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Joseph Leppert, Founder of Memphis Catholic Human Relations Council, 1968

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Unknown Female Interviewer- We are just going to test right now and see if we are picking up the volume. Joan be sure and speak up alright.

Joan Beifuss- Monsignor just say a few words to see if we are picking you up.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I am honored and happy that you have come to visit. I look forward and (muffled) I will try to be ready.

(Tape break)

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I am the oldest of 9 children and this family there are two boys and 7 girls. My baby sister died when I was 4 years old and the rest of the family is still living. I was ordained in the priesthood February the 2nd 1926, St. Bernard church in Memphis and my first deployment was in Nashville and then I was in Nashville at St. Joseph's church and cathedral, St. Ann's, and I 1937 I was pointed the pastor of Chris the King church in Nashville. I was the first pastor and then 1953 I was transferred from Christ the King church in Nashville to (Muffled) church or St. Theresa church as it is called in Memphis, and that is where I am now located as pastor.

Joan Beifuss- Monsignor you grew up in Memphis?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I am not sure yet I have grown up but I was raised in Greenville Mississippi and been moved to Memphis in 1918.

Joan Beifuss- So you were a teenager, well I guess at that time you weren't a teenager wee you were about 16 or so when you came to Memphis.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I finished high school before I came to Memphis.

Joan Beifuss- What high school did you graduate from.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- The Greenville high school.

Joan Beifuss- And where did you go to seminary.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Seminary in St. Mary's seminary in Baltimore. I started out in Little Rock college my first year and then I transferred from Little Rock to Baltimore for my major seminary training.

Joan Beifuss- What part of Memphis did you live in before you went away to college?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- My family has lived in sacred heart parish (muffled) in Memphis until my mother and father were called to their reward and now I have my brothers and sisters living in various parts of the city. Most of them stay in Memphis more.

Joan Beifuss- What is sacred heart parish?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Sacred Heart is the cross town...Jefferson...

Joan Beifuss- Ok now when you came back you came into this church in 1953 right?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I came here in 1953.

Joan Beifuss- Was then this church already integrated in 1953?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- No at that time there wasn't very much, the church has been integrated always, the churches have been open although they have had separate parishes for negroes so designated as the negro parish and their schools also. Because the churches had been open to negroes always, but very few attended because they had their own parishes designated as such. In Memphis it was (muffled) south Memphis and St. Anthony's in north Memphis. The schools were not integrated until more recently principally because the public schools were segregated and our bishop judged best to follow the schedule of the public schools here in Memphis although it was different in Nashville. The schools were open in Nashville the county schools 8 or 10 years before Memphis.

Joan Beifuss- Oh were they?

Unknown Female Interviewer- Did they have many negroes in the schools in Nashville?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- In Nashville the high schools all were open.

Joan Beifuss- Now when the public schools integrated here was that when the negro parishes as such were closed.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- No the only parish that was really closed was St. Anthony's two years ago. It was the transfer to the (muffled) parish when (muffled) of parish lines and St. Thomas parish was assigned to here, Franciscan fathers that had been in charge of St. Augustine's, St. Augustine's parish. St. Augustine was closed in as such.

Joan Beifuss- Now is there a church still where St. Augustine's was?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- No.

Joan Beifuss- No.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- It has been closed and St. Thomas has now taken over that whole area.

Unknown Female Interviewer- When you came in 1953 how many parishes in Memphis were there in all?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I would say approximately 20 parishes.

Unknown Female Interviewer- How many are there today?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- About 25.

Unknown Female Interviewer- About the same.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- About the same number as some of the outlying in the county for example, Whitehaven, fraysers.

Joan Beifuss- Now the negro children you have in school now are they children whose parent live in the neighborhood or are they children who transferred over a the closing of St. Anthony's?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- We had some before St. Anthony's school was closed and many have come since that time however. At this present time we have about 75 negro children in the school out of about 275, 280.

Unknown Female Interviewer- How many grades does your school include?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- We have 8 grades.

Unknown Female Interviewer- 8 grades.

