

Oral Memoirs  
of  
Monroe Abram  
St. Peter Claver, Macon

*An Interview*  
*Conducted by*  
*Bettye Middlebrooks &*  
*Katy Lockard*  
*on*  
*July 24, 2019*

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Community Elders, Black Catholic Oral History Project

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## **General Policies and Procedures**

A member of the Oral History Association, the Archives & Records Management Department of the Catholic Diocese of Savannah (A&R) supports and embodies the goals, guidelines, and standards of archival quality prescribed by the national professional association to ensure long-term preservation of memoirs. It is the practice of A&R to select narrators whose recollections, as participants or eyewitnesses, are relevant to the department's chosen research topics. Their recorded memoirs provide links between the immediate past and the present in a very human way. A scholarly but relaxed and conversational atmosphere exists during the interview. To encourage completely candid recollections, the narrator is asked to regard the oral history memoir as a highly personal journal. The transcribed historical document, which the finished memoir becomes, is the raw material used by historians and professional scholars.

In the interest of preserving these memories for future use, the narrator and interviewer must sign a deed of gift agreement. Generally, this releases their portions of the interview to the oral history archives of Catholic Diocese of Savannah for historical and academic research and public dissemination. The narrator may also choose to restrict the memoir by limiting access or by sealing the memoir until a specified date.

## **Memoir Procedure**

1. Initial contact with the narrator.
2. Arrangements made for interview(s).
3. Recording of interview(s).
4. Transcribing of recording(s) in the A&R office.
5. Audit-checking and editing of transcript(s) in the A&R office. Abstract(s) created.
6. Review of transcript(s) by interviewer.
7. Review of transcript(s) by narrator. Due to edits requested, transcript(s) may not match audio recording(s) exactly.
8. Upload of draft transcript(s) and recording(s) to A&R's web portal.
9. Presentation of bound copy of completed memoir to the interviewee.

## **Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) with Monroe Abram is unrestricted. The deed of gift agreement was signed on November 9, 2020.

## **Interview History**

The recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) were processed in the offices of the Archives & Records Management Department, Catholic Diocese of Savannah, Savannah, Georgia.

Interviewer: Bettye Middlebrooks

Transcriber: Trint.com

Editor: Katy Lockard

Final editor: Stephanie Braddy

## **Collection/Project Detail**

The Diocese of Savannah is collecting oral histories from members of the Black Catholic community to fill in gaps in the documentation.

Monroe Abram, 88, was born in Macon, GA to Helen and Monroe Abram, one of three children, including Bernard and Bernadine. Growing up in Macon, he was an active member of St. Peter Claver Parish, attending the Catholic grammar school from first grade to eighth grade. He attended and graduated from [Old] Ballard High School (later named Ballard-Hudson Senior High School) in Macon, GA. He went on to attend college in New York City, NY. He worked the Paulist Fathers of NY while he was in college. Following graduation, Monroe went to work at Robins Air Force Base as an alcohol and drug counselor. He retired from Robins AFB after 30 years.

Monroe was married twice. He and his first wife, Avis, had one son, Monroe Abrams, Jr. who also graduated from St Peter Claver School and Mount de Sales Academy. Monroe, Jr., his wife and their four children live in Tennessee. Sometime after the death of his first wife, Monroe married a second time. He and his wife, Joan, who served for a number of years as principal of St. Peter Claver School, moved to Warner Robins, GA. Sadly, Joan passed away in August of 2020. The couple had been married for 45 years.

Bettye Middlebrooks is a longtime member of St. Peter Claver Parish in Macon, GA and a member of the Black Catholic History Advisory Board to the Archives.

Katy Lockard is the Director of Archives & Records Management for the Catholic Diocese of Savannah.

## Interview Transcript

**KLockard** OK perfect. Okay. So to start out we just need you to say your name.

**MAbram** Yeah. Name is Monroe Abram.

**KLockard** Yes, and Mr. Abram can you spell your name for us?

**MAbram** M-O-N-R-O-E, last name Abram A-B-R-A-M

**Klockard** Thank you.

**BMiddlebrooks** Okay Monroe, we're interviewing you now for Black History. We are trying to recapture some of the history that was lost long ago and we have the history of the church and school, but we wanted the history from the parishioners to tell their memories of church and school here at St. Peter Claver.

