “You know” (--) and he gave a talk and I was thinking “What’s he talking to us for,” you know, “We’re not Brooklyn” (--) I lived in a gentrified neighborhood. I didn’t get it at first, and then it began to sink in on me, this is (--) we need to get together and form (--) an organization for organizations, and we need to be trained to do that. And then Jack, through the (--) and the (--) if you wanted Ed Chambers, you got to do what he asked, and Ed Chambers said, “I want you to get eighty Catholic Pastors to support this before I do anything. We got to have eighty pastors.” And he said, “You got to get me two million dollars from Cardinal Bernadine so we can start organizing.” And then Cardinal Bernadine, Saul went to this and he’s going to ask religious leaders from other denominations, and we’re going to do this. We did it. How did we do it, because (--) the men who trained us, trained me, how to make the (--) with Cardinal Bernadine. You know, that was (--) he brought in one of his assistants and we turned the chairs away from him. We’re here to talk to Bernadine. And I couldn’t leave the room till we got a yes from him; we got a yes from him. And then we had to make the presentation to other religious leaders. They sat me right in his line of vision just to cross my arms and stare at him, remind him he’s got to say what we wanted him to say, and he did. It was incredible. And we had other skills to learn. You know, I was watching Rahm Immanuel, you know, and his campaign, and all I could think of was when he was our congressman, and we wanted to meet with him about some issues, and (--) we had a two o’clock appointment with him. And at 2:20, he wasn’t there, so I went up to the desk and said, “We are leaving” She says, “You can’t. He’s on his way here.” “Yes we can, our time is as valuable as his and we only give twenty minute waiting time, and tell him we will call him back and set up another meeting” and as we left, he started walking, he said, “I’ll meet with you now” I said, “No, we’re leaving. You were supposed to be here twenty-five minutes ago.” “I’m busy.” “No busier than we are.” It’s all a power thing. And we walked out, and I’m thinking, “He’ll never meet with us again” and he did. Didn’t like us, but he listened to us. (--) You learned things like
that, you learned to evaluate ( -- ) that you did. And I just saw this stuff, it was really wonderful. I couldn’t have done that, had I not been around in the sixties. I wish I had that in the sixties. It would have been so valuable. On so many levels. But I’m one of the ( -- ) I’m not one of the leaders, obviously, ( -- ) but I’m one of the foot soldiers, that there were tens of hundreds of millions around our country that did this, that could not do it or chose not to do it full time, but was still a part of it. Maybe if we’d all done it full time, it would have ended earlier. That’s in hindsight, but we did only what we were allowed to do in that particular time in history. But it changed us, and we wonder what’s happening in the generations that follow us. And now these pop-up rallies and pop-up marches, they’re going on, and traffic gets blocked and stuff like that. I sit there and I think “This is good”. And they thought it all out, they understand the implications of what they’re doing. I guess my attitude is, yes, it’s gotten a little less passionate and a little bit more pragmatic.

(The interviewer paused the interview to check the equipment)

PB: And the last few questions are reflection questions.

DG: Okay.

PB: ( -- ) What lessons did you learn that helped you most with your religious conviction?

DG: ( -- ) I learned not to be quite as judgmental as I used to be. That, when you start judging people, and putting them in boxes, categories ( -- ) communication stops. Not everybody that doesn’t agree with me is evil. ( -- ) That I’m not always right. That ultimately, the gospel that I read is a gospel that says, no matter what, we have to be kind. And how hard that is when you’re passionate about something, and you really feel you’re right. I believe that ( -- ) there is a need to gather, that there is power in numbers, you know God’s presence works through that. That we need to share convictions, that we need to be in community, we need to be in relationships when the issues rise. Then we can be there, so saying theologially, that’s why we gather around the table. That why we share in the Eucharist. That’s why we share the banquet of the lord, so we need the strength, and we need the hope, and we need the vision. It’s there, and naturally, we are in relationship, we are in communion with one another, and then we can bring this to where we need to bring it, to be where it needs to be brought, because the opposite of that is the anarchy of isolation, of loneliness, of separateness, of brokenness, of emptiness, and that’s what we’re fighting, and that’s the battle we fight in the world, and communion, which is our relationship with God, the isolation, which is the relationship with evil. In our world, and the forces of evil will do everything in their power to drive wedges between us, so we have to look for what we have in common, and emphasize what we share, the common values, rather than the things we differ in. You know, by dividing us, people take away our strength and our ( -- ) vision, and our resolve when we need to come together with some things and hold those things together.

PB: How did the conflict of 1968 reflect previous movements in your life?

DG: ( -- ) Made me grow up, I was just a kid before then, I didn’t take anything too seriously, I ( -- ) talked a good talk, I ( -- ) I didn’t realize that there are people who put their
lives on the line for what they believe. And people give up everything for what they believe. And that’s pretty darn powerful. Challenging.

PB: What conviction rose above every other that led to the majority of your actions?

