

Transcript

Razaq Anibaba: Good afternoon. My name is Razaq Anibaba and I'm here with Christopher Grant. I'm about to ask him about St. Gregory the Great. Prior to Mary Mother, and let's just start. Take it away. So can you introduce me? Can you introduce yourself for me? Sorry.

Christopher Grant: [Jokingly] Oh, your name is Razaq

RA: [Chuckles] Yes.

CG: My name is Christopher Grant, lifelong member of St. Gregory the Great Church, Mary, Mother of God parish. 61 years old, actually live two blocks from the church and lived there my whole life.

[Short pause]

I've been involved in St. Gregory's for most of my life, [Eyes open wide] actually, all my life. I'm currently the chairman of the St. Gregory Credit Union, which is kind of an interesting identity, particularly in a Catholic parish structure to have a credit union still. [Leaning forward] And I've had many, many different roles in the parish. You know, one being a parishioner itself, but I've been a student. I went to the grade school here at St. Gregory's, went to the high school at St. Gregory's.

[Recalling] I was on the ... I was the Chairman of the Finance council for many years. I was the president of the parish council for many years. I sang in the choir. I was a cantor at Mass. I was an altar boy. I worked in the rectory when I was a kid, so I've done everything in St. Gregory, as you can possibly imagine.

RA: So you were well invested?

CG: Well invested, yes

RA: All right. So you mentioned that you have been a member since 1962. So can I ask you what made you stay since 1962?

CG: I think it was because my participation. I always had opportunities to participate in various activities within the church, within the parish. I don't know if a lot of people get that opportunity, or even have an interest in pursuing those things and getting involved, necessarily. But we were always welcomed and always invited to participate and do things in the parish, even if it was little. And we used to have carnivals every year. And we were always asked to help. So you know, even though we were in, you know, 3rd,

4th, 5th, 6th, we were, you know, we volunteered at the carnival, or the Mardi Gras we used to have, so there was a lot of different activities. And they always asked us to volunteer and participate. [Head nodding] And I think that was important: that you always felt welcome. And also everything that we ever did here, I always felt that it was the backbone of it was our faith, right [warm half grin]. There was always some religious aspect to it necessarily, which was always important as well. And I think also, maybe because I was a student here, and I lived here, I mean, it's not like I was coming from a whole different neighborhood. I was living in the neighborhood that St. Gregory is in. I was here every day of my life. I went to the grade school, I went to the high school. I walk past this building 20 to 30 times a day, you know, play basketball, I into sports. You know, there was everything. [Twirls finger] Was right here.

You know, in fact, Pierce. There's a school called Pierce, that's just east of us. If we went to the other side of Clark Street, because we're right here at Clark Street, and Bryn Mawr, but if you went to the other side of Clark Street when I was a kid, that was a whole different neighborhood. I mean, that was like going on vacation somewhere because we never went to that side of the street. You know, the furthest we ever went was probably

[Mapping out the neighborhood] I'd say maybe Ashland, and the east side. [Looking into distance] And then we used to go to the McDonald's right here, which wasn't there at the time when I was a kid.

[Fixed gaze] But there was a great candy store called Charlie's. We're getting close to it's fantastic. Oh my God, it was fantastic. But we all stayed in the neighborhood, you know, so I was always active. I was always participating. My parents were not very active in the church. They did go to Mass every Sunday. And then my mother and my father would volunteer at different activities for school, so that there was that support mechanism. It wasn't frowned on, you know? So I think maybe it was part of it as well.

RA: Can you tell me about your first visit? Maybe most likely in your teen years and then compared to your first visit as an adult. Or like the difference between it ... like what was the difference St. Gregory presented to you?

CG: Um, it always felt the same no matter when I was a little kid or when I was older. No. It's never really felt differently to me. You know. I think I was probably somebody that knew more of what was going on. Because I was so active. I knew more of the people that were here. I knew more of the nuns, I knew more of the priests. I knew more of the parishioners, because I was very active. [Shrugs shoulders] But no, I never really felt different. From the time I was a little kid till now. I'm 61 years old. [Head tilted and arm shrug] So

RA: What is the most beautiful thing about the church now? And now, and also, in the 80s too.

