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Interviewee: Stephanie Russell

Interviewer: Michelle Sweetser

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Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

Michelle Sweetser: So I just want to start by saying for the record today is August 17th, 2016 and I, Michelle Sweetser, University Archivist, am here interviewing Stephanie Russell who recently left her position as Vice President for Mission and Ministry. So thanks for joining me today Stephanie.

Stephanie Russell: Thank you.

Michelle Sweetser: I thought I would just start a little bit by talking about your background. So I think you—you graduated from Marquette in 1983.

Stephanie Russell: I did.

Michelle Sweetser: Which means you would have arrived in the Fall of '79. So what kind of drew you to Marquette as an undergraduate?

Stephanie Russell: I would say I was drawn here by two things. One was the journalism program that I was enrolling in at the time. And the second was a boyfriend who later became husband who was a year ahead of me. I was actually slated to go to Northwestern and changed my mind at the last minute to come to Marquette instead. And I was also a relatively recent Catholic and so the Catholic character of the university I knew would offer me some opportunities as well.

Michelle Sweetser: Ok. I was going to ask whether you were raised in a religious tradition and if it was Catholic. It sounds like you had converted, shortly—

Stephanie Russell: Yeah, not so much from something. I was sort of raised in a generic Christian home. My dad was a—my parents eloped when they were—my mother was fairly young and my father was a non-practicing Catholic. My mother was rebelling against a Swedish Evangelical sect and so I was raised in sort of a generic Christian home. Not a lot of church attendance except Christmas and Easter. As it turned out they years later had their marriage blessed and became very active parishioners at the—at St. John's Parish at Creighton. But—but at the time that was the case so I sort of went on a search myself and so I had all of the rites of initiation just before my sixteenth birthday.

Michelle Sweetser: Ok great. So where did you worship then here when you were on campus? Did you go to Gesu or Joan of Arc?

Stephanie Russell: I did. I went to Gesu for the four—what was then the four o'clock liturgy on Sundays and St. Joan of Arc for particular evening Masses. Especially Wednesday nights. And—and noon Masses as well and sang at those liturgies—I was a student worker at Campus Ministry.

Michelle Sweetser: Oh ok, I didn't know that. What were the Masses like at that time?

Stephanie Russell: Oh they were great. You know it was the late seventies early eighties so liturgy was still pretty—I don't want to say it was fluid because liturgy isn't a completely fluid thing - but there was a lot more sort of creative latitude around things and so, I know you've interviewed Susan Mountin—Susan was one of the homilists during those days and there was a really, really great group of Jesuits on campus that were very animating, compassionate, good people, some of whom I stay in touch with to this day and who are very important people in my life.

Michelle Sweetser: Yeah? Who were those individuals?

Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

Stephanie Russell: Rick Abert, George Winzenburg. The late Bill Pauly. Bill was a wonderful guy, he—he was one of the hall ministers at McCormick which was at that time all-male. And he was actually the person that introduced me to spiritual exercises. And introduced them to me in Eastern form through the work of Anthony de Mello, the Jesuit, Anthony de Mello, who sort of merged Eastern prayer and meditation traditions with the spiritual exercises. And Bill is just a wonderful person and we stayed friends for years as—as my husband and I have with the other two as well. Tom Faase was also a real gift. Tom later left the Jesuits and married, had kids, and died a few years ago and he was just a wonderful source of joy. Sebastian Moore, who was not a Jesuit, was a Benedictine, but a real wisdom figure and also very important to me.

Michelle Sweetser: Great. So it sounds like your interaction with these individuals was kind of maybe—was through Campus Ministry in part and you were working through Campus Ministry. So what kind of activities did you participate in or help to organize?

Stephanie Russell: Oh at Campus Ministry?

Michelle Sweetser: Yea.

Stephanie Russell: I was a cook on student retreats. I helped to lead some student retreats. I was an RA my sophomore year so did some things that kind of connected Campus Ministry to the work in the hall as well. I was involved in a student led prayer group that met regularly and did MAP¹—a MAP trip to Appalachia—to Pennsylvania and several MUCAP assignments². And Susan Mountain was on staff at that time Margi Peterson other really great lay-leaders as well. But yeah, it was sort of a utility in-fielder I would say, you know kind of both justice work and liturgy—which was unusual. You usually had students who were doing one or the other and some retreat work as well so it was a great joy—actually we—my husband and I made the Pre-Cana retreat as an engaged couple. We got married after my sophomore year in college and went on later to help lead it which was really fun as well.

Michelle Sweetser: Great. So transitioning just a little bit—

Stephanie Russell: Yeah.

Michelle Sweetser: So how valuable did you find your Marquette experience in kind of developing your kind of religious and moral values? And I guess then thinking—moving forward to now, sort of, how do you—what's your present view of kind of Marquette in those areas? In teaching religious and moral values?

Stephanie Russell: Well I would say it was huge for me. And there were a couple of dimensions of that. One was the philosophy requirement, that was really almost the equivalent of a minor at the time, had a big impact on me. I liked philosophy a lot and I was a social work major but liked theology and philosophy both. And I think that was a very important part of my own moral development. Religiously and spiritually, certainly theo—the theology curriculum, Father Bob Wild, I had for two classes actually—

Michelle Sweetser: Okay

¹ Marquette Action Program (MAP or M.A.P.), designed to provide students with opportunities to perform community service during spring breaks.