Joan Beifuss- Is the neighborhood changing here?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- The neighborhood is changing some, not too noticeably however and our parish (muffled) has had a number of negro families always. A few of the families came here to church but the children were not permitted to come to school until we began integrating the county schools grade by grade or two grades a year for several years until we got up to 6th grade I think it was and then decided to take in all the grade schools and all the high schools at one time.

Joan Beifuss- This school was integrated grade by grade?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Well along with the other county schools it was all on the same plan for several years.

Joan Beifuss- Could you have gone ahead and had open integration or did you have to follow the plan?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I had to follow the plan. This was the bishop's decision in these matters you see it is not local, the bishop asked the pastors of Memphis to discuss the program of integration and the majority of them decided that they better follow the county schools. A few of us were in the minority group but we followed the decision of the majority because the bishop recommended that.

Joan Beifuss- Well did he do the same thing in Nashville so that 8 or 10 years before that decided to integrate?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Actually Nashville decided to go ahead of Memphis so we were in a diocese that was part segregated and part integrated in the schools.

Unknown Female Interviewer- Kind of by local option almost then.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Yeah local option of the pastors which was approved by the bishop.

Joan Beifuss- Have you found any particular problems in operating an integrated school?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Not great, not serious problems. Some of the parishioners have not accepted it too kindly, they have their own opinions and their own feelings about the matter. The majority I would say have accepted it I think most places and in most cases people will conform to the wishes of the ordinary and the authorities. They may not like it so much and they may not be in favor of it but they go along and accept it. But some take a different stand and a different attitude so they have either moved away and taken the children out of school or discontinued their support of the parish and things of that sort, but that is a very small minority. So it doesn't disturb us too much if at all.

Joan Beifuss- Can you tell us briefly about (muffled) of the catholic human relations council.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Catholic human relations council began with a small meeting, a small group meeting from pastor of St. Augustine and a few of his parishioners and a few parishioners from (muffled) parish. A few men from St. Anthony's parish. So we discussed it the possibility of getting a group to be concerned about human relations and the Kelly parishes and the schools and better relationship in light.

Unknown Female Interviewer- When was that?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- It was 195...get the exact date we have (muffled) 54 may have been, not that far, this would be 58 I would suppose. I have got the exact year but we have been 5 years in existence I suppose.

Unknown Female Interviewer- That would put it in the 60's.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- It would be in the early 60's yeah.

Joan Beifuss- that was after parish schools were already integrated?

Unknown Female Interviewer- Or had begun to integrate.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Had begun to integrate.

Joan Beifuss- Did the council function (muffled) the bishop from the beginning or did it function independently.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Well we didn't have a council at the beginning we had meetings regularly and programs with this group, integrated groups and discussed the possibility of forming a council and then when the time came and when we

thought that we were ready because we saw the benefits and the need. We had gotten some information from Little Rock Arkansas where they had formed a council. So we had decided to apply for affiliation with the national council in Chicago of interracial justice. We had asked the bishop if that would be possible and with the assurance that we had a need for council here in Memphis and we thought the people were ready for it. So he gave us approval so that is when it became a national council.

Joan Beifuss- Monsignor..

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- And a constitutional program that would align with the national council.

Joan Beifuss- would you tell us anything about those early days before the council existed was the climate among most Catholics favorable for the council?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- It was something new, I think some at least I think very interested and thought it was a thing to do and we had a need for it and other just didn't know what it was all about and I think you have the same conditions today after 5 or 6 years. Some are all for it and some don't know about it and some think it is communistic because of their own personal interpretation of the council and the issues. For awhile we had quite a bit of static and I speak in those terms, and opposition and misunderstanding, false impressions but fortunately we weathered the storm and we came through alright. Many many letters were sent into the Chancery office with regard to the council and (muffled). So the bishop wanted a committee to look into the matter after a thorough investigation the bishop gave us his continued approval and then of course when Bishop Jordan came into the diocese he was all for progress and the affairs of human relations and gave it his full support and since that time there has been a little happier experience.