**MAbram** Um-hm.

**BMiddlebrooks** So you want to begin with one of your earliest memories?

**MAbram** I think I just stated one. I told this room we should be the baptismal room just however I was baptized in this room right here, see where we at now. [00:01:00] And my son, he was also baptized here too. In fact, we had the same godparents, you know. So, in 1933 is when I came into the church, you know. This is all to bring back so many, many memories up there. I was altar boy there.

**MAbram** The priest who was there then was a German priest, Father Prendergast<sup>1</sup>, he the one taught me and two other fellows how to do the Latin<sup>2</sup> for the mass, see. During those days the priest's back was to the people; he wasn't facing the people like now. Another priests that stayed with us for a long time was Father McKeever<sup>3</sup>, that stayed here for quite a few years and we were the regular altar boys and we would be at every [00:02:00] Sunday mass, see. Every mass.

**MAbram** And I remember at the time that usually wasn't a law but it was just the practice that women [would] sit on one side and the men on the other one, see. And my mother, I could remember her sitting right in one of the pews back here now. She used to get up early in the morning she used to make that six o'clock mass, six thirty mass, where she'd get back home to fix breakfast for us, so we could come to mass. I can remember now, every lady that you'd see in here had their head covered, and we were very faithful.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Kenedy's Official Catholic Directory, Rev. John Prendergast, SMA served as pastor of St. Peter Claver Parish from 1942 to 1946.

<sup>2</sup> Mass was spoken in Latin until after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) in many Catholic Churches in the country. At St. Peter Claver, mass changed to the vernacular language (English) on August 31, 1964.

<sup>3</sup> According to Kenedy's Official Catholic Directory, Rev. Michael J. McKeever, SMA served as assistant pastor of St. Peter Claver Parish from 1945 to 1946. After his time in Macon, he was assigned as pastor to Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Atlanta, where he served until 1957.

**MAbram** The thing that I remember most about this church, it was a priest by the name of Father Howard<sup>4</sup>, was a black priest, SVD order<sup>5</sup>, and this place never been so packed with Black, non-Catholics. You know, because no one had seen a black [00:03:00] priest before! And he was here for a whole week giving that mission<sup>6</sup>. And speaking of missions, I remember a time where this church wasn't a parish, it was a mission<sup>7</sup> and someone else took care of us, because we weren't able to take care of it. But anyway, Father Howard put on the mission there for a whole week, preached every week. And then like on Sundays they had a big high mass, what we call a high mass and low mass<sup>8</sup>, you know. He was the celebrant, and way back then they had the celebrant, and you had a deacon and you had the sub-deacon, see, and the deacon and sub-deacon almost like waited on him like the altar boys do to the priest now, see.

**MAbram** And they<sup>9</sup> confessed they had never seen nothing like that before you know. And I remember Sunday, that Sunday morning when everything ended, you know that we had a big breakfast for everyone, and as one would, we use to meet [00:04:00] when we was in the yard, we said, "It's Deo Gratias,"<sup>10</sup> you know, whatever that meant back then, but that's the way we used to greet one another you know.

**MAbram** But he [Father Howard] kind of got myself two others kind of shook up. [He] wanted to know, did we want to come down to Bay St. Louis.<sup>11</sup> See, that's the only place that a Black priest could go back then those days, and did we want to come down? So we all went to eighth grade and we wanted to become priest[s], but that didn't last too long, you know.

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<sup>4</sup> Information has not been located regarding Father Howard, however, a flier for a parish mission given by Rev. Thaddeus C. Boucree, SVD was found in the Chancery Correspondence Files from St. Peter Claver. According to the biographical information, Fr. Boucree was born in New Orleans, LA and attended seminary at Bay St. Louis, MS in the fall of 1939. He became a member of the Society of Divine Word (SVD) in 1945 and was ordained a priest in 1952. He went on to serve at parishes in South West Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas. While in residence as St. Francis de Sales Church in Louisiana in 1978, he conducted a parish mission September 9 through 13 at St. Peter Claver in Macon.