² Marquette University Community Action Program

Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

Stephanie Russell: And my husband was a theology major so he had Bob for a lot of courses as well. He was an excellent teacher—he wasn't the only excellent teacher but he was, was one of them. The ambient environment of the school—you know we didn't talk about the mission at that time. You know we really did assume that this was on the shoulders of the Jesuits and that there were other people, some of whom had—had been in and left religious life, who had a kind of a formation that played to their strengths, so, you know, I was involved in the group that was protesting Marquette's investments in South Africa, and while that wasn't necessarily well received by—by the administration, particularly Dr. Quade³, there was a lot of encouragement from the kind of religious community, both lay and ordained on campus. So those were all really important things, I had lots of opportunities for reflection, for kind of the link between faith and justice. And but—again not all that happened in religious ways, the—probably the most significant course I took at Marquette was a course with Howard Fuller on social welfare policy and programs and Howard is not a person of faith, but a person of tremendous and deep commitment and that was very formative for me as well. So now I would say these things are a lot more explicit. They are, you know we try to, do a more intentional job of forming lay leaders to be able to accompany students in their moral and religious journeys. I do think there's a temptation to fall back on the language of justice and ethics, both of which are key to, to both Jesuit and Catholic identity, but there's a—there's a temptation to fall back on that without reference to the Gospel. And—and so I think we need to speak—sometimes when I would—as a mom I've gone on lots of campus tours at lots of places so this isn't necessarily, germane solely to Marquette but you'll hear people—you'll hear tour guides for example, say, "well this is a Catholic university but we take anyone here." And the point really ought to be, this is a Catholic university, therefore we need a variety of religious experiences here, to move from the circumstance of tolerance to desire and inclusion in terms of the kind of Catholic university that Marquette is—which is not the same kind of Catholic university everybody else is.

Michelle Sweetser: Yea. So that ties into another question I had for you regarding kind of how, when you came and took on the role as Vice President for Mission and Ministry - there were a number of name changes kind of along the way - how—how do you see Marquette as supporting the needs of minority students, faculty, and staff and sort of, these individuals who maybe come from other faiths traditions, and—and international students?

Stephanie Russell: Well I think—I think we've tried to be attentive—there's a very big commitment by the Society of Jesus to interreligious dialogue and to dialogue with culture. Some of the problem is the—this sort of innate [long pause] I don't want to say identity of "We are Marquette" can lead to some assumptions about who the "we" are. I—I think the university is doing a better job of trying to address the needs of minority communities I don't—when I first worked at Marquette I was in Carpenter Hall which no longer exists and the Multicultural Center was also in Carpenter Hall, located in the same place as Campus Ministry and I think there was—though I think the services to students in the sense of identity were much more lacking in some ways, there was a kind of a unity between those operations that made it clear that this is one intention to love and serve students of color. And—and EOP⁴ was not far away and there were lots—there was a lot of back and forth in some ways there. So I would say all the—all the tools are there in terms of Jesuit identity in terms of centuries-old Jesuit tradition of embracing culture. But I'd like to see us make that less of a special event. And I would like to see every

³ Dr. Quentin Quade, Executive Vice President.

⁴ Educational Opportunity Program

Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

time we talk about mission for that to be part and parcel of what we mean. I have occasionally heard people try to separate the strands of mission and a commitment to inclusion by assuming that everybody who's Catholic is not necessarily a person of color and therefore what are we doing kind of committing ourselves to diversity on campus and they're not quite that pointed about it but close. And that is very concerning to me. That the—the kind of Catholicity that Marquette historically has embraced is a very inclusion Catholicity—the inclusion of Jewish students from the very beginning and all of that and so, if we can—if the university can hone its language and practice around diversity not for its own sake but as a constitutive element of what it means to be Catholic and Jesuit, not only will it be well-served but it will create an environment that's a lot more inclusive. So I think there's a long way to go—I think there's a long way to go in higher education generally, around this. I think good strides have been made but, you know too many students don't feel completely at home and—so we need to change this idea of who the “we” are.

Michelle Sweetser: That's fair. That was kind of, I know, moved us forward, but I kind of wanted to kind of follow that sort of line of—

Stephanie Russell: Sure—

Michelle Sweetser: Thinking. How has your faith evolved kind of during your time at Marquette as a student, as an employee, kind of now having a little bit—maybe a little bit—of distance?

Stephanie Russell: Yeah, yeah. That's such a great question. [Sigh] You know I came to Marquette having, as—as I said just recently kind of entered the church in a formal way and my introduction to the church was through the Catholic Worker. It was through the School Sisters of Saint Francis who are tough, independent women, and Ignatian in many ways. They were some of the early participants in, in the renewal of the spiritual exercises and thirty—thirty day and eight day retreats. So, in some ways, I was a little bit late on the curve I would say. My spirituality coming into college was probably much more of a seventies kind of a spirituality though I was on the tail-end of that whole renewal and movement coming out of Vatican II. And so that was a very justice focused kind of a spirituality. Sort of a, working Gospel kind of an approach. And—and I found a lot of receptivity to that when I got here. I was challenged in terms of questions of meaning and a life of prayer, to partner with that and I was also challenged to not be sort of a Jansenist. You know, that if—if you do A, you get B and—but to really try to cultivate a relationship with God and other people out of self-giving and not out of expectation. And of course I fall short on that every day, then and now, and, as I—as I got older I think I got a little bit less grandiose in terms of my own role in the church which I truly thought was changing on a break-neck level, you know at break-neck speed that—that there were going to be ordained women imminently, that this was sort of the civilization of love that Vatican II spoke of, in some ways very naïve although I don't regret that, and that continued in some ways—that continued early on I was involved in the founding of an Ignatian community later on in the early 90s that continues to exist today in five cities actually it's just starting its first Spanish-speaking community. But we really thought as we founded that community that this was going to change the Society of Jesus itself. So you know you can look back on that and say how foolish—on the other hand to kind of have your eyes on a horizon that other people have planted in your spirit and that you really do believe comes from the very best of the Church and the spirit of God, is okay, even on the days when you're disappointed. So I would say my faith is a little bit more long-range and patient now, maybe no less connected to justice—I hope not - but more

Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

practical and that some losses in my life and some opportunities to be with people who I really consider to be spiritual giants have taught me a lot about patience and interdependence. There's a Messiah and I am not he, and that's okay.