Unknown Female Interviewer- When you first formed the group did you have specifically in mind the objective of working with the negro white relations or did you see that as one aspect for maybe a broader scope for your project. Human relations concerns just about anything in the long run.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Right it does, it doesn't just deal exclusively or it is not confined to negro, white relations but because of the numbers of negroes in our community we thought that was a major concern in practically our whole concern although we have had some interracial program with the Cuban families. We don't have too many others, we have a few Indians from (muffled). A little association with and as I say the major concern in our program was really towards the betterment of human relations between the negro and the white.

Joan Beifuss- Monsignor did you work with Edmund Orgill on that human relations commission or whatever it was that the city had going?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Yes I was a part of that program.

Joan Beifuss- What was the name of that?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- The title of it was Memphis human relations or I would have to check the formal title of the program. That was in existence for many years 85 years they had a program of that nature.

Joan Beifuss- Was it active?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Active and we thought that committee or the Memphis council of human relations had laid the ground work and prepared the atmosphere for a peaceful continuance until we found out that it was more or less superficial to a greater extent because they hadn't really influenced or formed the thinking or the attitudes of the entire community to such an extent there was good will or a kindly attitude between the races when matters developed with the strike.

Joan Beifuss- Do you recall in the early 60's when there were the sit ins when the libraries were integrated and the fairgrounds and the parks? Do you recall that period.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I remember those times, our council I don't think was in existence.

Joan Beifuss- Did, was there any movement on the part of the churches at that time to aid the integration of public facilities here?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Well I think individually some persons were probably but other than individual effort or recommendation support we didn't have any society or any united front to present.

Joan Beifuss- Ok now when did the Memphis ministerial association start had that been in existence for a long time?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- That had been in existence for a long time. Many years.

Joan Beifuss- Did you become a part of that as soon as you came into Memphis?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- No at that time we were not permitted to become members of those groups.

Joan Beifuss- The catholic clergy were not?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- That's right, that's right.

Unknown Female Interviewer- When did that change?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- About 3 years ago I think, Father Joseph Ecklecamp at St. Mary's was the first one to become an active member of the minister's association in Memphis and then we discussed it with the bishop, bishop Durrick who was the apostolic administrator of the diocese. He gave us approval to, for the priests to

become members if they so wish. So since that time probably 8 or 10 or more have become active in the minister's association.

Unknown Female Interviewer- Are you a member?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Yes. I am a member.

Joan Beifuss- But you were also isn't there some kind of a ecumenical group here in this area that you work with?

=There is a neighborhood group we call it. It is promoted by reverend Loyd Barker the pastor of the McLean Baptist church. Who called together a group of clergy men from this area and we have what is called a neighborhood concern for the church. It is dealt with various matters and concerns of different kinds and it is chiefly concerned with race relations and the change of neighborhoods and the purpose was to determine what could be done and what we would like to do and so that has been interesting also.

Joan Beifuss- Now when did that formulate?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- We have been working now about a year or a year and a half. Since then nice programs interesting and beneficial have been developed.

Joan Beifuss- Would you say the protestant churches in this area are in a different position than the catholic churches as the neighborhood changes?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Oh I think so. The very structure of the church is...the clergy of other churches I think for the most part are called by the people and depend on the people how long they will stay. (muffled) He would like to go someplace else. In our church we are appointed by the bishop we are sent to the church to the parish to the assignment, the mission field whatever it is and we stay until the bishop decides to move us unless we request a change and he answers favorably on our appeal. People can recommend things but they don't tell us whether to come or to go. Once we are here for better or for worse they have to take us until death do us apart. Difference is in the (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- Well have any of the pastors of protestant churches that had formed this little group in the neighborhood did they run into any problems with their congregations?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Some of them have done some real fine work and they are encouraging integration as far as they can do so and I think some of them however are, they would like to encourage you themselves to do something but until their people change their attitudes they are probably unable to do very much. But they are making the effort and I think they are making progress and we are quite happy about it.

