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The University of Baltimore is launching a two-year investigation called "Baltimore '68: Riots and Rebirth," a project centered around the events that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and their effects on the development of our city. UB administration and faculty members in the law school and in the undergraduate departments of history and community studies are planning a series of projects and events to commemorate the 40th anniversary of this pivotal event. We are currently working with the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History, The Jewish Museum of Maryland, Maryland Public Television and the Enoch Pratt Free Libraries to pursue funding for projects that may include conferences, a website and a library traveling exhibit.

Your potential participation in an oral history project would contribute to the very foundation of this project – the memories of Baltimoreans who lived through the riots and saw the changes that came about in response to them. Your life story can fill in the limited knowledge we learn from newspaper accounts and the television footage.

If you choose to participate in the project you would be interviewed by students from the University of Baltimore. They will ask you questions, but your memories will determine the direction of the interviews.

If you agree to serve as an oral history informant in this project, you will meet with a team of undergraduate students. The students will take a still photograph of you. In addition, if you have a photo of yourself in or around 1968, we would greatly appreciate it if we could borrow it, scan it, and return it. We would reserve the rights to reproduce those photos and use them on the website, conferences, exhibit or publications.

The students may conduct the interviews at a location of your choice, or you may meet them at the University of Baltimore Langsdale Library for your interviews. During the interviews, your recollections will be recorded in two forms: audio and video. The students will be responsible for operating the equipment. You can expect the interviews to last for a minimum of 30 minutes each.

Sometimes talking about events that occurred decades ago will unearth forgotten memories. Undoubtedly, some of those remembrances will be negative. We greatly appreciate your willingness to take the risk of exploring a potentially painful past so that your life experiences will be recorded.

After the interviews the students will transcribe your oral history. They will provide you with a copy of the transcription for your review before the transcription is published. The transcription, video and audio records will be archived in the Langsdale Library Special Collections and will be accessible to the public. Your name will be attached to these documents. The University of Baltimore may use your image and/or your words in any future documentaries, exhibits, conferences or publications. Participants in the oral history project agree to waive their confidentiality.

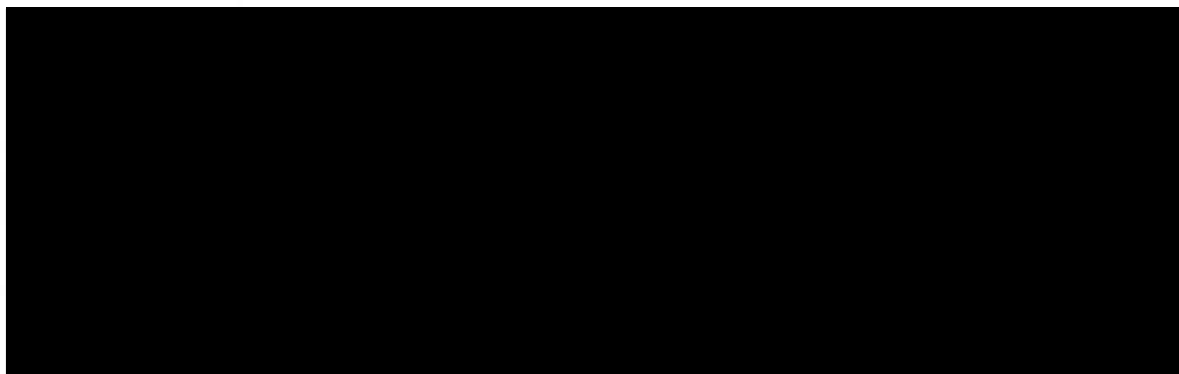
If at any time you are uncomfortable with participation in the study, you are free to drop out. Participation is strictly voluntary. While your participation is requested and highly valued, you are free to decide whether or not to continue participation at all times. You may decline to have your name published with your reminiscences

If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact me at 410-837-5296. Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth M. Nix, Ph.D.
Visiting Assistant Professor
History and Community Studies
The University of Baltimore

I have read and understand the information provided above, and consent to participate in the study. I have also been given a copy of the informed consent for my records.



Interview of Thomas Donellan, pastor of St. Peter the Apostle Church

Interviewed by: Jaime Nish on October 11, 2007 at 9:30AM

Thomas Donellan: Now, what is your role?

Jaime Nish: My role is, I am in a class where we are doing these interviews. And then, after we do the interviews then we go and we do a little investigation about the background, your background. And we want to get a first hand account of what happened during the Baltimore riots because there's not a lot written about them.

Thomas Donellan: So, this is leading up to the conference in April?

Jaime Nish: Yes.

Thomas Donellan: Now, before you ask the question, just tell me what some of them are.

Jaime Nish: Well, some of them are going to be we're going to ask you to state your name and what was your situation in the '60s? And before the riots, what kind of interactions did you have with people of other races? We're going to talk about the racial mood of Baltimore, the assassination of Martin Luther King. And just how you got information about the riots, a few of the things that you saw, national guard, the mood in your area. And then just, a few of the after effects of the riot.

Thomas Donellan: Can I do it, uh...They're just interesting enough, pretty much the way I organize my thoughts. Would it be all right, rather than dealing with questions, if I kind of laid out that information?

Jaime Nish: Absolutely. How about you do it like that, and if I have any other questions...

Thomas Donellan: And then, if you have any other questions, because I think it would flow better than if it was locked into a question-and-answer form.