DG: (--) I would see the pictures of my contemporaries, dead, you know, not how they died, but their military pictures, their family pictures. And I would look at them and say “A whole life worth of dreams will not be dreamt. Whole lives worth of hope will not be fulfilled. What children would there have been, what love would there have been.” All that has been squashed, By death and a war we shouldn’t have been in, and the extreme value of life that we’re not just statistics, we’re not just casualties of war, we’re not just numbers any more than the Vietnamese and the Viet Cong were. These were all human beings with hopes and dreams and fears and visions of life and they’re all gone, they’re all gone, and the incredible waste that is, and can’t there be a better way to respond to every issue we have with war, and can’t we learn from it, and I guess the answer is no, because we’re still doing it, we’re still doing it. (--) Channel surfing the other day, and some channel was flashing faces of people who died, and our conflicts the last ten years, and where they were from and, you know, wrote their little bios and you see those pictures now and they’re kids to me. They were my contemporaries, and it’s just too much of a loss. And all the lives were affected by it. There’s got to be a better way, got to be a better way. (Car drives past) You know, if we’re going to police the world, which our country’s been thinking we should be doing, then the absolute youth and vitality and vigor of our society, these young men and women are going to just bleed away, and what will be left with?

PB: So, what were some periods in the movement when you relied on your faith to get through?

DG: Almost every time. (--) A lot of our marches were to a place of worship, or started in a place of worship. We were done with prayer, we identified as seminarians or clergy, for peace, it was part of our identity. We always wanted to keep, keep that part of it, (--) not just a political thing, because it wasn’t particularly (--) well, politics had a part to play in it, it was our religious belief what was motivating us, it was the gospel of Jesus, saying, you know, and the challenge of that Gospel, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will inherit the earth.” And to really make that a reality in our lives.

PB: So, what did the movement do to change or enhance any belief you had?

DG: Well, I think it helped my belief in God to grow, it helped me to see the complexity of the world in which I lived, so the complexity of God that created that world. Taught me to realize that while we struggle with evil, it’s not just black and white, there’s a lot of gray in there as well, and how we respond to things, the choice that we make when we respond, really says a lot more than we realize sometimes.

PB: How did the events of 1968 change you?

DG: (--) I don’t know. Would I be here today, probably, but maybe not here, being a priest, I don’t know, would I be here or out in the suburbs somewhere, or something else, I think what ’68 did was led me to believe that there are absolute heroes and martyrs in our world, people want to give up their lives because of their passion, and if I could have just one tiny bit of
that passion in our ministry and in my life, it’d be a good thing. I’ve always worked for that, worked for that. It’s something I believe.

PB: So, what are you most proud of as an activist?

DG: ( -- ) Nothing I’m really proud of; I’m saddened that we had to do that. I’m saddened that things got so divisive. I’m saddened that it had to continue so long. I’m saddened that ( -- ) there was more demagoguery than there was honesty. I’m saddened for the times there wasn’t the integrity that was necessary to be totally honest. I’m saddened by why we had to keep doing it, and the lives kept dying. ( -- ) I’m saddened that I didn’t do more, I’m saddened that I ( -- ) sometimes ( -- ) was in thought, and as violent as some of the people whose violence I abhorred ( -- ) I guess it had to be, but nothing there, nothing there that I can say “Boy, I’m glad that happened.”

PB: What parallels do you see between 1968 and now?

DG: That’s an incredible question. ( -- ) I see ( -- ) a fatigue that wasn’t there then; there was a freshness still there then. A fatigue brought out by instant communication, but you know, we see it happening, or two seconds later, throughout the world. A fatigue of trying to separate fact from opinion, the media. Fatigue of, you know, ask the man on the street, “Who are we fighting right now? Where are our troops?” Will they know the answer? “Where are our airplanes striking?” Will they know the answer? You know, “How much money is our country spending on this? How many total lives have been lost in this so far? How many people are in VA hospitals with mental and physical conditions?” I mean, people live longer now than ever before, so you got people, multiple handicapped people, with limbs missing, that would have died in Vietnam, but they’re sewn together, but their lives are, are torn apart. So, you turn on the TV and Dancing with Stars, there’s a guy there without an arm and a leg, he’s dancing and he’s a vet and everybody is applauding him for what he did for his country, and that’s nice and good, and I give him credit, but for every one of him, there’s got to be hundreds of VA hospitals that are ( -- ) with lives that have been torn apart, and our VA hospitals don’t even do a good job of protecting them, so I just see ( -- ) there’s almost overload. The circuit breakers are popping, there’s just so much going on. How do we get a handle on it? I don’t know, because you know, what do you want to march for today? Do I want to march to get us out of Afghanistan, do I want to march for ( -- ) that our planes don’t fly over Iran. Do I want to march because people of color are being killed on the street? Do I want to march because people are separated from their family because their illegal, but their children aren’t? Do I want ( -- ) where do we begin? And so, things have gotten so fractured now. And I think it’s very hard. And I had great hopes that an Obama presidency ( -- ) could have brought us all together, ( -- ) I don’t think it’s through any (doorbell rings) fault of his own, but through the way the political system has evolved, that hasn’t happened. You know, I think anybody could do that now, there’s too much, anybody can do, can keep things divisive politically, that’s to their advantage, and so what do we do? What do we do, do we have term limits, do we kick the bums out, what do we do? Who do we believe; who’s the honest one? You know, in any of this, you know, how many more Aldermen need to go to jail before we can really make a different in Chicago? How many more people need to get killed on the streets of Chicago? And you know, “Chi-raq”, we get upset when Spike Lee wants to make a movie with that name, ( -- ) but, in fact, you know, live on the west side, live on the south side, and you realize the ( -- ) even parts of this neighborhood, if you’re black, it’s a scary
part of the world to be. Where do we begin with all of this stuff? Where do our energies go, where does our time go? With the economy tanked, (door shuts) do people even have time or the energy to do any of these things? You know, I don’t know. So, without trying to sound too pessimistic, these are different times. We’re going to need some charismatic leaders to bring us together, and not just in politics, but in church, and in life, in literature, everywhere, we need people to really challenge us and bring us together.