Joan Beifuss- What kind of projects do you do within the group, is it mainly a means of talking about your problems and trying to come to solutions?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- We relate what we are doing if we have any integrated programs of any kind we relate that and we propose things that will be open to all the people for example on Good Friday night we had an ecumenical program sponsored by this group with neighborhood concerns. It was held in the Evergreen Presbyterian Church over there on University. The different pastors or clergymen of the various churches took a part in that program which all the people were invited and it was an integrated program in the church at Evergreen Presbyterian.

Joan Beifuss- What geographical area does this group include?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I would say the Cabana apartments on the northeast sector and then over towards the university Southwestern and down as far as probably churches down (muffled) block, Faxon, Parkway over in that area. So it includes a number of the different faiths.

Joan Beifuss- Does it include any poverty areas did you got hat far into town?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- We don't go quite that far crossing into Breedlove. That would be a poverty area over there but not too many churches over there that will affiliate with us.

Joan Beifuss- Monsignor then this year you have been active in the ministerial association then.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I have been active in the ministerial association.

Joan Beifuss- Ok because I am trying to bring us up to the beginning of the strike. Now early in February when the ministerial association issued that statement on race relations or race relation Sunday do you remember?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Right.

Joan Beifuss- What was the thinking behind that, as I understand it that was the first time they had issued such a statement.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- The group was invited, a group of white clergy a group from the minister's association was invited by a group of negro ministers who have their own association or another association of course most of the negro ministers to me then discussed what could be done, what could the clergy do to help settle the strike.

Joan Beifuss- No before that Monsignor, this is going to be before we get into the strike. Early in February from race relations Sunday I think it was there as an ad in the newspaper taken out by the ministerial association asking for an end to prejudice and this sort of thing this was before the strike started, do you recall that?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I didn't know but the time on that my impression was that came after the strike again? Was that before I would have to check and see.

Joan Beifuss- The only reason I thought it was before was because I tried to tie that workshop publicity in with it and I thought it was before but it might have been. Well let me check, go back even further.

Unknown Female Interviewer- Well why not taker the chronology of what happened which brought them to the point of producing that.

Joan Beifuss- Let me ask just a moment before you start. (Tape Break)

Joan Beifuss- Ok then chronologically we will go back tot eh beginning of the strike. When did you first hear about the strike Monsignor?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I don't know the exact time really or moment but the news on the usual channels I just heard about it. (muffled) on the television.

Joan Beifuss- Well then when did you first attend a meeting in regard tot eh strike. I know you were at that city council meeting were you not that Fred Davis conducted?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Yes I was there and I went down to the council meeting. There was a committee meeting of the council. It wasn't a full council but a committee of a council chaired by Malcolm Davis wanted to hear from the workers themselves. What their attitudes were what their grievances were and what their demands were etc. What they wanted. There were very few workers a this meeting maybe a dozen and they did not respond to the request for expression from them. So then Malcolm Davis kept insisting that they speak openly and frankly. So finally one of the leaders whether it was a union leader or one of the ministers responded to councilmen Davis' appeal to have the workman speak for themselves. He said give us 5 minutes and we will have the workers here. So in some way some where they managed to get the majority of the men on strike up to the city hall and coming into the council of chamber. And within a little while the council's chamber was overflowing with people. The majority of the men on strike were there and created quite bit of confusion and excitement. (Muffled) for a little while. I had gone tot this meeting to get information to see if I could get some facts because I didn't know what this was all about either.

Joan Beifuss- Did you go by yourself?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I just went by myself just as citizen that would like to look in the matters that I thought had some relevance.

Joan Beifuss- At that point did it already appear to you to have racial overtones?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- As I am meeting it developed, definitely it was more than a management in labor. Because it was ultimately stated by speakers, these representing the negro group and strikers, the workers of the sanitation department at least that is the way they expressed it to the rest of us that it was more than just wages. They interpreted the words and the actions or the lack of, or simply an

attitude on the part of the city administration there was more than just an economic situation it was racial. Whether it was or was not it was interpreted by the spokesman for these strikers in this way and so there was a discontinuance of this program. There were things, very hard sayings and violent expressions at that meeting. Probably all of that is on tape, it is something that one would have to hear and to witness to realize the seriousness of that moment or that time at which this outbreak really came of emotions and frank expressions and demands and threats and what not. Very unfortunate and a very unhappy development in that sense.