Jaime Nish: I'm going to ask you just one or two questions before we start just to get the basic information and then we can start. Can you state your full name, please?

Thomas Donellan: My full name is Thomas J. Donellan.

Jaime Nish: OK. And how old were you in the 1960s?

Thomas Donellan: I was 35 in 1965. So, I was 38 when the riot broke out.

Jaime Nish: OK. And where did you work at the time?

Thomas Donellan: I was pastor of the Catholic Church in the neighborhood.

Jaime Nish: And that is?

Thomas Donellan: The Church of St. Peter the Apostle, Hollin and Poppleton Street.

Jaime Nish: Now, if you'd like to go ahead.

Thomas Donellan: Well, pretty much in terms of what questions you had asked, I was thinking this is a specific project focused on the riot. However, whomever is coordinating this and putting together a presentation for this conference, needs to understand the antecedents that caused the riots. And, there are several that have to be very clear. The riot did not just happen. They had very definite antecedents. I'm not going to deal with the national scene because everybody knows that and especially since we're—we have been coming up on the 40th anniversary many, many of those scenes have been replayed. And with the time—I mean, this you know, I could only tell you what everybody all ready knew. So, I'm not going to deal with that, although that had a significant role in what happened. I'm going to try to deal more with the specific area and role that I played. And secondly, one antecedent that's extremely important, and I hope someone researches it and has it as part of any talk, or whatever, is that this all began, really after World War II. Prior to World War II, Baltimore was a very tightly segregated city. When I grew up, white people lived on one street, and black people lived on the half streets.

Jaime Nish: I'm sorry, what do you mean by the half streets?

Thomas Donellan: Well, there were little rows of houses, they were big three story houses. And then, in the allies in between them there were little half streets with maybe 12 feet houses where the black people lived. There was no integration, whatsoever. Then, after the war and during the war, there had been a large migration of the black community from the south. During the '50s, Baltimore was in very much upheaval because the total racial complex of our city neighborhoods changed. Black people having made some money during the war, began to move into white neighborhoods. And white neighborhoods began to empty. And the white people began, in great numbers, to move either north or south or west because Baltimoreans move in a straight line. And so, large areas of Baltimore City went from all white to all

black in two to three years. An example is, since we're dealing with southwest Baltimore, which will be my specific area, the area from Edmonson Avenue historically was called the other side of the bridge, the bridge over Hilton parkway, was all white. As blockbusters, people who bought the houses and tried to drive out the white people came in, that neighborhood went from all black to all white in a little over two years. And the white people went to Catonsville and Howard County. So, I was in a parish in Catonsville, where we had 700 children in our school in 1956 and 1700 in 1960.

Jaime Nish: So you're saying the neighborhood in West Baltimore went from...

Thomas Donellan: All black to all white.

Jaime Nish: All black to all white.

Thomas Donellan: All white to all black.

Jaime Nish: That's what I was just checking on. Alright.

Thomas Donellan: And the same thing happened in North Baltimore, Asco Street, the Irish 10th Ward along Calvert Street, and so on, East Baltimore, the Polish neighborhoods. It happened in every section of the city. But the out migration from, say, North Baltimore went north, whereas the migration from West Baltimore went west. The East Baltimore riots functioned around those out migrations. So, now I am somewhat familiar with the East Baltimore riots, but I was not involved in them in a first hand manner. So, I'm going to concentrate only on the West Baltimore Riot. So, that made an enormous difference, that out migration. It has to be understood as the changing point that led to the whole change in Baltimore City. Then, what happened was, my church was on the corner of Poppleton and Baltimore Street. Baltimore Street became the great divide between the black community on the north and the white community on the south. That was a no man's land. On the north side of Baltimore Street was 100 percent black, virtually, that I know of, there were no white people living there. They had all fled. On the east side, it was almost totally white. Some, integration. The white people had lived there for 100 years. They were the descendants of the Irish and other nationalities that build the railroad at the B&O. And lived in those houses on Lombard Street and so on, their parents and their grandparents before them.

Jaime Nish: I have a quick question. St. Peter the Apostle was an Irish Catholic Church, correct?

Thomas Donellan: Right. It was built by the Irish in 1842. It was the largest church in West Baltimore. And it's the third oldest Catholic Church in the city of Baltimore, and the first in West Baltimore. So, it occupied a major role in the community. The divide between Baltimore Street is significant because the riot was defined by Baltimore Street. Prior to the riots, starting in 1965, or slightly before, major efforts