CG: I would say. I like the tradition of the church. I like that we're doing things that have been... that people have been doing for thousands and thousands of years. So you could go to a mass now, and it's the same mass that you probably would have attended two thousand years ago. Maybe not, as you know, long or formal, but it's the same, right? So we go back. We can.. whatever we're doing now is what they did a long, long, long time ago. [Places hand on forehead and looks down] I do wish sometimes that they brought back more of the mystery of the mass necessarily because I remember as a kid, there was more pomp and circumstance for Mass and stuff. More formality to it. It was more like you sat there and you're like in awe. Right. You know, like you couldn't believe it. Oh, my God, these incense all the time. And they used to have the Eucharistic procession. You know, they'd have this big tent over the Eucharist, the monstrance. And then he's like, whoa, you know, or I remember when I was in kindergarten, the kindergarten here at St. Gregory's had a walkway that went through the kindergarten and then there was a door that went into the high school. So I remember when I was a kid, we had a Monsignor here at St. Gregory's. So when I was in kindergarten, Monsignor Turlock. He used to wear the clothes like a bishop, because he was a Monsignor. So he had these clothes on, they were different colors and stuff. So I remember when we were kids, he walked through the kindergarten. And we all thought he was the Pope. Because, you know, he was always in this outfit of a Monsignor. And he was like, [Subtle jazz hands] Whoa, it was here comes the Pope. You know, he'd walk through and bless us as he walked through, and he goes through the doorway, and he goes into the high school. So it was like this, like the Pope came through our kindergarten, you know, but it was just a Monsignor. He was just a priest. He was the past pastor here at one time. I think he was like the second or third pastor of St. Gregory's, but he was like, Ooh, you know, here comes a real holy man, you know, yeah.

RA: So you mentioned that's one thing you would change. However, what is something else you feel like, has changed thus far from the past?

CG: From the past, I'd say [Laughing] it's I think more when we were kids or younger, we felt like we're obligated. I think we've kind of lost that. There's no sense of obligation. You know, I know for several people, my family don't go to church anymore. My mother watches it on TV. I used to stream it for her during COVID. I used to stream mass for people because they couldn't go to mass. My my family used to go to Mass. My nieces and nephews, they really have no interest in church anymore. I don't know what's going

to spark an interest for them. I don't know. [Palms up] I have no idea. I think those are questions that we're asking in today's world because every institutional religion, today's having those same issues, right? There's so much competition for our time, energy and effort. And unless there's some relevance to it, if you want to call relevance, but unless there's some reason in their own lives to participate, they kind of just go away, right?

RA: Yeah.

CG: You know, you're young, young guy, you're in college. You know what, why are you active, right? I mean, what, what interests do you have in your faith? If you know what keeps you here, I know you're going to a Catholic University.

RA: Yeah.

CG: And maybe it's your background.

RA: My case is different. Okay. I'm a student at the University of Michigan. Oh, but I'm taking this class for transfer credit.

CG: So Go Blue [Fist pump]

RA: Go Blue [Return the gesture, smilingly]

CG: Yeah! That's where my niece goes

RA: Really?

CG: Yeah. She lives in Ann Arbor. Yeah.

RA: But that's why I'm currently at Loyola. So I guess you could say mine's a little different. Compared to my teammates.

CG: What's your major?

RA: My major is UX Design

CG: Yeah, interesting. So are you Catholic?

RA: No.

CG: Do you have any religion?

RA: Christian

CG: So you're just a Christian. So Evangelical, are you born again? Or? You were baptized?

RA: Baptist

CG: Are you born in the United States?

RA: Brooklyn, New York.

CG: Brooklyn man? Yeah. That's good. Yeah. Well, good for you. Any thoughts about converting to Catholicism?

RA: Not right now.

CG: Nothing yet?

RA: Yeah, no.

CG: This may give you a little draw. Participating in this whole interview process and stuff.

RA: Well, let's see. Let's move on to your ...

Stephanie walks in

CG: Bye! Take care of yourself.

Stephanie Held: Hello! [Smiling with whole face]

CG: Oh no! I thought you were Kitty.

SH: Sorry. No, Kitty is Elsewhere.

CG: How are you?

SH: I'm Stephanie. I'm the one who has been emailing you. Do you guys need anything? Are you all set up?

RA: No, we're fine. [Thumbs up]

SH: Okay, perfect. All right.

CG: I got a question for you. You're not a relative of like Maria held or Conrad held or anybody like that.