Joan Beifuss- Could you tell us a little bit more about that meeting. That was when they brought in the bread and salami for the sandwiches was it?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Right they brought in and prepared to stay awhile and threatened to stay until their demands were met. You would have to hear to really get the full impact of the deep seeded emotions and determination on part of the leaders both the labor leaders and the ministerial group who was sponsoring them. A threatening demand made upon city authorities to ask them to do what they wanted them to do or else. The (muffled) out in so many terms. So immediately the emotions of people took over and it disrupted the whole order of the day and I think there was a recess called and to be resumed as soon as possible and get settlement made. I was not able to stay too much longer after that. I saw the purpose, I was not contributing anything to the meeting by being there, other than visually witnessing. So I left for other appointments that I had and that continued on late into the evening until the meeting was adjourned with the promise with the assurance that something would be done in response to the grievances and the demands of the workers. I think another meeting was called the following day in the music hall of the auditorium.

Joan Beifuss- Were there any other white ministers at that meeting you were at, that you saw?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- No, I didn't check to see.

Joan Beifuss- Then the ministerial association had not yet become involved at that point?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- No.

Joan Beifuss- Then did you go back to the meeting the following day?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- The following day ordeal, I went to that also and there were several not many however, 2 or 3 white clergymen were there.

Joan Beifuss- Can you name any of those?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I only know one for sure is my assistant who is now my associate pastor Father Graham. We were there in this meeting in the auditorium

the following afternoon. There was several laymen who were interested parties also. Again, just as observers to see the developments.

Unknown Female Interviewer- Laymen from your parish or?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- No, just friends.

Joan Beifuss- Could you name any of them?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- No. (muffled) who they are.

But this meeting was a full meeting of the council with the exception the mayor was not present. The mayor had attended the meeting for the council committee in city hall until it broke into some disorganization and disruption and he left. He did not attend the council meeting also held in the auditorium on the..

Joan Beifuss- The mayor was at the meeting the preceding day?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Right.

Joan Beifuss- Was he?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- He was. He answered questions, the mayor and the committee.

Unknown Female Interviewer- Who was on the committee that day?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- (muffled) councilmen Davis chaired the committee and I don't know all those men.

Joan Beifuss- I didn't know the mayor had been at that meeting.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- He was.

Joan Beifuss- He was sitting up with...

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- He was up there and answered questions and spoke to union leaders and ministers and answered questions and councilmen (muffled). He was a part of the meeting until this outbreak, this was the violent atmosphere developed and he definitely felt that they were not going to be reasonable or act rationally and it turned into an emotional situation and so at the recess time he left and didn't return.

Joan Beifuss- Wait so then the meeting at the auditorium.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- The meeting at the auditorium is the council meeting without the mayor.

Joan Beifuss- And what happened to that?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- The statement was made that there, the auditorium and the music section was filled and there was a large number of people there, a great many people mostly all the strikers and their supporters union and ministerial leaders...

Joan Beifuss- Um Monsignor....when you say ministerial do you mean the black ministers?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Mostly, yes. The chairman of the council committee I think it was Richard Pryor I am not sure. He read a brief statement. (Tape Break)

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- So he read a statement that they would discuss it with the mayor and it didn't seem to feel that they were competent to make any decisions and it was up to the mayor to do it and they would try to talk to him. My understanding of the statement, it was a very brief statement and then the meeting was adjourned and all the councilmen left pronto. That disturbed all the workers and all the people assembled there because they had come for at least dialogue, communication, question and answer. They said this is it gentlemen and left. That was not very well accepted by the spokesmen or the leaders of the group. They asked us to get a microphone because they took the microphones, they disconnected those and that irritated the men and the ministers. Displayed a full page commercial appeal with the cartoon heap of garbage and on top was a negro worker and that was a spark that enflamed people mostly and openly stating that this is a racial war and conflict not just an economic one and here is proof. That was there interpretation of that. (Tape Break)

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Response, one was his (muffled)

Unknown Female Interviewer- Talking on the telephone.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- But it was quite a bit of excitement and it was rather interesting however to see the control that the leaders had over the assembly. Because where I was sitting around me remarks were made that were very bitter and also very threatening that it could have been turned into a violent mob by anyone who suggested it that meeting. There was such resentment by the action taken by the council, they had nothing more to say. However they did get the assembly to march down Main St.