began on both sides of Baltimore Street on the black community side and on the white community side to try to begin to bridge the gap between the two. This - the most significant players in the area in those years were the churches. The black churches, of course, have always played a significant role in the black community. They were very positive and were working very hard to try to achieve some stability and change. Baltimore... And then, I was thinking last night, the problems have not gone away. We were dealing with the boarding up of houses, the poor quality of public education, the lack of jobs. Not much different than we are dealing with today. On the east side, the people had jobs. However, they were divided into many small churches. St. Peter's was the largest. There was also a church called St. Martin's at Fulton and Fayette which is a very large church. Both, of course, were only a small percentage of what they had been in their hey day. And then there was a church in Pigtown called St. Jerome's. So those were the three Catholic churches. But there were numerable churches of other denominations. And there were two kinds of ministers there. Some had been there for 40 years, 30 years and had decided to stay to see what they could do. One in particular, I was thinking of, was a minister named Fred Mund. He was the minister of the United Church of Christ on Scott Street. He had been there 40 years. Leader in his church, a brilliant man. But, he had decided to stay there, in one church for his whole life. And so, he was, the most knowledgeable teacher to those like myself, who were coming in from the suburbs as volunteers: volunteers heavily motivated by John Kennedy. It was Kennedy's call that really mobilized many, many people, myself, included, to volunteer to move from the suburbs into the city. So, the churches were very key. And the churches were well organized. The so called ecumenical movement, which was attempt of the churches to work together had just begun in the Catholic Church and really facilitated in the other churches probably in '63 or '64. However, survival does strange things for you. None of us had any money. None of us had any real strength. We had parishioners who had been there for many years. There was certainly not a lack of prejudice in our parishioners. However, in addition to St. Peter's, the United Methodist Church has a very large church on Pratt Street. I'm not sure if that's Calhoun or which any more. But they united 13 small Methodist churches into what was known as the Southwest Christian Parish. The other small churches, Scott Street Baptist and United Church of Christ, the other Catholic Churches, we all worked together very closely. Westminster Presbyterian Church, which is now part of the university, that was a key player. They were key players. So, we worked very closely together both spiritually and helping each other with services because nobody had any money to hire to somebody if somebody went away. But, also meeting regularly to see how we could change the community. The black churches also met regularly, and in a real breakthrough, probably in 1966, the black ministers who met every Monday morning for prayer and discussion invited the white ministers to join them. So, for two years, we met together to look at the neighborhood, to coordinate what we could do. So, that was really a very hopeful.

Jaime Nish: Where did you meet?

Thomas Donellan: In the rectories. In the parish houses of the various-- we would move around to the parish houses of the various churches. Because then, almost all ministers and priests lived in parish houses adjacent to their churches. That was a very hopeful thing. We were making progress.

Jaime Nish: Could you give me an example of some of the things that you were trying to accomplish in the community?

Thomas Donellan: Well, we were trying to deal with the political structure, first of all, which was the old Baltimore system and other cities, major cities of the political club. And in the sixth district it was controlled politically by a club called the Stonewall Democratic Club. And, they were not uncooperative. They had just been there and were ruling things for a long time. So, we had to deal that because to get the city involved in the many problems, they controlled the city. However, the city was changing. We had Mayor Thomas D'Alesandro and Thomas D'Alesandro Jr., both of whom were very open to helping. So, the city began to develop services, like cleaning the allies, rat eradication, improving the public schools. Together, we were able to get two new schools built, James McHenry, school 10 at Lombard and Schroeder and School 22 at Pratt and I'm not sure where; just at Pratt at the end of Union Square. And those were brand new schools. They were open space schools, which was really revolutionary in those days. And they were brand new. We were able to get free breakfast, extra tutors. Actually, at St. Peter's we had the first Head Start in 1966 in Baltimore City and one of the first in the country. Because they were government funds, obviously, they had to be integrated. So, you know, it was a wonderful time for black and white parents to come together. And pretty much the white churches, if they had programs, tried to have them integrated. That was what we were working on. Now, black churches, quite honestly, not as much, two reasons. One, it was risky for the minister. The black people were-- the white people were not oriented to going to a black church for the racial reasons and also, they took three hours to have a service. So, there was not a lot of integration of going that way. But we were trying to change things and the city was offering programs, health programs at the university hospital. They had gotten to exercise a presence under the Nixon administration, social legislation, was very good. Most people don't realize that, but some of the most progressive social legislation for the cities was under Nixon. However, of course, Johnson's Great Society had preceded that and money and things became available. So, we were just working to organize the people. Many of us, myself included, were trained community organizers. And you do that by organizing the-- at least the school of thought that we followed was you organized against an enemy, the Elinski School of Organizing. And, so, we had to pick enemies. In some cases they were institutions who were enslaving. Some were little neighborhood stores that were ripping off the people. Wherever we could find something to encourage the people, especially if we could find something for them to work together. So, between '65 and '67 and '68 things were going in a positive way. Now, that doesn't mean there were great successes. I would not want, even, to imply that. There were minor steps. They were certainly not giant steps to change. But, at least, something was happening. There was goodwill in the neighborhood. The Hollin Street area had the Hollin's Market, which was a godsend, because Hollin's Market provided all fresh food. And on weekends it was totally integrated because it was the only place in the community you could buy fresh foods. The others were these little tiny stores. So, every kind of thing was there, and of course, I'll that a little later, that's what sort of saved the neighborhood during the riot when there was - when all of the stores were closed. So, that's just kind of the background. Now, the national scene was going on through all of this. It was not, as far as I think bank, a player in where we were or what we were doing. It was a consciousness and a support. I mean, there were many demonstration with both black and white community demonstrating for open housing, for jobs, and so on. But, the national scene was not a large player in the local Baltimore community.

Jaime Nish: I have a question at this point. I had done a little reading about the Catholic Church's position on race and riots, and I know during, I believe it was the L.A. Riots, they were taking the official position of condemning the riots, while sympathizing with the cause. Did that effect you in any way?