Michelle Sweetser: Yeah.

Stephanie Russell: So.

Michelle Sweetser: You mentioned some of these giants and—were they people here or these are opportunities that through Marquette you met others?

Stephanie Russell: Yeah, some were here and some were some of the big names you would expect. You know when I was working at Marquette the first time at Campus Ministry in the late 80s, you know we had the first Martin Luther King Day, that—that we sponsored and you know so Martin Luther King III was here, I think the next year Cesar Chavez was here. You know I mean there were just people of—Shirley Chisholm - you know people that were very moving to me and of course later Archbishop Tutu in particular of everyone was—was and continues to affect me in very important ways but they weren't all big names, I mean they, you know, people like my mother-in-law—my late mother-in-law, who was a person of tremendous faith and spirit and courage, you know there are women in particular, that have had deep influence on me, who—certainly Dorothy Day, you know not all women that I met but, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, you know women of the history of the church who have been very important in my life as well, so I—you know, spending time with sort of the communion of saints living and dead, and staying attuned also to small voices of wisdom. You know there have been people on the Marquette campus—there was a woman here I directed on a retreat a number of years ago—a retreat in daily life—who was in maintenance, who had a number of kids and some cognitive disabilities, who was probably one of the most faithful, loving human beings I have ever met. And, you know those are people that set examples for me of what it means to be a person of light. And so I—I'm really grateful—

Michelle Sweetser: Sure.

Stephanie Russell: For that opportunity as well.

Michelle Sweetser: Yeah, it's really moving.

Stephanie Russell: They're gifts to me, teachers.

Michelle Sweetser: Sure, sure. What was it like for you as both a woman and as a lay-person, kind of taking on a leadership role, kind of being responsible for Mission and Ministry or Identity here at the university?

Stephanie Russell: Yeah, well you know it's funny, I—I did not set out to work for the Church [laughter].

Michelle Sweetser: [laughter]

Stephanie Russell: Nor did I set out to work in higher education.

Michelle Sweetser: [laughter]

Stephanie Russell: And—and I have found myself over my life in a spot on many occasions where the sentence starts with "the first woman." So when I was—I was working on the Wisconsin Province staff it

Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

was as the first full-time woman on a province staff or, you know the first woman to—to, like I used to run Province Days and so you had hundreds of Jesuits and I would be the only woman and—and had set up the meeting and speakers and emceed and all those kinds of things and it just is odd—I also had four sons at home—

Michelle Sweetser: [laughter]

Stephanie Russell: —and a husband so every once in a while I just needed to get away and go be with women for a while.

Michelle Sweetser: Sure.

Stephanie Russell: And—and I was also the youngest person on that province staff so, it was—there have been lots of oddities in that regard so in some ways stepping into the job at Marquette while there were other women doing mission work, I was the first woman who was the chief mission officer, who then later—alone—and then later with Jesuits and then other men, involved in other capacities. So in some ways it was familiar territory, but I didn't do it to be the first woman, I just did it because I believe in the mission and, because of the great formation I have, because of being so well loved by people early in my formative life and by Jesuits like Bert Thelen who was another one of my heroes who was the Provincial who hired me, it never occurred to me to be afraid or uncomfortable. What probably should have set me back was not at the front end having a doctorate and so having to get to know people in order to be credible instead of having the—the credentials that could sort of take those questions for some off the table—I think faculty felt trusted and valued but that takes time until you know someone coming in, so, so yeah I—I mean I think I was—certainly was able in both the province setting and in the Marquette setting to raise issues that were important to women and I hope to try to encourage women lead—women's leadership and women in leadership but I wouldn't say that was a separate agenda, that was an integrated agenda with other things. Lay leadership was as important to me as specifically women's leadership, and also supporting Jesuits who really were, maybe in some years riding a tide against the culture in terms of the way they function in the church and the world.

Michelle Sweetser: Okay. So you didn't find being a woman to be a challenge in terms of getting—

Stephanie Russell: Oh sure. I—you know it's certainly a challenge sometimes you know you'd certainly get treated like, you know, “go away little girl” now and then, but I'm able to—I wouldn't say I have a lot of marketable skills. [laughter]

Michelle Sweetser: [laughter]

Stephanie Russell: But—but one of them and I don't even know if this is marketable, is while I don't love conflict I feel like I can go—If I—If I or others are treated in a dismissive way or there seems to be something that's not working I have been able to sort of walk towards the tension instead of away from it, and to engage people in dialogue and to say “boy, this really seems to make you uncomfortable let's talk about that.” So when I first went to work for the Wisconsin Province there was a Jesuit on the staff, that was there short-term doing some support work and was very uncomfortable with my being there, called it an abomination in the middle of a meeting and I would walk into social events of meetings with this person and sit next to him and he would get up and leave the room or move to the other side of the room or read my mail before it was given to me, you know it was—it was quite the event and, one Lent,

Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

some of the rest of the staff was gone and I just thought this is just wrong, this isn't how Christians should be with each other. So I went to him and said you know, I'd like to talk with you and if there is any way in which I have hurt you or dismissed you or been unkind to you, I really would love for us to have that conversation. You know it's Lent, it seems like the time and that afternoon he packed up his things and left and never came back to the office. So I'm not saying it was easy for everyone, it certainly was difficult for him. But I've tried over the years to see those less as affronts and more as expressions of pain, and—and my question then is what—what is this person afraid of and how can I do anything to help alleviate that fear, and not take things so personally—I do think you have to get a kind of a thick skin—

Michelle Sweetser: Yeah—

Stephanie Russell: Around things.

