

Pastor Robert Rodin, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church L C A,
interviewed in his study by Teresa Jordan, January 16, 1986.

Notes taken at time of interview; not audited against tape.

RR born in Valley City, N.D. in 1932; lived there about 9 years. Moved to Portland in WWII; his father worked in the shipyards. RR was raised there, graduated from high school in Portland. Then he went into the Navy for a couple years. Worked in a tin can factory, for American Can, when he came out for a couple years. Went to Pacific Lutheran in Tacoma, then to seminary in Illinois. First parish in Walnut Grove, Minnesota, '62 to '65, then Chehalis, Wash, '65 to '70. Then to Seattle, Washington, '70 to '77. Has been in Butte now a little over nine years. Came in 1977.

Mine was operating at that point. RR liked the historical aspect of Butte, liked the idea of living in a mountain area. It was more like a vacation when he first came. On the negative side, it was dusty, dirty, seemed like you had to dust the house every day. You'd hear the drum of the heavy equipment in the night. His wife had more problems adjusting--cultural shock. She had been very involved with musical world in Seattle; much less to offer here.

The image and stereotype of Butte was of a wide open, hard drinking town. RR's impression before he came was that it was probably not a very strongly religiously centered community. But he found out differently, that there was a strong, traditional sense of the church and Christianity in the community. That pleased him. Strong Catholic emphasis in the community. He thought that was good, even if a lot of it was nominal, not terribly active.

His parish in Seattle had been on the south side, interracial area. Whites were moving out; his church was trying to counteract this. The parish was fragmented in that sense--and it wasn't fragmented here. This congregation was more traditional Swedish, German background--not all German & Swiss, by any means, but many. But there was a stability here that RR didn't see in Seattle. Butte didn't have the same sort of intense problems at the time. So, sort of alike a vacation to be here.

With the closure of the smelter in Anaconda, Reverend Joe Dillon (Lutheran) over there was involved with the reaction and impact of it. We were made aware that the same thing could happen in Butte. RR suggested to the Ministerial Association that they do the same as Anaconda; prepare for it. But many thought he was a nut to even suggest that mining would close in this area. There was no way, people said, that they would close down the pit and mining.

The Butte Community Union was formed about that time. Bob McCarthy and Kathy Campbell approached RR to form a community organization, grass roots organization that could speak out for

Kodun

rights for unemployed workers of the Anaconda Company. That got RR more involved in terms of community affairs. He almost hesitated to do it, because he had done all that in Seattle. The church is supposed to be concerned with the community of God, and out in the community, but there is a reaction w/i the congregation when you are involved in something that involves demonstrations, controversial actions. When the involvement is right here, in your own community, there is some stepping on of feet, political reaction. A desire by many in the congregation not to get involved.

RR was not looking for conflict. But it has a way of following him around.

Food Bank--at the time of closure, the churches realized that there would be lots of unemployed. RR had been involved in Seattle in a program called Neighbors in Need. Question, once you get something like that started, how (or if) to terminate it; does it go on perpetually. Butte's Food Bank is probably the strongest in the state; is well funded right now; has a network to distribute excess food that comes its way to other needy communities.

RR was asked by church at large to go to shareholders meeting of ARCO in Los Angeles at Wilksbury (sp) Hotel, asked through a California church-related social action group called Prophet (or Profit--they used it both ways, play on words.) That was just after the closure of the pit. RR was a little wary--the church can sometimes call out its troops but then pull back if things get too sticky, and he wondered if he would be left hanging. But the church said it would pay his way. He brought it up at the Ministerial Association, said it would be nice to have someone go with him. He, w/ the Asso, wrote up a letter of reasons for complaints to present to ARCO, especially things like problems of separation pay, concerns about the water table in Butte, etc. It was signed by about 25 or 30 clergy and sisters here in Butte. Then Bishop Curtis of the Diocese of western Montana asked Fr. Ed Hislop to go, helped him financially to do that. So they went, prepared their presentation. Before they went, RR called Don Peoples, told him they were going, said if there was anything he wanted to express--essentially got a sort of non response.

So they went and presented it, knowing it wouldn't make much difference, came back, and there was a big write up in the paper. To RR's surprise, there was NO reaction. He didn't get a single phone call--not positive, not negative. Fr. Hislop had some response, but not much. RR didn't know quite what to make of it.

Also, there was the feeling in the community that it would only be a year or two before we'd start up again. Feeling that "when they get rid of a couple union leaders, it will be a clean slate, and everything will be fine." RR didn't agree.

One member of his congregation, a man who had worked for the AMC in insurance claims, said, it's really good they closed it--it

Rodier

was nothing but a graveyard and a deathtrap. Some people felt that it was good that the air was now clean; made Butte a nice place to retire. But a lot of people in RR's congregation unemployed.