Thomas Donellan: No. The archdiocese of Baltimore was-- our archbishop was Archbishop Sheehan, Laurence Sheehan. He was totally supportive. In fact, the Catholic Church, that's how I ended up there had instituted something called the urban ministry. And priests were asked to volunteer to come and work in the city and quite - I was not the only one. There were a fairly large number of Catholic priest who left some very comfortable suburban parishes to come and work in the city with the cooperation. The church also directed its Catholic charity organizations, its money resources to keep our churches open, to support education. No, the church was very positive. Now, whether that you say support a riot, a riot was not even a concept at this point. I mean I had never dreamed to ever see a riot. And we were working in little steps to change things. We didn't expect a riot. We were positive we thought we could change the city, even get more - get rid of the boarded up houses or whatever. It was a very, very positive energy coming from all, and not just the churches, I should say that, but the beginnings of the community action agency of Johnson's war on poverty. Young people volunteered for VISTA which is Volunteers In Service To America, which was a fairly substantial program rooted in the infant beginnings of the University of Maryland School of Social Work, which was just beginning in 1965 in a little old building on the Baltimore campus. But, they housed the VISTA program. And the VISTA workers were in the neighborhood as were people from charity organizations of all of the denominations. I mean, there were a lot of people trying to change things for the better. So, we didn't even think about a riot. We were thinking about changing. So, that's the background. Now, Martin Luther King was assassinated, of course, in early April, as I recall of 1968. And that was a traumatic experience for everybody, not just the black community because, you know, I had heard him speak personally not only at the mall in Washington but to small groups to our ministerium, so on and so forth. So there was a huge support behind what he was doing, although there was not a lot of physical going because there wasn't any money, and, but there was a huge support. So, there was a great, great sorrow over that. And there was a real support of the white community to the black community that tried to deal with that and help understand and make clear that, you know, we saw it as a tragedy. So, that was the beginning of April. But, before that, maybe a month or two before, the total community began to get a feeling of uneasiness. We lived on the street. I mean we walked the street. We knew everybody. Maybe not everybody in both communities, but we certainly knew our own communities. And people were working with us, but there began to be an uneasiness. It's hard to put it into words. It wasn't something we-- we didn't even want to face it, but there was an uneasiness there. And when Martin Luther King was assassinated, we just did not know what was going to happen. Certainly, in my wildest imagination, as I thought about this last night, and in those I was working with, because quickly, going back in 1966, another minister and myself, his name was Carl Hickey from Dorcuth United Methodist Church on Washington Boulevard, together, joined by the other churches we formed one of the first community organizations called the Southwest Baltimore Citizen's Planning Council. And we represented the various groups from the various churches and communities and schools and so on, from Pigtown all the way up to Baltimore Street. That later got merged after the riot into a group called COIL, when a community action agency tried to bring the black and white communities together, they broadened that into a wider thing. So the Southwest Community

Association was a player. And we were trying to see what results would happen, as were the ministers and organizations in the black community. Now, I was thinking last night, could I say, "That we expected there to be problems" And the answer is absolutely no. We did not expect any serious problems. So, out of that - that's the background. If you want more, I'll answer it later. And after Martin Luther's assassination, as I said, we didn't expect anything. But, on a Saturday, I didn't try to put my dates together, but Saturday-- the worst riots in Baltimore, in West Baltimore were Holy Week, and the week before Easter. It started on Easter Monday and it went all the way through Easter Sunday in 1968. That probably-- Martin Luther was assassinated April 4th, so, probably it was something like the 10th or 11th of April when Holy Week began. I can well remember it. The priests working in East Baltimore, we were all united, especially in our Catholic urban ministry, but, other churches too and community organizations. And I remember getting a call very early Saturday morning that there was a major confrontation, we didn't really want to call it a riot because we didn't know what a riot was. We never saw a riot. I saw it on television, but I never saw a riot. That there was burning and looting in East Baltimore and the buildings were being threatened. That the police were not police-- were not able to control it. They didn't know what to do and they didn't have enough personnel. They didn't have training and things were bad. So, we, over that weekend, Saturday and Sunday we had communication. We were talking to ourselves and there was not one person who expected that to spread to West Baltimore. We thought we had really done the job. So, what we were asked to do was to spend Saturday and Sunday and Monday on the street, all of us, not just priests or ministers but any VISTA worker or anyone a health worker or nurses, just walk the streets and visit with people and try to tell people we're different. And there were literally dozens, if not hundreds of people walking the street in the white community and black people in the black community. I don't know if you can understand what it's like to live one half a block from a divide between thousands of black people and thousands of white people. It was a very different experience. But we were building bridges and that was helpful. However, on Easter Monday it started Saturday or Friday night, I guess, Saturday and Sunday in East Baltimore. On Easter Monday, we were getting out-- I was out walking the neighborhood, I was about 3 blocks from the church talking to the neighbors because the schools had been closed and the businesses had been closed. Tragic decision. Had the schools and businesses been open, I don't think we would have had the riot.

Jaime Nish: In West Baltimore.

Thomas Donellan: Anywhere. Because everybody was off from work. It started in East Baltimore. You might have had it in East Baltimore because that precipitated the closing of the businesses. But in West Baltimore, suddenly everyone was off and sitting around and getting more frightened as they heard the stories from the east.

Jaime Nish: And this is the Monday before Easter?

