**Isaiah [0:02]:** All right. So if you could just tell me a little bit about yourself. Like how long you've been in Chicago, Rogers Park. When you joined the parish.

And how have you changed over the course of, like, your being a part of the parish?

**Leroy [0:23]:** Okay. So

so I've been a member of the parish since 1965, so that's more than half my life. So. Okay. So I've seen a lot of changes, of course. And I was just looking at this list that I had prepared. It's on the Edgewater Historical Society website. It's a list of all the pastors. And, um, with the exception of the first two, you know, I've known all the others. Okay. Now, the first two had a combined tenure of 32 years, but still, I mean, so Dr.. Reverend Picard, you know, and have you looked at that? Have you looked at the list of pastors yourself? Okay. So, you know, so everyone since then, you know, I've known so some better than others. And, you know, obviously, you know, like some some better than others. You know, it's just natural

progression. So.

So, you know, I was born in Edgewater, and except for going away to school, well, we moved to Rogers Park and then to Skokie and then the Gold Coast. And so when I was living with my parents, but since 1965, I've lived in Edgewater three only three different places. So.

**Isaiah [1:49]:** All right. So you joined in 1965, right?

**Leroy [1:54]:** Right.

**Isaiah [1:55]:** Why? Could you just tell me a little bit about why like did- like-?

**Leroy [2:00]:** Well, I mean, it was this was the closest parish. You know, there's that mindset. You know, you go in the parish, you're in, y know, And so, you know, I was born and raised Catholic. I went to St Gertrude's Grammar School and St Gregory High School. So so where I lived, I was always within a block or two of the L, so it was within short distance of St Ita's. And in all cases I could walk to church.

**Isaiah [2:30]:** And so how did you feel about your first visit to the church? Do you remember?

**Leroy [2:38]:** No, I don't know. You know, I mean.

**Isaiah [2:41]:** No, that's fair.

**Leroy [2:42]:** Yeah.

**Isaiah [2:45]:** So, um, could you tell me, like, when you knew this was your church? Like when you felt connected to the church and to the people?

**Leroy [2:56]:** Well, I guess it's a mindset that may be different from yours. And you are considerably younger, but when you grow up Catholic, you know, when you move, you join the parish where you live and that's your church. It's not it's not like maybe today will you go around and and check on what you like or or even denominations? That's how and that's how it worked. So, you know, I lived here. This is a new parish, you know, And so that what it was.

**Isaiah [3:27]:** And so could you tell me a little bit about your involvement with the church? Are you just a parishioner? Are you involved? Yeah.

**Leroy [3:37]:** Well, somewhat. I mean, more recently.

But I you know, a friend of mine from that I knew community figures in Uptown. And he- he goes here. And so he encouraged me to be an usher with him. So I agreed. And then also he asked me if we wanted to count money. So I did that. And we did that for a while until the pandemic. And for some reason our services were no longer needed. So we didn't do that. But that's how I became a little bit more involved than I was earlier. Um, but a number of number different things I did with some of the social pastors early on. Um, but not really intense, you know?

**Isaiah [4:25]:** All right. And so can you tell me like a typical week at St. Ita's, like, do you come just for mass? Are you here for confessions, um, adoration, silent prayer or anything like that?

**Leroy [4:41]:** No, it's generally, you know, Sunday mass except during Holy week, you know, then I that I make a point to go to, you know, Good Fri-, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday. Um.

**Isaiah [4:55]:** All right. And so, um, what's, what do you think an underutilized part of the church is? Or like one thing you wish people outside the church knew about it?

**Leroy [5:07]:** Hmm. Well, I would say since the Franciscans came, I can't say it's under utilized. And I would say that's probably the best thing that happened to the parish. Uh, because there's a lot of priests, they work together. Whereas before, you know, you know, was just the pastor, you know, which is more typical, unfortunately, now than it used to be. It used to be there's pastor and associate pastors and they lived in the, in the rectory together. And now it's in a number of parishes it's not that way at all. It's just the pastor living alone in a big house, really. So, no, I think this is beneficial for them and for the parish.