Michelle Sweetser: Sure—

Stephanie Russell: Especially in academic environments. So—

Michelle Sweetser: Yes, that is true. [laughter]

Stephanie Russell: [laughter]

Michelle Sweetser: [pause] Can you talk a little bit about the—some of the new initiatives that you started while you were in Mission and Identity and what specific needs you saw them addressing within the community?

Stephanie Russell: Sure, sure. Well probably the one I'm proudest of is the Ignatian Colleagues program which is now a national program and in its ninth year, which started as, kind of an idea, I actually just found the memo that I wrote to Father Wild and to Madeline Wake the other day, which—it was an idea that I was thinking of for Marquette, you know just a kind of a certificate of Ignatian formation—

[loudspeaker announcing fire alarm test]

Stephanie Russell: [laughter] Okay. Alright.

Michelle Sweetser: [laughter] Excellent.

Stephanie Russell: And—and kind of said to them “Hey, I'm thinking”—at that time I was thinking about a year instead of eighteen months and that this would have some experiential pieces, it wasn't quite as well-formed as it is now with the four building blocks of retreat and intellectual formation and international immersion and capstone project, but, as it happened I was just in conversation with Father Jim Grummer the North American Assistant in the Curia, Jesuit Curia, who used to be Provincial in Wisconsin and we worked together when he was socius for a number of years, and so he and I and Greg Lucey got to talking about this and Greg Lucey said to me “well, why don't you bring this to the Heartland Delta Meeting of the Midwestern Presidents and Rectors and Provincials” and I said “well I really haven't asked Father Wild if it's okay if I do this” and he said “well, go ask him” you know and so I went to Bob Wild and, said “Hey, you know I just wrote you this memo, you know there's no reason you need to say yes to this” and he said “no, no, no, bring it.” Well I got to the meeting and by the time we

Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

finished the Heartland Delta meeting they had unanimously approved it as an initiative they wanted to engage which I'm told is the first time they unanimously—

Michelle Sweetser: Wow—

Stephanie Russell: approved of anything and I wasn't even bringing it as a proposal. So there was a group of people put on it and—anyways, not to belabor that but a program was developed that continues to this day to be, according to the HSU presence their—their premier formation program for senior leaders, in the schools' both academic leaders and operational leaders. So I'm very proud of that, there are local echoes of that in smaller six- and eight-week programs at Marquette and at the other schools that mirror those puzzle pieces. Other things that I'm really, you know the—the move of the Faber Center into the University—was not called the Faber Center at that time. But the Society had already made a decision that, it wanted the Center for Ignatian Spirituality either to incorporate independently or to come under the University so, that was something of a complicated and difficult move but, something that the Society had asked for and so, Marquette said yes to and, so the—the—the oper—operazizational—operational—I don't know why I wanted to create a noun there but you know what I mean, the structuring—

Michelle Sweetser: Sure—

Stephanie Russell: Let me change that—of Mission and Identity—later Mission and Ministry—into something that was addressing the pastoral needs of the community through the Faber Center and Campus Ministry. The administrative needs in terms of mission integrity through the Office of Mission and Ministry and the formational needs—

[fire alarm test]

Stephanie Russell: Do you want me to stop?

Michelle Sweetser: [pause] Looks like we're good.

Stephanie Russell: I think we're okay.

[loudspeaker announcement: It's just a test]

Stephanie Russell: It's just a test. That was really important I think and to start to think a little bit more strategically about where we were going, it's been important to me to create opportunities like the Arrupe Seminar for the formation of new deans and vice-presidents. To Mission Week, you know, that had been a—there was a mission awareness week that really was a very small thing when I got here and of course Mission Week has taken on a life of its own now, not so much the speakers although those are important but the—the—the liaisons in each of the colleges who really give it life and, it's kind of created its—you know had its own life in that way. I tried to put mission in places where it ordinarily wasn't, around issues of sexuality that were discussed on campus, into diversity more consistently, serving ex officio for a while in the Core Curriculum Review Committee. You know really trying to live in the academic life of the institution has been very important to me. And—and then to be of service to the other schools and to the network which of course has led to the work that I'm currently doing—but, Marquette you know has been very generous and not just in the Office of Mission and Ministry but in Marketing and Communication and Advancement and many other offices to really try to be a support.

Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

So you know moving mission into something that was a cabinet position and not—not for its own self-aggrandizement but as a service function to the rest of the institution has been really important to me.

Michelle Sweetser: Sure, great. You mentioned Mission Week, so I wondered if you could talk a little bit more about how that kind of came about and what you see as some of the more meaningful experiences you've had through that event?