Thomas Donellan: That's right. Easter Monday, the Monday before Easter. I was about 3 blocks from the church about 2 p.m. and I heard the terrible roar of police sirens in great numbers. I thought, "Oh my

goodness.” So, I rushed back to the church. As I turned off of Lombard into Poppleton, I was just devastated. It was one of the low points of my life because on the corner of Baltimore Street and Poppleton Street on both sides everything was being set on fire. The stores were being looted. There were literally hundreds of-- at least hundreds of people burning down Baltimore Street. The police were totally helpless because they were only, you know, they don’t have an army. They only had a limited number and this was a huge number of people. It was a terrible disappointment after what I just told you that this happened. We never dreamed. And just looking at it was looking at something that was horrible because here were people who were acting not like people. You know, they were literally out of their mind with hate. So, I moved to the church. Now our church was right on the line. And it was a very important church. We did not know whether the church was threatened. I had staying with me six Sisters of Mercy who walked with me in the community. They did not leave. They made the decision to stay with me during the riot, whatever. So, on that Monday, things began to happen, I took a position about a half a block from Baltimore Street. But suddenly behind me were hundreds of white people armed, because they were not going to burn our church.

Jaime Nish: May I ask what they were armed with?

Thomas Donellan: Guns. Knives. Many of them were hunters. City people in those days were, often, hunters. Some of them were policemen, security guards. But living in the city having a gun was not unusual. So, the great fear was if the black mob moved on our white church I just shutter when I thought about what could have happened. It would have been incredible bloodshed. However, I stood in the middle of the street and the rioting was going on. All we could do was watch. At no point did the group turn to come anywhere near our facilities. We had one whole block on one side. We had a major school on the other side, which was not a school any longer but a community building. So, we did not know, all day Monday this went on. One vivid example, which I’ll never forget, on the corner of Baltimore and Poppleton, northwest corner, there was a small shoe store owned by a man named Klein. And he had been there 30 or 40 years. It wasn’t large. He was a very, very good man. We used to give him-- buy shoes from him for the kids in the neighborhood. If they showed up at school without shoes, we would send them to him and the churches would pay for it. He came rushing up, he had heard of the riot, he saw his store in flames and people carrying his shoes out. He broke loose. Not only was I there, but there was a whole line of substantial people who were trying to stop any movement, you know, the white people to get involved. And, he broke loose, ran across the street into his store. So, three of us ran after him into his burning store grabbed him and dragged him out and all around us were flames and people taking his shoes. Truly-- seeing the riot begin, and being disillusioned, and seeing that scene were 2 very, very dreadful experiences that you remember. Then, I was trying to get Monday clear. I couldn’t do that. But, I know that we were on the street all day Monday into the evening protecting, the church.

Jaime Nish: What other types of things were you seeing?

Thomas Donellan: All of the buildings were being burned. Every store was being looted. In fact, from Baltimore and Poppleton, down to what is now Martin Luther King, all of those stores, whole blocks were burned. Where the University of Maryland is now building, those buildings, that space was all destroyed in the riots?

Jaime Nish: And they were all businesses?

Thomas Donellan: Not all businesses. There were residents. If you know Baltimore City, business is usually on the first floor and people lived in apartments above them, which is typically urban way of living in those days. So, there were people living there. Now it spread-- it never spread to the white community. The other churches-- St. Martin's was right on the line, the situation was pretty much the same. There was no attempt to attack St. Martin's, or any church during that period. At some point on Monday, the mayor and the governor must have called out the National Guard. I could not remember-- Monday night, I know the mayor put a curfew in which was not that effective. But, the Guard had not yet arrived and the police did their best. Still, we had to stand guard, not quite as visibly, but certainly. By Tuesday morning, the National Guard was on the street. They had their encampment at Carroll Park. I guess the governor had mobilized the Guard, Governor Agnew, and sent them into the city, east and west. They were virtually helpless, because they had not been trained. They were not people trained to shoot to kill. They did not know how to handle the hatred and violence that had erupted. And hatred is a meaningful word because we thought that that wasn't there, but it was sheer rage. Rage is a better word than hate. Just to watch the rage was overwhelming. So, they did put the curfew in that day, Tuesday at 4 p.m. And the third key thing in terms of personal remembrance was to live under martial law. The governor declared martial law, which meant anyone on the street after four o'clock was subject to being shot. And to live under martial law where you could not leave your home for any reason was very traumatic. Meanwhile, there was no food. The stores were closed, except for the markets. Now, a very positive thing was that congregations of churches all around the city and not only that, but Lion's Clubs or anybody, you know, community, they were collecting canned goods and clothes. Now, the city was sealed, you couldn't get in. But, when they brought that, the military would escort that to central places to provide food and the city, I guess, provided water, although that never goes off in the city. But, you know, without that, many men lost their clothing because their houses were burned. So that was a critical time. The church that I was in, St. Peter's has an area where you can step outside and not be visible, a little alleyway. And just to look out and see the city in total-- the area in total absolute darkness, the lights were on, but no people, no cars, no activity and no one able to do anything. That started 4 o'clock, I think, on Tuesday. And it was a reasonably calm night. But, it was the riots were still going on. So, on Wednesday, the governor asked the President to send in the federal troops. And there was a contingent of the 161st or 162nd airborne division out of Fort Bragg that had just come back from Vietnam and had been granted Easter leave to go see their families. The President cancelled their Easter leave and ordered them into Baltimore. It's not hard to imagine the mood that they were in, just having come back from Vietnam and having their leave cancelled. They were not in an agreeable mood. So, the riot really ended with their arrival because they were trained to shoot to kill. And the rioters would walk up and just make fun of the National Guard, but they did not make fun of the 161st Airborne. They just clamped absolute martial law on everything. Nobody could move, day or night without the permission of the commander. So, by