Right after the shutdown, RR counted 26 people in his congregation who were unemployed because of it. A lot are still unemployed. Some have taken early retirement; others, their families have helped. One young family joined the church, and their parents joined too. They had each other, but RR thinks that they turned to the church as a network of support.

One man in the congregation, the day the pit closed, he had one day more to work to qualify for his pension. He went to the Company, to his union leader--tried to get it waived. The best we could do, the company said, if we start up, you will be the first called. He has a small packers outfit now.

Another man is now working as custodian at the church for about \$200 a month.

People here are proud, they don't want to have a negative attitude, or take a handout unless it is absolutely necessary.

Tape 1, Side B

[During the interview, RR gets a couple calls from the BCU--they have just won a judgment from the MT Supreme Court that the law passed last summer making able bodied people under 35 years of age ineligible for welfare is unconstitutional]

Without the BCU, who was going to support low income in the legislature? BCU managed to draw local politicians together. RR thinks they won the suit on the basis of age discrimination--the law eliminated benefits for able bodied under 35 and limited them to 3 mos a year for 35 - 50. If the BCU hadn't had the guts to fight it, no one else would have. Sister Kathleen O'Sullivan, Bob McCarthy, Louise Kunz, Lulu Martinez.

What has happened to the 26 in RR's congregation who were unemployed from the shutoff? Some have taken early retirement, some have moved away. There are still about 15 or so who are here, unemployed. Many didn't move--they had a home here, would have had to see it at a loss, pay twice as much somewhere else. And then there are a lot of people who say they are employed--who are employed for the statistics--who are making minimum wage compared to \$12, 14, 16 an hour plus benefits. That's quite an adjustment.

People here blame the unions. Yet RR had interview in church in Centralia, Washington. they have large strip mining coal operation right outside of Centralia. He asked what the average laborer received. He was told, in the neighborhood of \$30,000 a year. That was more than it was here. Yet they are all very happy over there, there was no disgruntlement that they were

Rodin

being paid that well. That was a big successful coal operation that they were very happy about.

RR sees alcohol problems in his congregation, but he is not sure they are related to the shutdown; that they didn't exist before.

Thinks that the people hardest hit are those without a congregation. There are people for whom the Company, their joblife there, was their only network.

In RR's congregation--membership has gradually declined. About 400 baptised members now; about 450 nine years ago. There are not the number of people moving in there once were. Some have moved out. Gold Hill Lutheran Church seems to be holding steady or even growing slightly. There were not the number of members there who worked for AMC in the first place.

In the past, in times of crisis, the church was a place where people could come together, the church became vocal, a central place to express concerns. RR talks about the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King. And in Butte the church has had an active role. Sister Kathleen O'Sullivan and Bob McCarthy approached churches for support for the Butte Community Union. At the time of the shutdown, Bishop Curtis said that the Catholic Church was giving \$100,000 for relief of people in distress. The Butte Food Bank, while not a church organization, is supported by the churches, and is very successful. There is a sense of rallying. But when it comes to worship--RR knows that even in the civil rights movement there was a sense of "Why don't people come to church more?" RR thinks that there is a lot of latent Christianity out there. People dig down in their roots, they act as Christians, help each other, even if they don't actually come to church to worship.

About Our Lady of the Rockies--Luther referred to Mary as the Mother of God. He meant that in terms of very high devotion for her. His treatise on the Magnificat deals with justice as well. But Protestants and Lutherans not supportive of the church making an idol of Mary and worshipping her in place of seeing Jesus as the mediator. RR gave a sermon, said it isn't something we should make a battle or a war of it. As RR's wife says, would rather see Mary up there on top of that hill than a big Coors sign or a big kegger. It at least is a religious symbol of hope for the community. And basically the majority of people in the community are Catholic-oriented anyway.

Comes from that latent Christianity again. In the sermon, RR mentioned--and got no negative reaction, so he guesses they heard what he was saying--that "when they were putting up about the third or fourth piece, I had the radio on. I could hardly believe it--the reporter was saying, 'well, we're going to key in on the erection of the statue on the top of the mountain.' It just hit me, you know. Well, first of all, before this we are listening to Van Halen playing hard rock in relationship to some sexual song, as he very often is, then we're going to key in now