Joan Beifuss- Who were the leaders in the auditorium at that point?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- The usual the leader of the union and the ministers. It is the same group whose names I cannot recall right off. It was at the same I would say few were in control. They marched out of the auditorium and assembled on Main St. and began going south.

Joan Beifuss- What did you do?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I stood by, I went out on Main and Poplar and just some of the men that were in the meeting were standing by and some were coming out and my old friends were with me. We just observed what was going on the assembly of the march., There were many police standing by around in the area. So gradually the group marched and the procession starts moving. The police wanted them to march on the sidewalk but there wasn't room on the sidewalk so the leaders wanted to march straight down Main St. not on the sidewalks. So they finally agreed they would walk on one side. So the patrol cars were coming in and police walking along beside. I didn't stay too long after that I left and went back to the church.

Joan Beifuss- Did you think it was a good idea that they should march down the street at that point?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Personally the reason why they should not, I thought it would be as well to keep it as orderly an assembly as possible because if you have the people under control in the procession it is much better and it is less violent and it is less dangerous, rather than if you let them disband, disorganize and go into a violent mob. Actually which happened as I read about later when I read the story and saw the pictures of what happened on South Main, before they reached their destination. Because of an incident, what it was, again not certain because I don't know all the facts, but I have heard as you hear from one side the policemen were pushing and they ran over somebody's foot with the car and then the workers attempted to over turn the car. It was a bad feeling all the way around. These actions precipitate the open (muffled). People were maced and clubbed and policemen were hurt and the assaults and all that took place.

Joan Beifuss- But you were already back here?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I wasn't in on any of that at all I just read about that and saw it on television.

Joan Beifuss- Well now what was your reaction when you found out what had happened to the march that you had seen leave peacefully.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I thought it was very unfortunate and unnecessary. Could have been done otherwise. I think a better judgment on the part of the police while keeping it in order not to allow any incident to happen that would provoke further violence. Knowing the emotional attitudes of the strikers and the leaders that you will be aggravating something that is dangerous already and they could have kept their distance and kept it under control as well. Having those patrol cars right in the middle of the marchers was just asking for trouble which they got.

Joan Beifuss- Now at the end of these two days the meeting with Fred Davis and the marching on Main St., did it seem to you then that the situation had gotten very serious?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Yes very serious. Very serious. People were angry, and emotions and when the reason and intellect, emotions usually take over and by the

grace of god one can be reasonable and rational under the stress of emotionally exciting.

Joan Beifuss- Well now was that, was it after this point in time that the ministerial association tried to mediate?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Later the minister's association was asked to cooperate with members of the interdenominational alliance and the negro ministers. A group came together and we were asked to help and to offer our services in whatever way we could help to bring an end to the strike and some kind of a settlement. To make an appeal to the mayor, to the council, or to both, whoever was responsible for the adjustments of conditions. The men would get back to work and there would be a peaceful ending. So the offer then that was as far as we could go however. That was the determination of the ministers that we would offer our services to get the representatives of the city and the representatives of the strikers together in a conference table, because they had broken off talking and they seemed to be, no one wanted to bring together by arbiter. So the ministers were going to be arbiters or at least the chairman of a meeting where they could discuss things with one another and try to work out their differences. That was the way we became involved. Although I personally wasn't on the committee of the minister's association to meet in those arbitration meetings.

Joan Beifuss- Did you get any reports back from those arbitration meetings?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I got the (muffled) we heard some of the conversation and dialogue was given on radio and television reports and newspaper of course and even with the intervention or the involvement of the ministers the two groups still maintained their own firm position and seemingly were unwilling to be flexible enough to come to some kind of compromise and that is the way it maintained until virtually the end.