Thursday morning, things were calm. But, there are the National Guard-- I mean, the federal troops were driving around in military vehicles, not tanks, but trucks and so on. Now, part of the other thing to remember is that the fire engines couldn't get through. The mobs went after the firemen. So, buildings had to burn. They were trying to get up and down Baltimore Street to put out fires, but the mobs would not let them. But, there was no burning, that I can remember, after the federal troops arrived. They kept the curfew on, however. And so, being Holy Week the churches were faced with what do we do about-- it's the biggest church week in the year. So, what do we do with our services? Well, we had to have our Holy Thursday service and Good Friday maybe 2 or 3-- probably 2 o'clock in the afternoon because everybody had to be in by 4 o'clock. So we did the best we could. People, obviously, did come to church. Attendance was pretty good. But, you know, all of that was going on. Living under martial law is something I'll never forget. And the thought of that ever happening again, which is not impossible, is frightening beyond words because you lose all of your rights. All of your rights. You can't go anywhere or do anything unless you're permitted by the military. And, when they did declared, even in that situation, martial law and the federal troops were there, it was not violated. It was total and absolute. And the same happened in East Baltimore, too. So, by Thursday morning, the riots were pretty well done. But, what happened, here were these burned out buildings. Here was this animosity that had grown up between the black and the white, I mean, it exploded. So, where there had been cooperation, there was no ideas towards hatred, but there was now distrust and animosity. So, things were not normal by any means. After the riots were over, the black community, the ministers would not speak to us, because they said, "If they did, they would be in trouble with their communities. They would be Uncle Tom's." I remember, one of my best friends who wouldn't talk to me. I met him uptown at the Lexington Market. I said, "I called you. Why didn't you come and see me?" He said, "I would be an Uncle Tom. I wouldn't dare." So, like an iron curtain had come down and it's still going on to an extent. But, things got back to normal. The market was able to open. Federal Troops guarded it. The market was able to open. Suppliers, all of the-- there was fresh everything, you know, food, vegetables, meat, breads, everything was fresh in the market. So, the market became a lifeline for that whole Southwest community. Not just white people, but black people also, because it was being protected by the military. So, things began to get normal. Saturday is the highest holy day for Christians. You shake your head, you're a Christian?

Jaime Nish: I'm Catholic.

Thomas Donellan: Catholic. You're a Catholic. So you understand.

Jaime Nish: I understand.

Thomas Donellan: Well, then the Easter Vigil was celebrated at 11 o'clock at night and ended maybe one in the morning. So, I was determined we were going to have the Easter Vigil at 11 o'clock at night. So, I went to see the commander of the Guard and I was kind of, along with some of the other ministers in our Southwest organization, we were the liaisons between a community and the military and the city hall. So, I went to see the commander of the guard who, I think, was also Catholic. But, I said to him, "Look,

I've got to have this service at 11 o'clock tonight." Well things had eased up a bit. He said, "Well, we have a lot of Catholic soldiers who want to go to mass for Easter," and other churches, too, but they didn't have midnight services. They were going to be allowed to have Easter Sunday services. I said, "Well, we'll have Easter Sunday but we have to have this Saturday night service. So, they said, "Can you get the word around?" So we spread the word of mouth to all of the areas around and they sent jeeps with armed men to escort the walking crowd to church. And we had the biggest crowd, and we had several hundred people, more than 200 people. And we celebrated that Easter Vigil with the military. And if you know St. Peter's Church it has big parapets, high granite, the thing, a column. And, so, on the high granite there were armed soldiers. And of course, some of the crowd were soldiers, military. Some had to go in and out but they were-- we were well protected. And that was probably the single most positive religious service that I ever celebrated. And I've been a priest now 51 years, because resurrection, we had gone from death to resurrection, which was incredible, an incredible thing. And, you know, not-- there was no problem getting people to participate. Everybody was just filled with God and the presence and many of our nine Catholic churches couldn't get to where they were, joined us. So, we had a tremendous service. We ended at 1 or 1:30 in the morning and soldiers escorted everybody home. And Easter Sunday, they allowed all of the churches to have their services. And things were pretty much calmed down by then. There was really no riot going on by Sunday. That was the first time, since the previous Saturday, that I left the neighborhood for the area church. Sunday afternoon, I went home, we lived in Hamilton in Northeast Baltimore. And I remember going home and driving out of the neighborhood, you know, I didn't know, emotionally where I was. But it was just a relief to know that I could drive out and see that nothing was burning. We did not know, at that point, what the future held. We had no idea what the future held. But we did know that animosity had returned. And that somehow or other, the city had to be rebuilt. And, you know, the total experience of seeing the riots start and seeing all of the years of hard work to build bridges literally burned up in a moment. Seeing, you know, the potential danger for hours standing there, because I was, for better or for worse, I certainly was the leader of that church and pretty much the leader of the whole community. I don't want to put it all on me, but there were many volunteers from VISTA and others that were well recognized. Protestant ministers were all protecting their own churches. So, it was frightening. Then the martial law, that was dreadful. I'll never forget that. And then, you know, seeing Mr. Klein and his shoe store just the memory will never be erased. The positive thing was the celebration of the Easter Vigil. That really resurrected our community and, you know, we had some hope. You know, that was when Mr. Agnew made some negative remarks about the black community, which was the beginning of the end for him. He did a few other things that hastened it also. Well, that's how he became vice president, because he had taken a hard stand and made some really strong statements, that's why he was picked to be vice president, because he was a law and order person. So, you know, that's a lot of little details. I tried to get down, so I wanted to do it this way. Is that a coherent picture?