on Connie--who's it?--up in the helicopter and she's going to give us the latest scoop on the erection of the statue. They used the word erection about 5 times and after they got through with that, then they commented, we'll give you the next report the next time, and now we are going to listen to Pat Benatar sing "Sex is a Weapon." My reaction in the sermon was, how offensive that was to me. Here's a religious symbol that is being placed and you get this bizarre--and there is no reference to Mary, I mean it's Our Lady of the Rockies, secular oriented in that sense. But my reaction in the sermon was, maybe this is the way it really ought to be. This is the kind of world in which Christ came. He didn't come into a beautiful world, but he came into a world that was full of all kinds of distortions and corruptions and injustices. And it fit in terms of the sermon presentation for it. That was just before Christmas. But I was trying to say to them, I certainly don't think there should be any kind of negative response to it. In fact, I think it is a sort of a symbol of hope. I didn't realize the statue had been planned since 1980, before the pit closed. ...I'm sure it had to do with the economy. That was a rallying kind of thing. I know there were a lot of sisters at the time they were starting to get serious about it after the closure, who had some frustrations in relationship to whether all of that money should go toward a statue and whether it shouldn't go to the needs of people unemployed. But now that it is there and all, I don't hear any of that."

Things that hurt Butte?

The image of the hard cold winter. Transportation--now that the railroads are being pulled out, and some air transportation is being pulled out.

Tape 2, Side A

RR does not think the problem is unions. RR takes pride in that Butte was a strong union town in the 30's and 40's. And the union reputation isn't a real factor--people don't flee Chicago because Haymarket happened there.

But he has a real question as to why anyone would want to come and settle in Butte when they could go to Bozeman or Missoula where there is better transportation, a better winter--or even go out of state. RR recalls a study that said the Rocky Mountain Region was seen essentially as the recreational wasteland of the country, a place people came to recreate but they settled on the coast, in the south, whatever, left us high and dry.

But there are factors that have to be dealt with--the personality of the place is not enough: it a friendly place, people are nice.

People have tried very hard to bring industry and new diversified business into the community from outside. But frankly, RR has to say that he doesn't see much coming from the outside. He sees a lot of things being developed from people who are in the

community, including managers of new motels and food chains. Granted, we have opened the doors to chains that we have had closed all the time. Butte is a community of 30K or so, it's a natural market for a major food chain. So it's natural that they would come in once you open the door and welcome them. But RR doesn't see that as the salvation to the community and he doesn't see Butte as really business orienting more here. "That may be my pessimism coming through. I don't see Butte as a future ghost town or anything like that. But it may have to adjust to a smaller kind of image."

What works in Butte favor?

Its history-- for people who are interested in the west. Maybe its location between Yellowstone and Glacier, but there are other communities between as well. Certainly its hunting, fishing, recreation. And there are natural resources here yet for mining. When RR first came here, someone in his congregation made the comment that there was as much ore here as had been taken out. But, when we can get those ores cheaper somewhere else, esp foreign countries, probably not going to be much mining here.

What do you think we'll see with Washington Corp?

RR doesn't want to be negative. He hopes for the best. But he is cynical--he is seeing ARCO getting out of a huge problem. The word is that they sold it for \$7 million--a big giveaway. It's worth all that and more. But how serious Washington is going to be about starting up...RR doubts it, and if they do, they won't start up where ARCO left off, with say 280 workers right off the bat. The pits are all flooded; RR doesn't know how long it would take to pump all the water out. He thinks they would prob start other operations around the moly areas. Probably would be low key, yet they could hang on for the future and if mining does open up again in a big way, they'd be in a good position. But he questions whether opening up bonds for the community, \$15 M to start, not sure how that would be raised. Also, there is a question whether Wash Corp would even consider the union. RR was told that only one of their operations is union. Union Leader Barney Rask says that we will have to take less--but how much less?

Washington Corp commented about the bonds and tax breaks, those were 2 of about 15 hurdles they have to overcome. RR wonders what all the others are--if they are transportation, low wages, rise of CU to \$1/lb--well, it's not going to happen.

When ARCO came in, everybody was very up. Thought they had a lot of money, they could really support the community. People thought our worries were over. That wasn't the case.

Butte Community Union--

You hear that the real problem with the Butte Community Union is its tactics. But if you don't use tactics, nothing gets done.

Roden

You aren't going to be on friendly terms with everyone. From the very beginning, BCU was viewed as a political operation by the city government. Feeling that we have an elected representative government--where does this group get off trying to be spokesman for our constituency?

Even as BCU raised issues of separation pay, etc, for miners affected by layoff, there was the idea that we would create more attitude of hard, uncompromising union tactics that are going to be detrimental to drawing industry and business into our community.

But RR doesn't think that is where the BCU is at. Granted, did raise the issue re. need for power from Colstrip 3 and 4, and one way did it was to set up a soup line outside a shareholders meeting a few years ago--created enemies of MPC and now it is the big game in town, the power behind the scenes. BCU doesn't want MPC to leave because they are the largest employer in the community; that that doesn't give MPC them a position where no criticism can be raised, questioning some of the policies they have established. BCU is trying to be a conscience, raise some questions that no one else is raising. That is its problem politically.