SH: Not that I know of, because I'm not originally from this area. But maybe, both of my parents are from the Midwest

CG: [Pointing at the door across the hall] That one classroom is the credit union. Credit Union used to be here. [Twirls finger] This whole area here was the credit union. So you'd come in that entrance. And then there was a big countertop here. And then there was no wall here. And we had our conference table here. And then the loan room was down the hallway. So this was the credit union building. That was it. And then they had Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts upstairs, and then storage and stuff like that. But it wasn't like this at all. And then, about 25, 30 years ago, we had a new pastor, and he wanted to get all the offices out of the rectory. So we moved the offices here, and we got a grant to rehab this building. And then we moved the credit union from here to the gymnasium.

RA: So when was the credit union founded?

CG: Credit Union was founded 1950. 76 years, it's been around a long time.

RA: And how long have you been running the credit union?

CG: I've been running the credit union probably about 35 years. Yeah, I got involved because my father was on the board of the credit union. And he got me involved

RA: when it initially was started back in 1950?

CG: No, no, I didn't get involved until probably the 70s

RA: [Clarifying] No, Your father.

CG: Oh, my father probably got involved, maybe probably 70s and 80s. He wasn't an original founder of the credit union at all.

RA: Wow. Okay.

CG: But yeah, I think I think I got involved when they started to have to look at technology, because I was interested in technology when I was a kid. I think we had to get a new computer system for the credit union or to automate some of the stuff. So my dad said, why don't you come on board? And you can help us find something. So that's what I did. I came on board, and I helped them find a technology software solution to manage the credit union itself. So that's how I got involved.

RA: What are some challenges the credit union has faced during your time with the credit union?

CG: Let's say it was probably membership, right? Participation, getting people, getting people to, I'd say, membership, getting people to join. So I think a lot of people don't understand what a credit union is. How can a church have a credit union? I think still today, I think people still don't understand how can St. Gregory's have a credit union? Is it the same as a first commercial credit union? Yeah, it is exactly the same. We don't do mortgages, but we're exactly the same. We're a little credit union, we do loans, we have savings. We pay dividends. So we're the same as a large financial institution. We just don't do all the services and programs that they would. But yeah, I mean, I think it's getting to people that are even to know that it's here, right. And then I think more of an online presence. That's going to be a challenge. For us, because everything is more on site, you got to come to the credit union, you got to call on the phone, things like that. But we're trying to move it so that we can automate and provide more online for people like your age. [Pointing towards Razaq] You don't want to go to the building, you want to do it through your phone. So we're trying to move to that. And we will eventually, we're getting there. I think that's going to help us. I think that's probably our biggest challenge.

RA: So who would you say currently benefits from the credit union right now?

CG: Well, you know, I think credit unions are ... our past pastor, Bob cook. He's one of the Franciscan friars. He did a lot of research on credit unions and how it aligns with the Catholic social teaching that exists within the church. And one of the things that we're trying to establish, provide more support of is, you know, we've got the Canterbury house at St. Thomas Canterbury, which is a Catholic Worker facility, if you're familiar with it or not. If you're not, you should interview James who runs the Catholic Worker at Canterbury house, fantastic. But you know, there's a lot of people that are in need. And one of the things I think that the Credit Union is starting to do a little better job of is providing that need to people. An example would be, you know, just recently, we had somebody come in for a loan, who was out of work. So if you're out of work, nobody's

going to give you a loan. But St. Gregory Credit Union did. And we gave this person a loan in order to pay back rent, otherwise, they were going to evict them. Because he couldn't pay the rent, because he wasn't working. But he was just like, in process of finding a job. So we gave him a little loan to pay some of the back rent in order to keep himself, get himself stable. And now he's been working, and he's paying off his loan. And, and one of the ... that was a referral from the Catholic Worker house. So it's that kind of thing that our credit union does for our members, our parishioners that a bank would do, right. That's where our credit union is different. We're a faith based credit union. That's, that's what we exist for, in my opinion. I don't think a credit union should be, you know, \$400 billion in assets. Credit Union should be like St. Gregory Credit Union, we're 400 thousand in assets, and we help people with their everyday lives, you know, make a difference. Or if somebody's delinquent in a loan, or regulations, say go after them, sue them, go off to take their car away? No, I'm not gonna do that. If they continue to pay \$5 A month against their loan, I'm gonna keep that loan to books. Because eventually, they're gonna get themselves out of the problem that they're having. And they'll pay back the loan, you know, so it's those things.