<sup>5</sup> Society of Divine Word is an order of religious men founded in 1875 by St. Arnold Janssen and is one of the largest Roman Catholic order that focuses on missionary work. For more information: <https://www.divineword.org/>

<sup>6</sup> Missions are usually a series of talks, masses, teachings, etc. given by a visiting priest or knowledgeable person on the faith. In the 1940's and 50's, Southern Province members were known to give weeklong missions to Black Catholic parishes in the South. While they were most active in the Gulf Region and at rural parishes, it would fit that Fr. Howard, SVD would have come to Macon.

<sup>7</sup> "Mission" referred to in this case is a term used to distinguish the status of a church in the Catholic faith which is given certain privileges (such as the celebration of specific sacraments) based on that status. A *mission* is subordinate, and usually run by, a *parish*.

<sup>8</sup> In the Pre-Vatican II Catholic tradition, a low mass was less formal than a high mass, which was usually sung. All prayers and music were in Latin.

<sup>9</sup> This was prior to 1962, so it was not common for a White person to be assisting a person of Color during mass in the South.

<sup>10</sup> Latin. Translates to, "Thanks be to God".

<sup>11</sup> St. Augustine Seminary, began by the SVDs in 1920, it was the first seminary to train Black men for religious life. For more information: <http://www.svdsouth.com/history.html>

**MAbram** [I] Graduat[ed] from the school<sup>12</sup> over there. See, my mother started school part of the time.

**MAbram** [Pause]

**MAbram** We only had four boys when I graduated from school there, you know, just four boys, maybe three girls, that was still in there, you know and [00:05:00] we only had one lay teacher there, which I think you and I spoke about. She was a fixture in the place named Mary Davis.<sup>13</sup> She did the kindergarten all of these years and I went from the kindergarten right on up to the eighth grade to the school here. It was one of the fondest memories I can remember.

**MAbram** Of course, Father Galvin<sup>14</sup> he came here and he stayed for years too, you know. And Father Gavin is the one who buried my father and my grandmother. And, most of my family, a lot of them was baptized from birth, but a lot of people was baptized on their death bed. They was called extreme unction back there during that time.<sup>15</sup> And every time before, like before my daddy died, he was baptized. [00:06:00] My mother's mother was baptized. My grandmother on my father's side, she was a convert. She married someone who was a Catholic, a very faithful man, named Mr. Thomas, then she became Catholic [and] she was buried here. She was a member of an old congregational church that no longer exists over there on Madison Street here in Macon.

**MAbram** I left here and I went down to Old Ballard.<sup>16</sup> But this was the fixtures of the place. The priest use to take us to Atlanta, they had a parish up in Atlanta, they use to say mass up there, so we made acquainted with the altar boys up there and altar boys here.

**BMiddlebrooks** Who brought Catholicism to you all?

**MAbram** Well the Pattersons<sup>17</sup> was very, very old time faithful members here and see, [00:07:00] before come Patterson, it was Hunt. It was a man come from Virginia named Tom Hunt. He was what they called the "church warden" in those days. They put out to fans and they made ice water and made all of that sort of stuff and he brought it back. And then, Marion Patterson, which is the mother of Jessemme (sp?) and Mary Patterson, who has passed away. There used to be a Catholic

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<sup>12</sup> Monroe attended St. Peter Claver Grammar School.

<sup>13</sup> Mrs. Mary Davis was a kindergarten teacher at St. Peter Claver School for many years during the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, however her exact arrival and retirement dates are unknown. She was small in stature but had a big heart and a way with children. She was well known throughout the community because of her reputation at the school. Mrs. Davis was married to Dan Davis who died young due to complications from surgery. While the couple had no children of their own, Mrs. Davis raised her niece and nephew, Mildred and Carl Henderson.

<sup>14</sup> Rev. John Gavin served as pastor at St. Peter Claver Parish from 1957 to 1970, when he retired. Following his retirement, he remained in residence at St. Peter Claver until his death in July 1980.

<sup>15</sup> Extreme unction is presently referred to as "Anointing of the Sick."