What the city could do--communication is probably the most important thing. BCU members have written letters to city employees and representatives, but gotten no response. RR wrote a letter to a city employee on behalf of the BCU--he never heard back. And when you don't get a response, your only option is to use the tactic of the newspaper. And that is a tactic they don't like. Because you are raising questions publically that they don't want raised.

Sit'n with the General Assistance battle, also with Low Income Coalition and concerns about LIEAP funds that are being raised now, questions of auditing the MPC by PSC, questions related to Colstrip. Granted, because MPC is major power in the community, they receive maybe more than their share of the flack. Because we are so close to it. But BCU isn't just raising questions about MPC, but also raising questions about reclaiming the city of Butte--Butte Central area, for instance. Sidewalks, streets, homes, awful lot of vacant and run down areas. Beginning around Emma mine site w/ a park there--we suggested that a long time ago, and now there is some cooperation there. So hopefully it will get better. But when you have attacks from Joe Quillici saying we have non-concern toward low income people because we didn't even get word in time of the nature of a committee meeting up in Helena and therefore our representative was the MT Low Income Coalition, Paul Carpino, who was there and yet to have the reporter say open attack [unclear], and they call that the same tactic as we use. Well, our tactics were after we had tried to communicate by letter and whatever. We talked about a guaranteed heat program with Mt Power for low income people which is something that is taking place in a lot of states. We've been in communication with Nancy Freymiller and so forth there since last

Ronin

June or earlier. And everytime we get put off, delayed. We meet but nothing ever happens. So that's how the whole LIEAP question came up in relationship to interest and all [BCU questioned what happened to interest earned on Low Income Energy Assistance Program funds at MPC, asked for audit, said that interest was going into MPC funds and not back into the LIEAP program.] BCU concern isn't as much the interest in the LIEAP as it is w/ the problem of shutoffs and guaranteed heat for low income. Particularly low, low income. 50% poverty level or more.

"It was interesting in terms of the General Assistance, bringing suit against the state against limitations in GA, when it was pointed out that \$5 million comes into this community through low income benefits and so forth, some figure like that, in terms of spin off as they spend the few dollars, \$230 a month or whatever, that that has an effect in the community, well then things warmed up a little bit. Don Peoples invited BCU to come to the chamber of Commissioners, and supported us as a friend of the court. We did have some cooperation there. We were really surprised. And pleased. So even though things look like we are fighting each other, maybe it isn't all cat and dog. There are more sympathetic undercurrents of support about the issues. And it's hard to know in situations like this how much has to do with issues and how much has to do with personalities."

Q: In the hardship Butte has faced, have there been any unexpected benefits?

It has opened the community in terms of diversification, outside involvement. Some people think it's all right to have clean air, without industrial pollution. It has drawn a lot of people together; we have been able to draw together and do things. We have been able to get money, probably through the work of Peoples' office, for street improvements, infrastructure, etc. For individuals--a few have perhaps had benefit. RR knows of one member of his congregation who was laid off in one of the earlier layoffs for seniority, who went to U. of MT and is now an accountant for Montana Power. Loren Harney (sp?). For him on an individual basis, this was probably a good thing. You can always find persons, I'm sure, of those who went back to school, were able to readjust. Everything isn't all black. There is a sense of light that comes through.

Tape 2, Side B

On the other hand, RR can think of two people in his congregation--they are not really very active, sort of on the fringe of the congregation, but the last RR heard, they were still unemployed. They are about 28 or so, early 30's. It is really a concern. He doesn't know how they are coping. They are waiting for something to open up.

RR thinks that McDonalds is good in terms of jobs for kids. With his kids, one worked delivering paper, another worked at 4B's.

Rodini

But his daughter really couldn't get a job. McD's at least provides jobs for kids.

Q: The indicators show a healthier economy--less unemployment, lots of business starts. Does that reflect the real situation?

RR thinks that that is wishful thinking. The indicators show that because of places like McDonalds and Arby's coming in. But you have to recognize that that's because we opened the doors out of desperation for something like that to happen. What that is going to prove in the long run, he questions. Also, in terms of matching funds in relation to projects of street building, lights on Harrison, etc, that's outside monies in a sense that have come in. And Washington Corps, RR has all these questions. He thinks that very often a community puts all its eggs in one basket. It's good to have hope, you've got to have it. But he is VERY cautiously optimistic. He questions the indicators because the whole thrust is, you want to be positive so that you can encourage other business and other industry to come. It's nice to see that happen. The question is whether other businesses and job opportunities are made available here. There's a question about Wash Corp, if he will hire local people or whether they will hire people from outside the community and ignore local people.

Talks a bit about relationship of two Lutheran churches in Butte; merger nationally; not necessary here right now, but if things got too bad, that would be an option.