RA: So what would you say? Is the No, okay. So grant that you just gave one. So would you say that's like your favorite memory working at the credit union, helping the guy

CG: Helping people. I mean, another memory was, you know, this was where my first account was. My first savings account was at St. Gregory Credit Union. So when I was five, six years old, I opened my first account. So I was able to take my birthday money and put it into St. Gregory's credit union right? I went to the credit union with my passport, my little Passbook, you know, you had the little numbers on there. I went and made my deposit. Or sometimes I used to when I would get to be a teenager, not even a teenager. I say my seventh and eighth grade. I'd come over sometime. We want to take some money out. And Mr. Lowry, who was Credit chairman, he'd asked me what I want to do with the money and I was like, [jokingly speaking gibberish], I want to buy some books for school. I wasn't buying any books. I was going to buy candy or spend it on junk, right? But you know, it was my money. I put it in, I wanted to take some of it out, you know, but I would say getting me started to save. That was my first savings account, was at St. Gregory Credit Union. And it was cool, because it was right here. It was right next to my school. It was a block from my house.

RA: You mentioned the credit union is for parishioners. So what is the criteria in order for the Credit Union to view you as a parishioner?

CG: So you have to live in the parish boundaries. And it's expanded now because now we're not only St. Gregory, but we're also St. Ita's and St. Thomas of Canterbury. So St. Gregory was more of a local church. Yeah. St. Ita's is not a local church, St. Ita's, the

parish doesn't have parishioner boundaries. St. Ita's is more of a community church where anybody can be a member of St. Gregory's or St. Ita's. Gregory was just between Glenwood, Western, Peterson, and Foster. That was the parish boundaries. Ita's doesn't have boundaries. So one of the things that's going to allow us to do is we're going to open up possible membership to anybody. Anybody who's just a member of one of those churches can be a member of the St. Gregory Credit Union.

RA: So with the merger and Renew My Church project, what challenges arose for you when you heard that the churches were being merged pertaining to the credit union?

CG: One of the challenges I thought was, you know, is the new pastor of this new merged parish going to want a credit union because we can't exist on our own. We're not run by the Catholic church, but our charter, all credit unions have a charter either their charter through a company like you know, S&C electric over on Ridge. They have a credit union. But it's S&C Electrics credit. So their charter is a company. There are community credit unions, whose charter is communities. But there's also like us, a faith based credit union. And our charter is the church, St. Gregory, or, in this case, Mary, Mother of God now. So I was home, I was like, you know, I went there with our new pastor, which was Bob cook at that time? Is he going to want to credit him because he doesn't want to credit you and we can't exist, we'd have to go and merge with somebody else. And he came along, and at first, I don't think he understood it. Because he had a lot of things on his mind, you know, this whole merger going on. But then I think after a while, he was like, we have a credit union. It's like, what a perfect opportunity. I mean, it's... and then he did all this research on how it aligns with the Catholic teaching. And the friars, you know, they have these three pillars of their, of their, I don't know if it's their faith, it's their order. You know, they focus on faith, the poor, and what's the other the arts. And that sounds like St. Gregory, or this new mary mother of god parishes now, you know, St. Ita's is is more like the foundation of the faith. Right. That's our main church. St. Gregory's has the St. Gregory Cultural Center. St. Gregory Hall. That's more of the arts. Right? And then St. Thomas of Canterbury is where we have the food pantry and in Canterbury house, and that's focusing more on the poor and stuff. So it's a real fantastic structure for this new parish that was established through renew my church. But I'd say that was probably I thought one of the largest challenges for the credit union was, you know, was this guy going to support or not? And if he wasn't the new pastor, I mean, and if he wasn't, then we'd have to close it up or merge with somebody else. Interesting fact now is, there's a credit union called St. Jude, which is their charter, is the Claretian Order downtown. They're thinking of merging, because, you know, they don't have any employees necessarily anymore. So we're in discussions right now for having them merge with St. Gregory's to kind of take over that credit union and come to us. So it's going to increase our assets size, we're

going to maybe provide more opportunities. We'll have a location downtown, which we didn't have before. So there's a lot of opportunity thing for us, which is you know, a wonderful opportunity for the parish to so

RA: You mentioned a potential future merger. So what So what would you like Mary Mother of God to look like in five years? Pertaining to the credit union?