**Isaiah [5:52]:** And so how has the church changed over the course of your time here?

**Leroy [5:57]:** Well, I mean, the demographics have changed. I mean, I just looking at the list of associate pastors, too, when there there were predominantly Irish named, you know, in the beginning when I first came here, some German and now now it's not that way. It's it's more predominantly Hispanic. I'd say German, too, but it's the Irish dominance is no longer there in the demographics has changed for the parishioners, too, as well. You know, it's much more diverse than it was before.

**Isaiah [6:35]:** And so if you could, like, tell one story about your time from here, what story would it be?

Like any special events or anything.

**Leroy [6:49]:** Like, oh, spaghetti dinner. This is relatively recent, you know, And I know the people who are running it, and so I've helped out there, um, I guess just more with my interaction with Father Cook. I know. Um, and so, um, he has a great sense of humor, you know, and really, really hit it off very well, say closer to him than anybody, anybody else. Um, as a pastor or priest even. And so, um, I remember showing him this photo of myself when I was six years old with my father in front of Saint Ita's Church. And, and I am- I said, I have no idea why we were there, you know, because I went to Saint Gertrude's and. Yeah. And he said that was your first holy exorcism.

And I said, Well, it didn't work. Watch out. So I mean, just as I do, you know. So that's just a little story I tell, you know. And I also just said, you know, you know, when I die, I'd like you to officiate at the service. And I said, Oh, would you want me to schedule that? So, I mean, you have to just such a great sense of humor, you know. So anyway, that's a whole story.

**Isaiah [8:03]:** And so what keeps you coming back here? Is it just your culture? Like your like you've been here for so long or.

**Leroy [8:11]:** Well, I mean, it's again, yeah, it's your Catholic. You go to church on Sunday and you go to the parish or do you live? Pretty much. And so, no, it could be that if I were really dissatisfied, I'd go to another parish because it's not as strict as it used to be. Um, but I don't, I don't feel the need to do that. I have connections here, um, and it's close. I could walk if I need to. So it's a combination of that and convenience.

**Isaiah [8:41]:** And so

what has been the biggest change in the community, do you think? It's the demographics switch from, from like Irish and German to Hispanic?

**Leroy [8:54]:** Yeah. For the church, I'd say yes. And there's a general trend of fewer children, you know, nationally. And Edgewater as well, fewer younger people. So I don't know what the future holds, you know, looking at the demographics, but right now it looks pretty good. You know, t healthy attendance at mass, you know, And of course, on Easter and Christmas, of course, then it's back to.

**Isaiah [9:24]:** And so, um,

when did you hear the churches were getting merged into Mary, Mother of God, and do you feel like that's had an effect on the church.

**Leroy [9:41]:** MM

Not really and not in term. Personally, I, you know, I mean, it's the same I think, you know, I go to Saint Ita's, you know, I don't go to the other two, although I have gone a few times to St Gregory's for various occasions but um, so I don't think so. No I it's a requirement. It wasn't something that, you know, the parishioners here decided to do. You know, it was a mandate by the archdiocese. And, and so maybe the selection of the name, there were different options. And after I went with Mary, Mother of God too. But but it wasn't exactly a lot of choice on the part of the parishioners. It was a mandate from the archdiocese, which I understand. And I suspect that ultimately Saint Thomas of Canterbury will be closed of the three. And St. Ita's will remain because it's the largest has a parking lot, has an elevator.

**Isaiah [10:47]:** Um, and so do you think anything was lost or gained because of these mergers or no?

**Leroy [10:54]:** No, I don't know. I mean, it's never held, you know, it's never the desirable option, you know? But, you know, given the realities, fewer priests, fewer parishioners, you know,like I can see it happening. I don't think the archdiocese has handled it very well. But, you know, that's another that's another matter. Um, so, I mean, I think, you know, the the key negative was eliminating the the school related to the parish. You know, and I liken it to like in baseball, a farm system, if you look at the farm system, you're going to have trouble later on. You know, and so it's like that.

