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Nile Kirwin

RS 301

Professor Sara Jaye Hart

April 30, 2021

Oral History: Religion and Humboldt County, in the Time of COVID

Interviewer: Mr. Nile Kirwin

Interviewee: Mrs. [Anita Reynolds](#)

Mr. Kirwin: Your community of practice is at Saint Mary's church, correct?

Mrs. Reynolds: It is. Well, OK, that has been my parish, but I've actually started going to the Catholic churches in Eureka.

Mr. Kirwin: Oh okay, is that what you started doing when covid hit?

Mrs. Reynolds: It actually did and there is a connection there. I was very involved at St. Mary's for years and years and years and I just felt like their response to covid was not helpful. They pretty much shut down everything there and cut everybody out. They were kind of slow in getting masses started up again. I just decided, my faith is important to me and it was important to me to be in church, so I started going to Sacred Heart in St. Bernard's. The first time I went to Mass there they were so welcoming. They were outside greeting us, and that's a part of your church experience is having that personal connection. I feel badly because I love the people at St. Mary's, and I don't have any hard feelings toward the priest there, but I needed to feed my spiritual needs.

Mr. Kirwin: Especially in a time like this. Everyone has different varying levels of support, but if you rely on your spirituality, and the community it provides, having it disappear sounds challenging.

Reynolds: It's difficult, but I still stay in touch and read the bulletin every weekend. Things change over time. I hope to go back there someday, but it's funny, you start going somewhere else and I've actually made some connections. I mean, this is a small community, so I've always known people in Eureka. It's really been reconnecting. That's one thing nice that when you belong to a church that has different churches, you can move around a little bit.

Kirwin: Yes, of course. You said you see yourself going back there. Do you think you go back there regularly or do you prefer Saint Bernard's?

Reynolds: Well, for now I'm just going there because things are still kind of shut down as far as I'm concerned, you know? That was another thing at Sacred Heart. I would call and say I'm coming to Mass, and they said you don't have to call, we know you're coming and you're welcome. At St. Mary's you have to sign up ahead of time. And when I've gone down there to church, everything felt very much like the government. Don't come if you have a fever, don't come if you're not, you know? And I'm like, come on we're people of God. You know that we're being cautious. We're doing all the things we're supposed to do, but we don't need that in our face.

Kirwin: Oh totally understand that. I thought it was a little crazy that businesses like Target and Wal-Mart were open, but small businesses and churches weren't. How did the shutdown of your church right at the beginning of the pandemic impact your practice?

Reynolds: That was the exact thing that the deacon at Sacred Heart said. He used Target and Wal-Mart [as examples] he said, yeah it's fine because it's all about the almighty dollar, but when people need their souls nourished, forget it. I would say that it just increased my need, my thirst, to know more about the Lord. Early on, as we all were facing this, it was this unknown territory. My husband and I were kind of just soaking in all the media, you know? It was just pulling us down, so we learned over months that we just don't watch any news shows. I mean, we still get our news, but I've learned to start with reading scripture first. Relying on scripture and truth, then I can look and go, oh, it's okay, God's in control, we're going to be okay. That's

an important lesson I think I learned during covid. I feel like when I remind myself that I'm not in control, the government's not in control, It's God that's in control. That, to me, makes all the difference in how I get up every morning and face the world. And it's a good thing, right?

Kirwin: Yeah, that is a good thing. That's a beautiful thing, rather than just being overwhelmed by the fear that comes with the news these days. Are there any other challenges that you faced in your practice, or in your life spiritually since Covid happened?

Reynolds: Well, I think obviously the big challenge is not being part of the community or being with friends and family. That certainly impacts you, but again, I just feel like it's just a strong reminder that it's really God that we rely on. That's what's key and that's what's been driven home for me and my faith, is faith not fear. And hope, I'm not talking about optimism and saying, oh tomorrow's going to be great, but more real hope and eternal life and that this is just a small part here. We're all on this earthly journey and it's not going to last forever for any of us and certainly for me. I'm looking down toward the end and... I don't know, I think things come into your life for reasons. There's no coincidences in life, you know? It's like it's all providential

Kirwin: Yeah I do understand that true hope. It's a refreshing realization. Since you transitioned to Eureka, how have they adapted to the distancing rules and all the guidelines?

Reynolds: I think they've done a stellar job. I mean, St. Mary's, obviously they get A+ for following all the rules. But yeah, when you go to Sacred Heart or St. Bernard's, they have the pews cordoned off. You definitely have the separation, they have hand sanitizer, and people are wearing masks. I never felt unsafe. On Easter Sunday at Sacred Heart there was definitely a crowd, but they kept the distancing going. It was funny, these two women came and tried to get in my pew. It was really awkward for a moment because my inclination was, of course come on in and sit next to me, but the lady next to me goes, Oh no, we can't do that, we have to distance. So I said, Oh yeah, we have to distance, and they realized it right away. They just hadn't been there, and they didn't know the protocol, so I turned to her and go, thanks. That was very awkward for me because I don't like telling someone they can't do something right.

Kirwin: Well that's hard too especially when, naturally, there is an atmosphere of acceptance. Do you think that your community of practice will continue to use some of the adaptations that were adopted during the pandemic, even after social distancing isn't required anymore?

Reynolds: I hope it all goes away. It's going to take a while and I have to admit, I find the masks really annoying, but I'm very compliant. My husband, he goes to an eye surgeon in Santa Rosa. He told him early on, I think it was in May last year, he goes; when you're outside you don't need to wear a mask unless you're up close to someone. If you're distancing and you're out walking, there's no need to wear a mask. So I feel very emancipated when i'm outside and I don't have to wear it. Yeah, I'll be glad to have them go.

Kirwin: Yes of course. Were you striving to get back in the church and be in that community, or were you nervous at first?

Reynolds: I wasn't nervous at all. I was chomping at the bit. So I have to tell you, the minute I could go back to church I went to Eureka right away because they opened up immediately. St Mary's has done a lot of outside masses, and when they do outside masses, it's like they just want to get people in and out. At least there's a homily when they do it inside. They were doing mass every day, and I'd heard people were standing outside the church. I thought, that's not right, there's never been a time in any of church history. And we've been through this before. This is not the first epidemic. It's not the first time. I mean, there've been horrible things, black plague, all of it, but for the church to shut down and to have it mandated by the government is just very odd to me. I know the first time I went to Mass at St. Bernard's, it just felt like I came home I was like, OK, this is where I need to be, you know?

Kirwin: So with these changes that you've gone through, obviously you have a yearning for a sense of community at the beginning, how would you say your sense of community coming back is stronger? How has this whole thing impacted your local support system that you were used to having?

Reynolds: Well I still tried to stay involved. You know you miss the people because it's the people that make up your community, right? I think that's just going to be an ongoing process. Here's a difference, when I would go to Mass at St. Mary's, after mass, people would be in the narthex talking and visiting, and I don't know if that still goes on. I think people are encouraged to leave and not assemble because you don't want to spread anything, but at Sacred Heart I could see people there. This is just evolving for me. One of my dearest friends is a religious director at Saint Mary's, and she said the priest said, "well when is Anita coming back?" I don't have any hard feelings. I am not angry at anybody or upset. It was a desire to keep my spirituality alive, and to worship with people and to be at mass.

Kirwin: That must have been hard during those months I would imagine. It is a difficult time, but we'll adapt just as you have. Well I appreciate you speaking with me today. It was great to meet you. I wish you all the best.

Reynolds: Great meeting you as well Nile. You take care.

End Interview