Joan Beifuss- Did the ministerial association set up a special committee to try to get this mediation going or did the race relations committee?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Yes, the race relations committee and the minister's association, Rabbi Wax was the president of the minister's association at the time so he appointed several men, Dean Demmick and I forge the other names, Dean Demmick was one of the leaders I know. So they started meeting down at the (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- So when that didn't work, when mediation broke down did the ministerial association attempt to do anything else?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- There was nothing more really that we could do except to (muffled) personally speak with friends and there were several committees appointed to small groups two or three ministers to meet with the councilmen though we couldn't engage in the conversation and discussion of the problem and then review the case and make recommendations and encourage them to try ad get

the strike settled as soon as possible because of the dangers that were evident and continue.

Joan Beifuss- Well since you had observed that the council was reluctant to take a very strong stand, they seem to acquiesce to the mayor and his decision. Did you really feel you could influence the settlement of the strike through the council members if they were so reluctant.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Well and some of the councilmen I think were in favor to do all that they could and since that (muffled the strikers and some held a very firm decision in support of the mayor's position and so we hoped that if we could get enough of the council willing to present a strong statement to the mayor that he would probably acquiesce and he would respond.

Joan Beifuss- Was there any attempt to reach Mayor Lobe himself by members of the ministerial association.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Yes well individually but not officially or formally except that there were several that did speak with him and he would listen there is no question about that. I think he was sincere he thought he had the support of the community and the majority of white people in Memphis were in sympathy with him and thought he was doing just as he ought to do and they had accepted the opinion that was openly stated by the mayor that the strike was illegal and you can't strike against the government and they were supporting him. He was elected on the white support that he received and he thought he didn't have to.

Joan Beifuss- Do you know who any of the ministers were who spoke directly to Mayor Lobe?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- No. I don't know.

Joan Beifuss- You didn't know whether they talked to councilmen of their own denomination?

Unknown Female Interviewer- You don't know if Father Pennypacker over at St. John's Episcopal went to talk to Mayor Lobe since Mayor Lobe is a communicant up there?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Well I don't know.

Joan Beifuss- (muffled) Dean Demmick I was thinking of Dean Demmick. Ok then so that kind of failed, the ministerial attempt to kind of mediate sort of failed, what is your next recollection of this period.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Well there were four of us there so we thought we ought to have a forum where we could hear both sides and we did ask members of the city council, the mayor and the city council although now we were getting directly

with the mayor, everyone agreed that he was the only one who had authority to make any changes or to answer, respond to the workers. So we asked representatives of the strikers to conduct a forum but to participate in a forum at St. Patrick's church one afternoon. And the next day that forum was held at St. Louis church for the mayor. And both were well attended, we got the perspective points of view but we still remained the same.

Joan Beifuss- Was that sponsored by the ministerial association?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- (muffled)

Joan Beifuss- Baxton Bryant I know was moderating it.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- He was just (muffled). But it came out of a suggestive feelings I suppose then.

Joan Beifuss- Was it your feeling that things were getting more and more tense as things went on or what was..

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Right. Sure. Because there was no evidence of any change any where . The Mayor was convinced that his position was just and right and he had the support of the majority of the people and he was elected to support the majority of the citizens in Memphis and they approved of his stand and so he had no reason to change. He wasn't giving in to threat or anything else. (muffled) he wouldn't be forced into change if he didn't think it was right.

Joan Beifuss- How about the night of the catholic human relations council banquet when you got the award?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- That was a very lovely affair and it was evident that everything was going to be resolved and everybody loved his neighbor and he loved his enemy. Because we had representatives of both groups there that night.

Joan Beifuss- Yes I was going to say could you name some of the people who were at that banquet?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- No. So many people.

Joan Beifuss- I know Jesse Turner was there.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Councilmen were there and Mr. Mayor, Mr. Lobe was there, especially as it progressed that he would be out of the city and could not attend he offered his congratulations on the award.