Jaime Nish: That was fantastic.

Thomas Donellan: You know, because it's something I lived. As I say, last night I did not enjoy reliving it. But I'm glad that I was asked to do this. I had actually met someone from the University of Baltimore in the visitor center where I volunteer. I still love going to the city, even though I live in Towson, but it was always my first love. And I don't know, we were talking about somehow or other, I was showing her

the planning map where all of the neighborhoods, I don't know if you've ever seen that. The city planning department has a map where every neighborhood has a name. Now that was organized for the city fair. The city fair was not a response to the riot. There was a young lady from Boston University who interviewed me on the city fair this summer. And, you know, I was part of the group that moved on to try to do something in the city fair. She thought that the city fair was a response to the riots. It was not because that first year nobody knew what to do. How did you reconcile? I mean, morale was totally destroyed both among the people and the leaders. We were meeting. We were having conversations but what did you do? And then in May, the next May, the flower mart, which was held in Mount Vernon for 100 years, the mobs, the black mobs just went through and totally destroyed it. And, that was the catalyst for the city fair because after that destruction, some people, which I was not one of them, but the leader, I guess, was Mr. Robert Embry who was head of the Able Foundation, Bob Embry. He's very well known. He was head of housing and urban development at that point. His assistant, Hope Quackenbush, a reporter for the News American named Chris Hartenon, they met in Bob's office and said, "We have to do something to restore morale." And so, actually, it was Hope who said, "Let's have a fair of the city and let's showcase the neighborhoods." And that's where the idea was born, from there. So, that was the transition. And then the fair, they had pretty well documented, I think, from there. So that-- now you can ask me any questions, but, I think, that does cover a lot of the little things.

Jaime Nish: Yes, you did. Alright, I have a few questions. I made a little list. I'm going to start at the beginning. Some of them are actually relating to you and your background. Where were you born?

Thomas Donellan: I was born in Baltimore City.

Jaime Nish: What year?

Thomas Donellan: One hundred years ago. 1930. April 1930.

Jaime Nish: And where do you go to school?

Thomas Donellan: Loyola. Loyola High School. And then I went into the seminary after high school.

Jaime Nish: You're a priest of St. Francis Xavier, the Franciscan Brothers?

Thomas Donellan: No.

Jaime Nish: I'm sorry. Which one?

Thomas Donellan: I was the founder of the parish of St. Francis Xavier in Hunt Valley.

Jaime Nish: Oh, maybe that's what...OK. I might have gotten a little confused.

Thomas Donellan: I don't know if you know where that is on Shawan Road. I started that in the Hunt Valley Inn in 1988. But that's another part of my life. So, from one end -- I started my ministry as a leader, or the pastor, in the poverty of Southwest Baltimore and I ended up in the affluent Hunt Valley. So that was quite a journey.

Jaime Nish: And you were ordained in 1956.

Thomas Donellan: Fifty-six.

Jaime Nish: And which seminary did you go to?

Thomas Donellan: St. Mary's in Baltimore.

Jaime Nish: OK. The businesses on Baltimore Street, were there white and black owned businesses? And did both suffer damage?

Thomas Donellan: I would only have to presume there were because Baltimore Street was the only market street. Where I was in Hollin and Poppleton and Baltimore, there were little stores like Mr. Klein. There was a big furniture store, if you could call it that. You know, very cheap furniture at a very high price right next door to the church. But all the way up Baltimore Street there were businesses. There had to be some block-- I can't-- the corner of commerce was Carrollton and Baltimore. The bank was there. Kresgey's was there. There were definitely a mixture of businesses, very good business. I mean it was a booming with a market right down the street. On weekends, that was a pretty booming. And up Baltimore Street as far, perhaps as Fulton there were businesses and Pratt and Lombard, there were businesses all the way up there. And they were to-- especially the Baltimore Street businesses had to be both black and white.

Jaime Nish: Now, do you know what was the thing, like the tipping point that started the riots? Do you have any idea? No?

Thomas Donellan: Very interesting. That's a question that's been asked since the riots. When the riots were over, those of us who were involved and as many of both races as we could get, we frequently went off out of the neighborhood to have lunch or to sit around in somewhat of a place where we were not, and

talk and that was the question, “How did it happen?” We know that the people rioting were not all-- the majority, from the neighborhood because we knew the people from the neighborhood. Some were. But we knew-- it happened like a fire. It was not-- it was perhaps motivated by the death of Martin Luther King. It was not caused by it, that I’m sure. Some group, some force outside of our control brought this about. I had never-- now maybe somebody in this research will know. We talked about it for months trying to isolate, “How could it have happened.” And since we were not expecting it to happen, we could not come up with any answer to that.

Jaime Nish: Did you watch TV coverage of the riots?

Thomas Donellan: Yes.

Jaime Nish: And what were your impressions of the reporting?

Thomas Donellan: I don’t remember. It was so-- we were living it first hand. So, we didn’t have a lot of time to sit in front of the TV. Just at night after the beginning of the curfew, we would listen to see, perhaps, what was happening in East Baltimore, what the city was doing and things like that. To listen to the President call out the federal troops, you know, that kind of thing. But we didn’t spend a lot of time watching television.