Stephanie Russell: Yeah, you know Mission Week, in its early days you know kind of came just like lay-formation came as a response to the declining number of Jesuits and how do we keep—how do we build a culture. Cause so much of mission work is anthropological in a lot of ways and sociological. I would say the whole shift, and the mindset of Jesuit institutions has changed less to “Oh my gosh there are fewer Jesuits,” because there are fewer Jesuits, and you know that's not something that's coming that's something that's already occurred and so we need to talk about how we make the best possible use of the Jesuits who are here and, and then also how we do the formation work to create a new culture—not a reclamation of a culture—but to create a new culture for the future. So Mission Week continues to be something that's a tool in doing that but it's less kind of a graspy effort and more something that is looking long-range. So I—I would say the high—you know I've mentioned Archbishop Tutu but you know I think, I think my favorite Mission Week of all of them was the year that we focused on forgiveness. And it was a year that we had to reduce the budget. We didn't have as many high profile speeches, we had Rabbi Ingber⁵ from Xavier who was phenomenal and Immaculee⁶, who came to speak about the genocide in Rwanda, but there was this—this effort to talk about forgiveness in the family, forgiveness internationally, forgiveness in the church, etcetera. And I—I found it the deepest of all the Mission Weeks that I was involved in planning and probably the longest lasting. So I think you know as the years went by with that event we got clearer that it was less about the speaker although you may need to get the big speaker just to get people to go, and it's more about what you do with that academically, spiritually, socially, to root it and sew it in the consciousness of people and so the reason I think forgiveness had an effect is because it's a topic that every single person in the institution can relate to. Everybody needs forgiveness and everybody needs to forgive on one level or another in their life and so it was immediately accessible and so we hope touched a broader and deeper population than usual.

Michelle Sweetser: How did you kind of go about measuring success or thinking about what - how did you know if you've done a good job?

Stephanie Russell: Yeah, you know there are the usual metrics with surveys and this and that and those are helpful to a certain extent. But to me what matters is do you hear it referenced in six months? In a year? Do you see people running follow-up programs? So one of the things that happened for example, during the forgiveness week was we generated dialogue dinners for the first time at Marquette and those came out of the—the - good will and cooperation of the interfaith conference of Greater Milwaukee who has been running dialogue dinners for a number of years out of a model that they got from a nonprofit in Texas that is now defunct. So the resources really are more broadly available not—

⁵ Rabbi Abie Ingber, son of Holocaust survivors and founder of the Center for Interfaith Community Engagement at Xavier University in Cincinnati, whose work on interfaith dialogue has brought him international recognition.

⁶ Immaculee Ilibagiza, a Tutsi Rwandan woman who survived the genocide by hiding in the bathroom of her Hutu pastor and emerged after 91 days to discover that her entire family had been killed with the exception of a brother who was studying abroad. She has published books about how her faith carried her through.

Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

not copyrighted by that group anymore. So they came and helped us out in a very big way. I went and participated in their dinners and—and - we took that model and adapted it and they were very gracious about that, but that's a model then that student government along with Campus Ministry has set aside money and personnel for and continued an ongoing series of dialogue dinners around the environment, around issues of race, etcetera, because the model was something that we were able to teach people and was a student-led model but involved students, faculty, staff, and community members, and there are just way too few events in which we can say that on any Jesuit campus. So that really gives me great joy to see that continuing forward after that year. Or you know you hear people years later still talk about the effect that Archbishop Tutu⁷ had on them. You hear them refer to ubuntu and the idea of "I am because we are," so those are things—those are sort of the inchoate measures that to me speak of long-range effect.

Michelle Sweetser: Sure.

Stephanie Russell: Yeah.

Michelle Sweetser: Yeah, Tutu was here before I came. [laughing]

Stephanie Russell: [laughing]

Michelle Sweetser: It must have been quite the event.

Stephanie Russell: Yeah, yeah, and we were all—and it was also a Pere Marquette Discovery Award.

Michelle Sweetser: Right.

Stephanie Russell: You know so—and I would say the same of the Little Rock Nine⁸. We decided to forgo Mission Week that year—

Michelle Sweetser: Yes—

Stephanie Russell: to make room for that to happen so technically that was not a Mission Week event and others did all the heavy lifting on making those events happen but its—but in the spirit of long-range effect I think it certainly has the same kind of appeal and impact.

Michelle Sweetser: Yeah, yeah. How do you see kind of the needs of students, in the community having changed, from the time that you were a student to when you recently left your position? Because my sense is there's different needs, or they're coming from a different place.

Stephanie Russell: Yeah.

Michelle Sweetser: And so I'm just curious what your thoughts are.

Stephanie Russell: Yeah, that's a great question. Well let me just say first I think academically, the university is in some ways a better academic institution than when I attended it. But it's not a more

⁷ The Most Rev. Desmond Mpilo Tutu received the university's highest honor, the Père Marquette Discovery Award, during Mission Week, on February 12, 2003.

⁸ The Little Rock Nine – who dared to challenge segregation in public schools by enrolling at all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Ark., in 1957 - were recipients of the Père Marquette Discovery Award on February 9, 2010. It was the fifth time the university presented its highest honor.

Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

integrated academic institution. So the quality of the given department's work, is, you know certainly—and in many cases stellar. You know it's good and in many cases stellar but I don't know that we've improved the ways in which we integrate - certainly through the core⁹, but—but not simply through the core. Through the majors, through the curricular and co-curricular complementary experience, etcetera so there's a tradeoff there. The - you know in the seventies the launch of graduate studies and so many at the schools I think you know we—we cast that as a black hat in some ways "Oh this is when teaching started to decline, this is when the university started to sell out," well you know there's plenty of good documentation from the 1950s and 60s that the educational quality in Jesuit universities was quite poor. And the advent of graduate programs really served as a kind of a leveraging factor to up the ante on the quality of the undergraduate experience as well, but of course the tradeoff is where your money is and—and whether teaching does still matter and promotion and tenure in the way that it should. I mean before we even get to service.