<sup>16</sup> Ballard High School was established in 1949 and was Macon's only school for African Americans in grades 9-12 until 1970. In 1970, the same year that schools integrated, several schools merged and Ballard High School became Ballard Hudson Senior High School. Notable alumni include Otis Redding and "Little Richard" Penniman. The high school has since closed and a middle school of the same name opened in its place in January 2008. For more information: [https://georgiahistory.com/ghmi\\_marker\\_updated/ballard-hudson-senior-high-school/](https://georgiahistory.com/ghmi_marker_updated/ballard-hudson-senior-high-school/)

<sup>17</sup> The Patterson family was active in SPC Parish as early as 1935.



place out here, Saint Stanislaus Circle<sup>18</sup>, the place still existed and I think that they had some nuns<sup>19</sup> or something that use to come over here to the school.

**MAbram** Now I don't know what come first, the school or the church. But I should know because I went to the canonization of Mother Drexel,<sup>20</sup> and I don't know whether seventy five [00:08:00] or a hundred years it will be today. But I would say to them that there's no way in the world that we would've been able to afford our education because we just didn't have the money to pay for it like that and people were coming in and the nuns<sup>21</sup> were just something else. They'd see you come to school and your clothes didn't look too good, kind of nasty or dirty. They'd put new clothes on you to send you back and then they were always giving money to the people, to the families, you know. And you got to remember too, all of these people coming through here wasn't Catholic, they were non-Catholic. But I remember the nuns. There were people who give them donations, and they would take it, and turn round and give it to us.

**BMiddlebrooks** Now when you were in elementary school here, you started in kindergarten—

**MAbram** Kindergarten, yeah.

**BMiddlebrooks** —and graduated? So what kind of activities did you all have?

**MAbram** Well, we had very little. We had the yard out there. We weren't [00:09:00] competing against anyone. We had a volleyball thing and then that was it. But I remember the day, see L.H. Williams<sup>22</sup> used to be right down here, four or five blocks down below. Well they changed the time of the calendar, of the school up here getting out and the time they get out because we were getting in such big fights going on. So, they changed the time. [Laughs] So I think we was getting out later than they were, you know.

**BMiddlebrooks** And did you have a band?

**MAbram** No we didn't have no kind of band.

**BMiddlebrooks** And a choir?

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<sup>18</sup> St. Stanislaus College, originally named Pio Nono College, was built in 1873 by Right Rev. William H. Gross, C.S.S.R., fifth Bishop of Savannah, to serve as a diocesan seminary. In 1883, the Jesuit community acquired the college for use as a Jesuit seminary. The college was open until its burned down in November 1921. After St. Stanislaus College burned down, the Jesuit community decided not to rebuild and the land was sold to the city in 1926 to build a new community on what became known as Stanislaus Circle.

<sup>19</sup> St. Stanislaus College housed both priests and nuns on the 42-acre property.

<sup>20</sup> Mother Katherine Drexel founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in Philadelphia, PA for the purpose of offering education to Native Americans and African-Americans. This included establishing new schools, such as Saint Peter Claver School in 1888. She was canonized a Saint in 2000 by Pope John Paul II. For more information: [https://www.katharinedrexel.org/st\\_katharine\\_drexel\\_overview/](https://www.katharinedrexel.org/st_katharine_drexel_overview/)

<sup>21</sup> St. Katharine Drexel founded St. Peter Claver School in 1903 and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament (S.B.S.) came to Macon in 1914 to staff the school. The Sisters retained an active role in administering the school until they turned the administration over to The Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Historic L.H. Williams Elementary School was built in 1905 and is a historically Black school, whose alumni include notable names such as "Little Richard" Penniman, Vietnam War hero Rodney Davis, and soul music great Otis Redding.

**MAbram** No, no, the choir that we had here was a lady named Essie Hutchings.<sup>23</sup> Her husband is co-owner of Hutchings Funeral Homes. She was the organist here. And they had another fellow [child] that sang in the choir named Bernard Rogers. [As an adult] He ran a shoe shop downtown on Broadway next door to the Douglass Theater. [00:10:00] Bernard Rogers, I think it was in the thirties when he went to Saint Emma's, the military's school in Virginia.<sup>24</sup> So then that's how my brother got to go to this school too. But Essie Hutchings, she was the organist here for years and years until she died. Now we did have some kind of choir, because she [Mrs. Essie Hutchings] would come over to the school and play the piano for that. And you know my sister, they always like having my sister sing. It was two songs they don't sing today in church, "O Salutaris" and "Tantum Ergo." She would sing them. And I know during the Christmas-time, when the people use to have the parties at the different stores down there [downtown], [00:11:00] they'd get my daddy to bring my sister down there, Bernadine,<sup>25</sup> to sing those songs, Tantum Ergo and O Salutaris.