**Isaiah [11:40]:** what do you think the role is of the church in the neighborhood?

**Leroy [11:47]:** Um, well, I mean, it's, it's to serve its parishioners primarily, you know, not the community at large, although, you know, it should be an active part, yo know, but you know, I would say that's secondary.

**Isaiah [12:03]:** All right. Um, and so what's your favorite part about St. Ita's?

like it can either be like the building, the people, the community, the masses, you know.

**Leroy [12:19]:** Well, I'd say the building. I'm, I'm a fan of architecture and there's a beautiful, goth- authentic gothic church. So I mean, that helps. I like it. Um, I like the people too. So it's not one or the other.

**Isaiah [12:39]:** Um, and so, um, do you have any fears about like the church now that it's combined with Mary, Mother of God?

Um,

yeah.

**Leroy [12:53]:** Hm?

**Isaiah [12:54]:** Like, like do you fear for, like, the future of the church?

**Leroy [12:59]:** Well, in general, you know, I think there's going to be further demographic changes. There'll be fewer priests, fewer parishioners, fewer younger people coming up. So I don't have a solution to that, but I don't think it's a localized thing.

**Isaiah [13:17]:** And so, um, do you know when they closed the St. Ita school?

**Leroy [13:24]:** It was quite some time ago. Well, there was another merger. They combined the various parish schools into one North Lakeside Academy. And if I remember the name, and St. Ita's was one of the schools that was merged into this. And so they initially, I think, had three campuses. And now I think maybe there's only one

I guess it's broken down by grade level. And so then Saint Thomas of Canterbury school, is now located and St Ita's School Building, I don't know. Well, now it's Mary, Mother of God, but I don't I don't know the intricacy- intricacies of that procedure, you know, um, whether if you live within the boundaries of Saint Ita's Parish, formerly St. Ita's parish, that you can't go to St Thomas of Canterbury School. I don't know but that's an interesting question to find out.

**Isaiah [14:26]:** And so, um.

Hmm.

Um, how would you like to see the three sites work together? Like Saint Ita's, Saint Gregs, and Saint Thomas?

**Leroy [14:47]:** Well, I think the way it's working now, there's a certain degree of autonomy, and yet there's a combined parish. Um, I would like to see some economies of scale, which I'm not sure that I've seen. You know, I'd like to see like, what was the, the number of staff people before the merger for each and then after. So but I don't know that so but that's a logistical question. Yeah.

**Isaiah [15:17]:** All right. And so, what, what do you think about, like the, the staff that run the, the parish just as a whole?

**Leroy [15:34]:** Well, I don't know them any. I mean, I know Dorothy Julianne is here, and she's been here for a very long time, well before the merger. And, um, and then your director of music has been here 25 years. Um, beyond that, I'm not sure, you know, in terms of the lay people, um,

so I don't, I don't have that much interaction either with other, with Dorothy and, and Dan Legacy.

**Isaiah [16:02]:** All right? And so

if you had to change one thing about the church, what would you change?

**Leroy [16:12]:** You mean about this church or the church? The Catholic Church?

**Isaiah [16:17]:** Both, both, either or.

**Leroy [16:20]:** Well, one, I think there should be some limits on the length of sermons. Okay. And there. There should be some more focus on the sermons and what you want to accomplish. Um, you know, some of the priests are better than others. Th- that's a given. But, um, not all priests are good hymnalists. And those that aren't maybe should have others, you know, have a, have a like you go online and you hear the, you know, bishops. So basically, you know, have something like that. Um,

so I mean, there's a, there's a few priests that like you get somebody from another country and they're just not used to, you know, the, the American way of doing things. And they're not used to speaking with a microphone and they shout. So anyway, but so these are technical things you so that's one thing I think that could be improved.

**Isaiah [17:21]:** Is there anything you just want to, like, say about the church as a whole or just say for the record or anything like that?

**Leroy [17:31]:** No, I'm pleased. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. All right.

**Isaiah [17:34]:** That's all I had.

**Leroy [17:35]:** Okay. Okay.

**Isaiah [17:37]:** All right. Thank you so much.