Michelle Sweetser: Right.

Stephanie Russell: And all that. I am—I am someone that sees mission as something that needs to be sewn into teaching, research, and service, and not a separate category like the bake sale that you add on the side to everything else. The mission is the academic mission done in a Jesuit and Catholic way. And so, so that's more of a soapbox thing than you need, but I think academically there have been many improvements but also some crying need for integration. Spiritually, or spiritually and socially I would say that the social consciousness of students at Marquette now is much more developed than it was when I was in school because remember I was here in the early eighties, these were the Reagan years, you know, people who were doing this kind of work like on the South Africa piece and other things were sort of outliers. And so, that's good news for the institution. That there's a resurgence of social consciousness. Some of that's a very privileged social consciousness in a place like Marquette and it's - it's very well intended but maybe not as immersive in terms of the needs of communities of color for example. And—and, the needs surrounding the Marquette community. So I think there is a lot to work with there. If we do that well and we do it in this interactive way with the Jesuit and Catholic tradition, students, I mean the service ethos is off the charts. One time in one of the surveys that we did in Mission and Ministry I had a student say to me in a focus group, "Service is the religion at Marquette," and while I understand that because it is the pervasive ethos on campus and it is some ways—in some ways a very linking and—and—thing and not a bad platform from which to start, it's still not enough. And so I think there's work to be done in—in terms of claiming Catholic in a way that is hearable and desirable without trying to lie about the parts of Catholic that are still struggling at this moment in the church. Both in terms of the recovery from the clergy sex abuse scandal and in terms of a sexual ethic that lags behind public discourse and the practice of Catholics themselves. So you know that's—there's movement there but I think we don't do ourselves any favors by hiding in the corner and pretending that this is not exactly the place where those conversations should be happening. So you know many - many I'd say things like retreat opportunities are about the same as they were and certainly the interreligious awareness at the university is much better. One of my joys was to see the interfaith prayer room finally installed next to Campus Ministry, not placed up on the fourth floor of the union or over in

⁹ The Core of Common Studies, which in 2016 is described as "the intellectual heart of a Marquette education, built on our Jesuit tradition and designed for successful life in the 21st century. The core comprises nine knowledge areas essential to a well-educated person, a Marquette graduate."

Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

Holthusen Hall as though it's something other than who we are. These are our students and we want them all running into each other engaging in service, engaging in deep conversation about questions of faith on a regular basis.

Michelle Sweetser: Sure. I'm sorry I'm kind of jumping all over the place.

Stephanie Russell: That's okay, that's fine. I'm probably not helping the line of questioning.

Michelle Sweetser: No, no, you are totally fine. Earlier you have alluded to your, well you didn't allude to - you just noted that the presence of Jesuits has declined, the number of Jesuits has declined, so you talked a little bit about some of the programs that you started to kind of try to share Ignatian values, and tradition with faculty and staff and so I was—I was curious though what you see as the role of lay-ministers in the spiritual and faith experience on campus. And how it's maybe similar or different than the counsel that was, you know, kind of traditionally and exclusively provided by the Jesuits.

Stephanie Russell: Well Jesuits, I think it's really important not to treat Jesuits as though they are museum pieces of a bygone era.

Michelle Sweetser: Right.

Stephanie Russell: The—the Jesuits on Marquette's campus are living links to the living dynamic tradition of the Society of Jesus, which is certainly present in the 28 institutions of higher education in the United States but also so much bigger than—than they are. And so, the— among the many values of Jesuits are their ability to link the rest of us to that living tradition as it changes and grows and calls forth new things from all of us. They're also links to other kinds of ministries in this society that make higher education better. The fact that Jesuit universities have connections with the Jesuit Refugee Service and with secondary education and parishes and retreat houses and social centers, call things out of us or at least have the potential to do so, in ways that not being part of an international community can't. You know? They would not otherwise occur. What I think lay colleagues do, so the Jesuits provide that witness of community that is not parochial. What I think lay colleagues do is take that tradition of Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit - sorry Ignatian spiritually - and Jesuit higher education and break it open through their own lens. So what is Ignatian spirituality for, a scholar in nursing? What is it for a parent? What is it for a married or a single person? What is it for an attorney? What is it in—you know the health care professions or in communication? And to break that spirituality open because you cannot have Jesuit education without Ignatian spirituality, everything we do in Jesuit higher education is based on the dynamic of the spiritual exercises. It draws from other sources as well, but it is very reliant on that tradition and so helping lay colleagues not just adopt Ignatian spirituality but to claim it for themselves out of their own religious freedom and to then gift back to the Society of Jesus and its institutions new way—new ways of thinking, new ways of engaging, it becomes then a kind of a living dynamic where the Jesuits themselves are the beneficiaries of the very lay colleagues that they have formed and welcomed into those ministries. So that becomes a relationship of equals, and I really do think we have a responsibility to set an example for students that includes strong Jesuit and strong lay-leadership, in the institutions. So yeah, so I think, it's important to do not just to hand on but to strengthen everyone.

Michelle Sweetser: Great, great. You mentioned kind of that—that you came to Marquette in part for the journalism program?

Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

Stephanie Russell: Yes.

Michelle Sweetser: [laughter]

Stephanie Russell: Yes.