**MAbram** It was all Latin songs back then. Just like all the Latin that we were learning for serving mass and singing. We had a book, on one side would have the Latin and the other side have the English, but we really didn't know what it meant. We really did know what it meant. But this time I expect you might see some of those books around now, the Latin on one side. Just like at midnight mass<sup>26</sup>, this place was packed. And they had non-Catholics come here. Everybody was looking for the midnight mass. It was a big thing. Everybody would show and that went on for a long time, long time. I don't know whether I have it today or not, but they [00:12:00] had a special service for that at that time.

**BMiddlebrooks** Now you mentioned to me before that a lot of people in the neighborhood were not Catholic.

**MAbram** Not Catholic.

**BMiddlebrooks** But the priests here took care of everybody in the community.

**MAbram** Yeah.

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<sup>23</sup> Essie Hutchings was born on November 23, 1894 to Ida Bond and Charlie Williams. It is unknown whether Mrs. Hutchings grew up Catholic or converted later in life, but at some point she joined St. Peter Claver as was their musician for many years. Essie was married to William (Willie) Pope Hutchings of Hutchings Funeral Home in Macon while Essie was a homemaker and active in the church community. She died on September 22, 1961 at age 66 and is buried in the Oakridge section of Rose Hill Cemetery on the Hutchings family plot.

<sup>24</sup> Originally a plantation, Colonel and Mrs. Edward de Vaux Morrell of Philadelphia purchased the property in Powhatan, VA in 1893 to establish a school for African-American youth. St. Emma's Industrial and Agricultural Institute opened in 1895 and the curriculum emphasized practical skills such as canning, farming, equipment repair, accounting and management. Later, it was reestablished as the St. Emma Military School. Following desegregation, the school's enrollment rapidly declined and it closed in 1972. For more information: <http://places.afrovirginia.org/items/show/39>

<sup>25</sup> Bernadine Abram was born on November 4, 1935, the younger sister of Monroe. Along with her siblings, she attended St. Peter Claver School and Mount de Sales Academy. In addition to singing in the church choir, Bernadine was also a member of the Council of Catholic Women, Associates of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Altar Society, a Lector and Eucharistic Minister, and the leader of daily morning prayer. She married Earnest Bailey and they had two children, Christopher and Helen. Bernadine died on February 5, 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Midnight mass is celebrated as the Christmas Vigil Mass at midnight on December 24<sup>th</sup>.

**BMiddlebrooks** Especially when they were sick or dying.

**MAbram** Oh yeah. Oh yeah, well you know when they got sick. Mostly they took him when they was really running short something to live on like clothes, money and rent and all of that sort of stuff. Didn't too many of them came here to be baptized because you've got to remember back then, like today, the predominant Blacks were all Protestant. So quite naturally, if we did it [were baptized], would be a lot of hell raised if they come and begin to get buried in the Catholic Church!

**MAbram** Well back in them days, there use to be an altar rail go[ing] cross that front of [the altar]. Well that altar rail, that means that if [00:13:00] you married a non-Catholic you couldn't go inside the altar rail to the sanctuary.<sup>27</sup> Well when my mother and father got married, they married them over in the priest's house. So from the priest's house it got better that they'd let you come into the church [to get married], but you couldn't go inside sanctuary. You had to stay outside the altar rail. Later on, they started letting you come into the sanctuary to have your marriage and then, if you had a Protestant minister, you could bring them along with you so the times just change, religion changed since then.<sup>28</sup>

**KLockard** Were your parents - one was Catholic and one was not?

**MAbram** Yeah. My mother was Catholic. My mother became Catholic through some of the kin people like I was telling you, old man Tom Hunt. She came through [them] and that's how she became [Catholic]. And she brought all us up [Catholic]. I had a brother and sister too [00:14:00] that were Catholic.