Jaime Nish: I don’t know if you remember, but do you remember thinking about how the national news portrayed the situation? Do you think it was a fair portrayal, if you remember?

Thomas Donellan: I wasn’t the least bit interested in the national news. Quite honestly, I wouldn’t have any idea. They certainly did not portray it in a positive light, I’m sure. But that’s only... <unintelligible> not from remembrance.

Jaime Nish: How did your immediate neighborhood change after the riots?

Thomas Donellan: Well, the neighborhood changed because we were no longer focused on the bigger picture. So we turned in on ourselves. We began to organize our neighborhoods. And that’s where the names of all of those neighborhoods came from. Some were Locust Point or Canton, they were there, of course. But, the decision was made to organize all of the neighborhoods, but mostly white in the beginning, some black, but mostly white. Harlem Park was, you know, there were others. Penn Lucy which is up on Pennsylvania Avenue. We were able to get some of them in. The idea was that we would get every neighborhood to organize itself around positive things. And, the people say that, but the people were really very good. I mean, they were demoralized too. They were angry that it happened to their neighborhood and to their neighbors. But the hostility changed. So, we could no longer work with the

black community. So, we had to work with the white community. And so we named ourselves Hollin's Park. And my-- one of the neighborhoods I still see Ridgley's Delight, we named that neighborhood after Charles Ridgley, who was the son-in-law of Charles Carroll and who had a house on Washington Boulevard. So, we began to work with the city, with the political structure, to give the people some hope. And, now our people, the white people were not largely poor. They were not rich, but they had jobs. Some were welfare. Some were, you know, needed assistance. But most of them were the working poor. And so, you know, they were able to keep jobs and we didn't lose money. We began to see an exodus, of course, from the neighborhood north, another exodus out into Cantonsville and Wesley Park and then eventually beyond to-- and also from there because it was a poor neighborhood, the exodus was to Morrell Park and Lansdale because they were the houses that people could afford. But it was a time-- the first response was total apathy. You know, morale was gone. But, then as we began to start some things up, and one thing in there that Johnson had instituted, a community action agency under the war on poverty and they began to establish centers in every neighborhood and provide programs, and assistance, and training, and programs of training for young people to read. I was once chairman of a federal grant that was charged with bringing 15 year olds who couldn't read or write up to sixth grade level in six months. Now, we had an enormous federal grant but we had 15-- we had 8,000 young people in that category in our area that we identified, our "catch man" [ph?] area, as they called it. We could only take 30 at a time. And it was a program that paid the youngsters 15 hours to work. But, if they didn't come to school they didn't get paid, so, strong motivation. It did work. But, unfortunately as so many of the federal programs, model cities and all of the other things later, they would last two or three years and then the government would withhold the funding and they would die. So, you know, it was just a gradual process. Now, gentrification now is happening even there with the University of Maryland. So, things are changing quite differently now.

Jaime Nish: What do you feel influenced African-American's decision's not to attack the churches?

Thomas Donellan: I think a deep respect for the churches, to start off with. Whoever was organizing this, I don't think, they could have talked the black community, even enraged, to attack the church. The church is a vital part of the black community. Plus, I like to believe, only like to believe, that the years of bridging made a difference. Because the black ministers were not supporting what was happening. They were trying to calm it just as much, if not more, than the white community. So, I think that, you know, that positive feeling because the churches both in East and West Baltimore were the people who were doing-- what was being done was being done through the churches and then eventually through all of the other programs that the government started. They were all very valuable. But, you know, the first ones that were there were only the churches. And then the other things began to be added. And then, you know, healthcare and all of the rest of them. So, I just think, initially, I don't think that there was any inclination to burn a church. And I think they saw that the churches on both sides were really not the problem. In fact, if anything, they had been whatever part of the solution there could have been. Now, one other thing around that, though is that, remember, when you-- this is written up or whatever, that even in 1968 Baltimore was a segregated city. The schools had been integrated under Brown Board of Education. That didn't mean there was any communication. Even in the middle schools and so on, when we opened Southwest High School, which was part of our community effort, which is now just closed, a big school,

high school, we worked very hard to get 50% white and 50% black at that school, which we accomplished for about three or four years. And then it was all black. I just think that that was not-- we didn't know that for sure. As we stood there and watched the mob, we had never seen that. We had no idea what was going to happen. But, in retrospect, I just think it was the great respect for the churches and what the churches had done, both black and white, that did not make them targets.

Jaime Nish: You said something about the flower mart mob, was that the month directly after or was that a year later.

Thomas Donellan: A year later. The year in between was limbo, if you know what limbo is. No longer does limbo exist, but it was a hanging time. No one had any idea what to do. And then, when the flower mart thing happened it was just like everything blew up. Here we are a year later, and we got nowhere, and that catalyzed the community, both black and white, to say we've got to do something about it. And that was when the fair came.

Jaime Nish: I think I have a very good picture of your situation. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Thomas Donellan: I think that's plenty.

Jaime Nish: Well, I thank you very much for your time.

Thomas Donellan: How many of these have you done?

Jaime Nish: I'm only working on you. I'll be doing your-- working on your background and writing out your story. So, you have all of my attention.

Thomas Donellan: Will you send me a copy.

Jaime Nish: Absolutely. I absolutely will.