Michelle Sweetser: And - but really your entire career after graduation has been kind of devoted to the church or doing Jesuit—working with the Jesuits in some way. So kind of how did that transition happen? And, yeah, let's just stop there.

Stephanie Russell: [laughter]

Michelle Sweetser: How did that—how did you come to that place?

Stephanie Russell: Yeah, well I'll do the Sparknotes so we don't belabor it. But so yeah, I started in Journalism. I wasn't in very long, and I still love to write. In fact, I would say to be a writer is one of the core pieces of my identity. I really, I find it life-giving, clarifying, and I would like to have more time for it and hope to have more time for it in the coming years having transitioned in my own work recently. But—but I laughed because—and this maybe plays to the social justice pieces that we were talking about before, I didn't feel as though—though I think it's extremely important to have bystanders who can report on an event for the larger community and I have nothing but the deepest respect for committed journalists - I didn't think I could remain that objective and I felt like I needed to give my life more as an advocate so I moved into social work and studied social work and I was a social worker with, emotionally disturbed six to twelve year olds for a while in a group home setting, before—before moving into Jesuit ministry and moved into Je—well I was working even at that time my husband was teaching at Creighton Prep and I was helping part-time with the speech team so I guess I was never really not in Jesuit ministry in one way or another. I was on the payroll at least part-time but then went to work on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, for two years from 84 to 86 and—and that was a situation where unlike now, where I think there's a much more refined way of training volunteers. At that point you really got thrown in the deep water so we were living in a trailer, we had our second child on the reservation, I was pregnant when we went out, I was teaching in the middle school and high school and also doing work in the district churches and parishes and my husband was teaching in the theology department so [pause] that was probably the single most formative experience for both of us in our adult lives. The experience of forming communities of faith, of being both invited and blessed and frustrated was probably the holiest place I've ever been. We were in close, close community relationship with Jesuits and the community of sisters and the volunteer community and the Lakota community there. Ate meals together at that time almo—you know, several times a day. So it was, and it was also an experience of being, even though you knew that you were in a position of power as a white teacher a white person generally, you were numerically a minority in a Lakota environment and I think that's a very good thing for any majority person to experience. So those were incredibly blessed days. We left after a couple of years to come back to Marquette, so that I could work at Campus Ministry, and my husband went back to doctoral studies and then, I was asked by the provincial after four years in Campus Ministry to come—the Society of Jesus was celebrating an Ignatian year.

Michelle Sweetser: Yes.

Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

Stephanie Russell: Four-hundred and fifty years since the birth of Ignatius—or since the founding of the Society and five hundred years since the birth of Ignatius. And he asked me to come and co-chair a committee of six as a full-time employee because he really—the provincial really wanted the Wisconsin Province to be the lead in creating spiritual, social, and academic programs and that was the—probably the best job I’ve ever had. I walked in on day one to an empty desk to a—to a job that had just been created.

Michelle Sweetser: Sure.

Stephanie Russell: And was told, “you have complete free reign on doing whatever you and the committee think is the right thing to do. Here’s your budget,” which was a substantial budget, “Go.” And so that was just a tremendous, tremendous year of retreats and lectures and films and trips to El Salvador and articles being written and the culmination of which was the return of—the invitation to return to every former Jesuit and his spouse/partner/family to come back for a weeklong series of healing ev—and social and spiritual events, and of course every Jesuit and every colleague that worked in a Jesuit ministry, everybody was invited for a full week and it was all gratis.

Michelle Sweetser: Wow.

Stephanie Russell: And it was, it still chokes me up to think about it. It was just incredible, it was incredible. And we had on campus here at Marquette, which is where we held it, over five hundred people for the week.

Michelle Sweetser: Wow.

Stephanie Russell: And it was—it was very moving, lots of healing that went on. Out of that was born the Ignatian Associates because at the final dinner Bert Thelen stood up and announced that we would be forming this new lay community that would be a new iteration of Jesuit life, again remember these were very heady days. And that everyone who was interested should go talk to me afterwards. [laughter]

Michelle Sweetser: [laughter]

Stephanie Russell: And I was only vaguely ready for that to happen so, so that—then I was asked to stay on. And I didn’t feel completely prepared for that task so I went—I was very well mentored first as a retreatant and later as a director of the exercises by John Mace who was the Socius of the Wisconsin Province, who was one of my heroes—one of those people who I just admire deeply. Doug Leonhardt, others who were part of that mentoring so that I ended up direc—until this day directing Jesuits and others in the exercises which is one of the great joys of my life and I did go to some coursework as well of course to prepare for that—during that time went and got a masters at St. Francis Seminary in Pastoral Studies, and then, I—I had—was under four different provincials during that time and, no I guess three: Bert Thelen, Father Ed Mathie and then briefly Jim Grummer and at that time Father Dan McDonald was stepping down from the—what had begun as the Office of Mission and Identity, he was a one man person—one man band with a half-time assistant—a clerical assistant and I had a call from Tim Lannon asking me to apply and I said, “You know, I’ve been at Marquette and I really”—I was planning to go work on a ministry on the south side with a—with a Jesuit—it was a healthcare referral ministry for the poor and I said, “I really want to do some direct service to the poor and I love Marquette but it’s really focused on middle-class and upper-middle-class students and I just don’t think I want to go back

Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

and he said, “Well, I really think you should think about this,” and he called a couple times and finally Father Wild called—Bob Wild - and said “I really would like you to come down and interview for this” and I didn’t think I was too special for the job I just didn’t think it was for me and so I said I would and I came down and met with a number of groups—I think I met with 125 people over two or three days—I counted up all the names, and I was so moved by the deep desire in people to make Marquette a place of faith and justice, especially the faculty, though not solely the faculty, that I just thought well how can I not. And so it then—what—what was resistance really turned into privilege and so the office was just me and this half-time lovely woman who was the assistant and we were located in the same office suite as the president in O’Hara Hall and that was the humble beginning I think—

Michelle Sweetser: [laughter]

Stephanie Russell: The humble ending too but that was at least the humble beginning. So yeah, it was—it was just a joy to be back and very surprising to me.