**BMiddlebrooks** And you had a youth organization too?

**MAbram** Yeah, yeah. [The] CYO.<sup>29</sup> It was a priest by the name of Father Canon.<sup>30</sup> He started that need. He's the guy [that] started having some things [activities] for CYO. Now, come to remember some years back, the priest rented a film to show movies here on Sunday night. And everybody [attended], you know, because there wasn't no movies, or nowhere else to go to on Sunday night. And I think it was a nickel a piece to go into the movie. So we would come here on Sunday night to go to the movie.

**BMiddlebrooks** Earlier you mentioned that men and women sat on opposite sides of the church.

**MAbram** Yes.

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<sup>27</sup> Arguments that altar rails separated a priest from his congregation and were unnecessary to guard the sanctuary were a point of dispute at Vatican II. Since 1965, the Church has stopped installing altar rails in new parishes and recommends parishes consider taking out their altar rails, but does not require it.

<sup>28</sup> The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) made many changes to worship services, such as speaking in English versus Latin.

<sup>29</sup> Catholic Youth Organization is a youth program run at the diocese level to help children and teenagers with their recreational, social, and spiritual needs. The first CYO was founded in 1930 in Chicago.

<sup>30</sup> According to According to Kenedy's Official Catholic Directory, Rev. Daniel J. Cannon served at St. Peter Claver Parish from 1946-47.

**BMiddlebrooks** And you were the first one I've ever heard say that. So since then though, talking to other people, I found out that they remember when men and women sat on opposite sides.

**MAbram** [00:15:00] Yes.

**BMiddlebrooks** And then there was a guy that was a convert.

**MAbram** Um-hm.

**BMiddlebrooks** And he said the first time he entered a Catholic Church, that's the way they were seated.

**MAbram** Um-hm.

**BMiddlebrooks** Do you remember about what time that was?

**MAbram** Hm. It had to be back there in the twenties and thirties, see because when I was born,<sup>31</sup> it was that way. I remember Mother use to sit right back there and you had faithful people who would come to say mass and that was their pew. You just didn't sit in their pew! That was their pew. You know I think [in] some old churches now everybody's got "their" pew.

**BMiddlebrooks** But you don't know when it changed?

**MAbram** I think it just gradually changed. It most probably changed in the sixties.

**BMiddlebrooks** Ok.

**MAbram** The sixties or maybe the fifties.

**BMiddlebrooks** After Vatican Two<sup>32</sup> maybe?

**MAbram** Yeah. Because during that time, when they changed the mass, [00:16:00] the way to mass was said in English. They stopped saying it in Latin and the priest faced the people.

**BMiddlebrooks** And all the children sat in front of the church?

**MAbram** Huh?

**BMiddlebrooks** Did all the children sit in front?

**MAbram** Yeah. And I remember times when they [would] bring the kids in, if I'm not mistaken, the boy sat on one side and the girl sat on the other one. Now they might have been sitting by grades. I don't know, but I can remember. I noticed back in them days, when someone came in church,

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<sup>31</sup> Monroe was born in 1933.

<sup>32</sup> The Second Vatican Council opened on October 11, 1962 and closed on December 8, 1965.

you just didn't bow down and nod.<sup>33</sup> You use to do nothing. You just sit there. You didn't look back to say, "hello," and all this other stuff. This handshake of peace<sup>34</sup> is something brand new, to come to where people got to really talk. We were a really silent church, just silent. And you didn't speak at all or talk on the inside. You waited until you got outside on the grounds [00:17:00] before you could speak. You know, you just didn't do that. You didn't sit there and talk like when we meet in the back of the church [today]. No you didn't do that then.

**BMiddlebrooks** All right, Monroe. Thank you so much.

**MAbram** Yeah.

**BMiddlebrooks** for telling us your story.

**MAbram** Yeah.

**BMiddlebrooks** We appreciate it.

**MAbram** Okay. Good.

[End of Interview]

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<sup>33</sup> Monroe refers to a time when talking in the chapel was considered irreverent. As Christians today become more comfortable with speaking in church, Mr. Abram notices a change in respect for the chapel.

<sup>34</sup> During the mass, the priest asks that the congregation "offer each other a sign of peace," prompting the congregation to turn to their neighbors in their pews and offer signs of peace, usually in the form of a handshakes or kisses. Liturgically, the sign of peace is a reflection of Jesus' teaching on forgiveness prior to offering gifts on the altar and is a way to unite the community gathered in love and reconciliation prior to receiving the Eucharist.