CG: Oh, I would love to see Mary, Mother of God have you know, so many parishioners that we can't even... [Wide eyes] we'd have to have like, five, six masses a day, you know, wouldn't that be a wonderful thing. You know, right now, we have a Saturday mass at St. Gregory's. We have a Sunday Mass and St. Gregory's. I think we have two masses at St. Thomas Canterbury. And I think we have like five masses or six masses over at St. Ita's wouldn't be wonderful to have that every week at every one of our churches. Yeah, that'd be exciting.

RA: Yeah, it would be fantastic.

CG: Yeah, I think it's coming around. I think that a lot of people are being pulled in. There's something missing in people's lives. I think ... I think Catholic churches growing again. After many, many, many, many, many years of decline. One thing let's say, give me an example. You came from Passages? Passages, a charter school, right. You were in a Catholic school? Yeah. So when I went there it was a Catholic school, right. Passages is not, you can't create a charter school based on faith. But Passages was housed here. And I know sometimes you guys came and participated in things at St. Gregory's.

RA: Not when I was there

CG: Not when you were there, I could have sworn that they had to like some kind of activities or something in the church. But I think that was, you know, I think something like that is something that you could kind of pursue, right. I mean, I'm sure a lot of kids at passages had some kind of faith. Right. Maybe some of them were Catholic. I don't know. I'm assuming some of them were out there. But yeah. So there was an opportunity to kind of get some new parishioners for the church in that in that aspect. Even though it's just a charter school, right. Yeah. And you were here, you're right next door. Yeah. So like, one of the things we wanted to do, which we never did, is do more of a marketing effort to the schools. So when you were here, there's why there's no reason why we couldn't have had you at account at the credit union. Right? When you were over here, you were a little kid here.

RA: Yeah. I came here in second grade.

CG: So we could have had you over there opening your first savings account at St. Gregory Credit Union when you were here in second grade? Wouldn't that have been cool. And then we could have had it open. The day you were at the gym? Yeah. So you could come to your credit union put your dollar in your savings account, or 50 cents, or whatever it was, I mean, to you, it's probably a lot of money when you were a kid. Right. Yeah. But still, I mean, get you involved in trying to save right? Yeah. So. So we never we never pursued it. We talked about it, but we never did.

RA: So with efforts like that. Do you think those efforts can also be translated to the other parishes?

CG: Yes, completely. Fact we're going to have, we're going to give presentations and stuff to the other churches. So there's a lot of opportunity. You know, it just takes time and effort. Right and executing on a plan, right. It's great to have plans. But if you can't execute they're useless, right. It's like you have a sheet of notes here. If you didn't have that, you'd be like, What do I ask next, you know

RA: So you mentioned you were also still a part of the parish in the 80s and 90s. So were there any churches around here as well? At the time, So what made this church different from other churches in the community around the 80s? And the 90s?

CG: Well, I would say it's probably you know, we have a beautiful campus. This church has a beautiful campus. I mean, there's no other church in this area. I think it has a campus like St. Gregory's does. And we had, you know, we have the church, we have the schools. We have the gym, a separate gym. Yeah. All the other schools in this area. They have gyms that are attached to their schools. Yeah. Or it's just a room of the school. You know, St. Hilary's, their gym is so small. Our Lady of Lourdes, which was, you know, south of us. Their gym is part of the school, which is now condos. St. Ita's had a very small gym. Let's see, St. Henry's closed up. Yeah, I mean, just our campus was fantastic. I mean, you decided when you went here that the gym is beautiful. And there's six classrooms over there at that gym too, which is really nice. The basement and the basement social hall was fantastic. We had bingo down there every week.

RA: I think they still had that when I was there as a kid.

CG: Yeah, So I think it's the campus. And also the church. Our church is beautiful. I mean, it is beautiful. Kind of very nice. But St. Gregory's I feel it's more homey, more welcoming. You know? I don't know what you think. Have you ever been into the church?

RA: Yeah, we did. We took a tour with the class

CG: Canterbury is more modern, smaller. It's a different style, right. All three of our churches I think are different in terms of design, architecture and stuff, but I think St. Gregory's is just more. More homey, right? I feel very warm when I go into St. Gregory. Not that I don't like Ita's and Canterbury, but it feels more homey. Yeah, I feel like I'm sitting on my couch [bursts into laughter]. Even though the benches are not that comfortable, but the pews

RA: Well, thank you so much Chris. Those were all the questions that I had. I appreciate you.