Michelle Sweetser: Yeah, so you felt the call.

Stephanie Russell: I did. I did and I felt honored to be working with people who were so thoughtful and committed and loving.

Michelle Sweetser: Yeah, and were there times during all of this that you questioned your faith, and in what ways and how did you kind of come to terms with that?

Stephanie Russell: Yeah, well I think on—the glib answer is on one level or another you question your faith every day.

Michelle Sweetser: Yes, right.

Stephanie Russell: And—and I think things like Mother Teresa’s journals - you know where she was questioning right to the end—some people find those very threatening. I find them really comforting actually. But certainly there were difficult moments. The clergy sex abuse scandal made the work of the Office of Mission, like it did so many things, so much harder because there’s just no trust left. There was no trust in the institutional church, there was no trust in anything that had the name Catholic remotely connected with it. The fact that it, certainly individual priests made that very tough but the—the response of the bishops and the seeming inability to understand the structural issues that led to the abuse crisis, you know, were so devastating for people and—and for me too and so I understand why people respond to that differently. Some people put their heads down and stay Catholic and just move forward, some people work hard as reformers, and some people—some people leave and go to a different faith community, and some people just fade away. And I think for women it was particularly hard. It seems to me that the voices of mothers were the things that made the biggest difference.

Michelle Sweetser: Yeah.

Stephanie Russell: And we can obviously point to great journalism at the Globe and at other places but this is something—I mean—this is a sore that needed to be lanced. And as somebody who had worked on a provincial staff I was not unaware of the humanity of ordained people but, the breadth of the problem. So I think it just was, you know, that—those were dark days that continue to have an effect and obviously the advent of Pope Francis—not that Pope Francis has done as much as I would like him

Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

to - to address this particular issues but his tremendous goodness and good will and essential attitude of mercy and love have done a lot to reopen doors that had seemed to be slammed shut. I also served for six years on the clergy sex abuse review board for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and I left it when I started doctoral studies cause I just needed to get off all of the boards that I was on but that was sort of my way of dealing with it. Those were hard meetings to attend.

Michelle Sweetser: I bet.

Stephanie Russell: And not anything I would choose to do—the bishop asked me and I said yes. But I felt as though if—if I were going to try to hold out Catholic as something loving and hopeful and—and you know to, how—shine light on the beauty and mercy of the Catholic tradition, then I also needed to do that fully aware of the trials and the ugliness that was there so that I wasn't being Pollyannaish. So it was important to me to serve the local church in that way along with companions who were just excellent on that board and I have to say that Archbishop Dolan - now Cardinal Dolan - you know, had his own style in the archdiocese but was never anything but supportive of the work of that commission. That's a longer answer than you wanted.

Michelle Sweetser: No. That's fine. [laughter]

Stephanie Russell: [laughter]

Michelle Sweetser: I don't set lengths of time for any of this. But I am mindful of the time and we're right at ten o'clock. So I just wanted to ask if there was anything you wanted to add or things that maybe I didn't ask about that you might like to talk about, in the few remaining minutes?

Stephanie Russell: Well, I guess I would just add a couple brief things.

Michelle Sweetser: Yeah?

Stephanie Russell: One is that one of the reasons that I'm doing this work with AJCU now is that I'm realizing two things that are—that are true at the same time. Number one: out of my own experience, presidential and senior leadership is really important in terms of sending signals to the rest of the uni-an institution about how important mission is and how it is that we live it so not just to say it's important but to see it as integrative in the most essential choice-making of the institution. That doesn't mean everyone will always make the same decision based on the mission, but that we have the discernment skills as a school to engage it in significant ways. And I do think it's really important for all of the schools to see themselves as part of a bigger network of the 28 but of Jesuit ministry more generally. The second thing is [pause] that I—I certainly have loved Marquette with a deep sense of gratitude. Marquette's been extremely good to me. And as an adult in faith I think as the university goes forward it will be important to be the place that is not—and especially given the culture as this is being taped and we're—we're recorded and we're in the midst of the presidential election- so much divisiveness in the country on left and right and divisiveness in the church on left and right - it's really, really important for Jesuit universities to be places that intentionally plant themselves at the crossroads of those divisions and bring the gospel into dialogue with them instead of retreat. That this is the gift of Jesuit education to the church and to higher education both and—and if it's done right—to the poor. And so when I hear people wring their hands about the future of Jesuit higher education I—it makes me wonder what they see as the long range goal, and if that long range goal is utter peace and tranquility,

Simmons Grant Oral History Project: Stephanie Russell Interview
Marquette University Libraries

that's never been what we're about. We are the place of tension and dialogue and honest candid self-assessment and cultural assessment so I—my hope for Marquette is that it continue to be that in Milwaukee and—and to feel good about that role as a place of faith where the—the rough edges of the Gospel are evident just as much as its comforting words. So.

Michelle Sweetser: Okay.

Stephanie Russell: Thanks.

Michelle Sweetser: Well, thank you!

[audio tape ends 01:01:04]