PB: Do you think protests and things of the nature of ’68 protests, do you think they have an effect?

DG: Yes, I think they can. You got to be careful, you know that, the message, so ( -- ) when there was a march in this area, after a shooting, it began to sound more and more like an anti-police march. I know a lot of police officers in this parish that are really good, good Christian people. Are there bad cops, sure. Is every cop bad, no. Are there some people that shouldn’t be shot, oh, yes. Are there people that are shot, so the police can protect themselves, yes to that to, but, it, you know I chose not to go to that protest because I had to make a choice, yes I believe that’s something we have to deal with, but it just turned into an anti-police thing, it’s not a good idea, and then to block a street just for the sake of blocking a street, no, I don’t think that does the job, unless you’re trying to make a bigger point there somewhere. I think protests are necessary, but they’ve got to be focused, and the message very clear, on what you’re protesting and what the issues are, and then what the solutions can be. And that’s not always easy to come to, nor was is easy in ’68, and did we always have that, no, but now, more than ever, we need to have those things answered.

PB: What do you think was the most regrettable consequence of the convention?

DG: ( -- ) I think ( -- ) our country lost some of its innocence, the realization that people can be bullied and beaten. That’s really sad. (Doorbell rings) The saddest thing is that we weren’t able to find the right person to carry the banner. So, that could’ve made a difference, and we ended up putting Richard Nixon into power, and we’re still dealing with the effects of that.

PB: What is the most positive consequence?

DG: ( -- ) I think people learned not to be so naïve, that this wasn’t fun and games. There were repercussions; for every action there is a reaction. You got to be ready for it, aware of it, deal with it, and embrace it, or reject it as we see as necessary, but not just be surprised by it.

PB: What was your greatest contribution?

DG: (Long pause) Carrying the two bags for the little old lady walking in the park.

PB: And, how has your purpose in life changed since that year?

DG: ( -- ) Well, it’s changed a lot, that was a long time ago, and a lot of water under the bridge and a lot of blessed life, being able to be part of people’s lives in my ministry, in time. And I think, if anything, I’ve learned that when all the dust settles, we’re going to be remembered for how kind we’ve been, and how we’ve treated others with kindness, and how we’ve kindly demanded kindness from others. Without that, the world spins out of control. And,
there’s the belief, you have to believe that it’s the most powerful thing we have, to be kind, and
that’s not always easy to believe. ( -- ) And, it’s really not alive in our political sphere, it’s not
alive in our church discussions, it’s not alive socially, it, not alive in the sports scene, it’s not
alive in our literature, in our music, in anything. You know, listen to the lyrics of some of the rap
music, and listen to the lyrics in some of the country songs, it’s a very different world, and we’ve
got to regain a sense of being kind to ourselves, being kind to our loved ones, being kind to the
stranger on the street, being kind to our enemies, being kind to people we don’t know, being kind
to our planet, the earth, being kind to just everything, all of God’s creatures. That’s what makes a
difference ultimately. I think I know that just from seeing how things evolved from those times,
and I see what happened. Just sometimes, most of the time being on the sideline, being an
observer.

PB: Those are all my questions. Do you have anything else to say?

DG: No, it’s, I just ( -- ) I hope history doesn’t choose to trivialize ’68, or stereotype it. it
was so complex, so challenging, so invigorating, so disheartening, so alive, so deadening, it just
a mix of things. One of those pivotal years that we remember like 1492 and 1066, and things like
that, and at least we’re Americans and some of us gets one of those kind of pivotal times.

PB: Well, I think with voices like yours, who were there, it will be impossible to
trivialize.

DG: I hope. And then also I would hope that you would, however this plays out, realize I
wasn’t a major player, just one of the foot soldiers, of many, many, many. And then, you know
one looks back in hindsight, yes, there’s a lot more I could have done, should have done. But you
lived in the moment.

PB: All you can do you do is document it now.

DG: Great.

PB: Thank you very much.