Joan Beifuss- For the benefit of posterity we might say that Monsignor Leppert got the human relations award this year in the catholic human relations council and it was presented to him at this banquet. It appeared...

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Fortunately I got it before the real tragedy occurred because I think I would have gotten another kind of award for failure had it come after that.

Joan Beifuss- Well it appeared to me that night it was almost the last time in this whole period that this diversified group of people met together or were even in the same room together.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- 4 or 5 hundred people there representing all sections of the city and all face so the community. Very lovely affair. Singing songs together and praise your lord and love your neighbor, and everybody did. Then short time after that violence broke out. It shows the difference between appearance s and how quickly things change when emotions are let go.

Joan Beifuss- Did you go to any of the mass meetings that were held at night by the strikers? In the (muffled) community?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I went to hear Martin Luther King, Martin Luther King when he came the first time when he about the temple. We again this advised the listener (muffled) several of the priests were there and at that meeting. We were seen by some of the program directors and invited to come up on the platform on the stage where the speakers were sitting. Although, we didn't participate in any talks but we were given a preferred place.

Joan Beifuss- you did sit on the stage? What other priests were with you that night?_

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- (Muffled).Father Greenspun.

Joan Beifuss- Monsignor did you, had you ever met Martin Luther King personally.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I met him several years ago he came to spoke at the church on Walker Ave. right near Lemoyne College and I met him that night.

Joan Beifuss- Did you have a chance to speak with him at all when he came in at march that first night when you sat on the stage?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- No I didn't meet him that night at all.

Joan Beifuss- Now that was the night he said he would come back in and lead a march is that correct?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- The night that I heard him was before the first march. It was just, he was going to march the next day and that was when the march was disrupted with the violence so then it was after that the first march, the second march was when he came back the second time.

Joan Beifuss- Ok now you marched in the first march with Dr. King didn't you?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I marched in the first march.

Joan Beifuss- Ok tell us about that first march. Oh let me start first why did you march with Dr. King?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- It wasn't just Dr. King I was just giving an expression in my interest in people and evidenced in my concern for human rights and human dignity and I saw that we were hoping that these peaceful demonstrations would prevent violence and so I am just giving a testimony to being a witness to the fact that it wasn't just the negro people it was people in our community. This is a great concern that (muffled) the spirit of goodwill towards all.

Unknown Female Interviewer- I am going to ask just as a point of information, did the catholic clergy in making a decision say to participate in a march such as you participate in. Do you do that, do you have to go through your bishop or are you perfectly free to participate in anything you want to?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- I had several questions asked me as my position is Dean which is bishop representing this area. I thought I had a responsibility not only to myself but also to the other priests. They were asking me if they could march because usually we do go through channels when we are subject to obedience and try to respect the position the best we can. So we cleared things with him on this decision that might affect the whole church (muffled) in that respect. I knew that many of the priests were in the same feeling and attitude basically I was. So I had to contact the bishop and ask him about marching as again a sign of our concern. He responded readily and he said that is up to you as individuals. I do not say you have to march but I do not forbid you to march. If you feel this matter of conscience and you wish to do so. So it was clear for the first march, the second march after the first one had been broken up or disorganized and had been unsuccessful. It was in discussion, this is actually a good story about marching. He was concerned also about the welfare of people and the welfare of our community and (muffled) and to the fullest extent that he would also march and I was very happy to hear that because it gave me some encouragement. We were together in the second march all the way.

Joan Beifuss- Now prior to the first march had not some nuns been marching with the garbage men, there had been nuns involved before this?

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Brothers and Sisters had marched in the first march and as well as the second.

Joan Beifuss- But before the first march had there been any involvement with the clergy.

Unknown Female Interviewer- Sort of a picket line downtown.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- They may have been, I didn't see picket lines.

Joan Beifuss- It seems to me Sister Adrian had been somewhere.

Monsignor Joseph Leppert- Well she may have been she was concerned about it all. She was interested in.

Joan Beifuss- Ok then on the first march that started at Clayborne Temple. Did you go to that march alone or did Father Graham go with you or? (Tape End)