# silent ACCEPTANCE

Fifty years ago, Christian Brothers High School broke ranks with Southern culture and tradition to open its doors to a black student. This new venture in Memphis, Tennessee of "education by association" would later tear the city's public schools apart. For the city's public schools today, the hurt has not yet been fully healed. For Christian Brothers education, new challenges lie in wait.

Terence McLaughlin, FSC

# silent ACCEPTANCE

by

Terence McLaughlin, FSC

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OTHER WRITINGS BY THE AUTHOR

*Catholic School Finance & Church State Relations*
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*Life of Brother Joel Damian*
Chicago District Publication, St. Mary's Press (1994)

*Folk Literature Series*
Seven booklets – 1992-2003 – Private Circulation

*The Schools That Faith Built*
Chicago San Miguel Schools, St. Mary's Press (2003)

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Christian Brothers University Buildings and Memorials – SMC Press (2003)

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*Blessed To Teach*
Lasallian Teacher Readings and Practices, Memphis, TN (2010)



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# forward

The entrance of the first African-American into an all-white high school in Memphis on August 16,1963 is detailed in this memoir, *Silent Acceptance*. It is written by the man who navigated that entrance at Christian Brothers High School, Brother Terence McLaughlin, F.S.C. A special integration program for thirteen black youngsters in four all-white public elementary schools began in 1961 and post-secondary schools became open to all students in the late 1950s. The high school chapter of this movement began with the petition of the Jesse Turner Sr. family to the Christian Brothers to enroll their eldest, Jesse Turner Jr., beginning in September of 1962. *Silent Acceptance* takes the reader from that registration in 1962 all the way to the present and provides the reader with insights into a very important moment in the history of Memphis, of the Christian Brothers and of its family of alumni, personnel and friends since the arrival of the Brothers in Memphis in November of 1871. Brother Terence takes the pulse, so to speak, of our country and Memphis and its environs regarding race relations. And in that context, Brother opens to the reader the events that started the racial integration of the high schools in Memphis. Yes, the movement started fifty years ago and yes, the movement has quite a journey ahead.

— Brother Joel William McGraw, F.S.C.
*Assistant Principal*
*Christian Brothers High School*

# in gratitude

"Let's armchair this for a moment," Brother Philip Lynch, a great teacher who served the three universities of the Brothers in the Midwest would say to a student when he felt that the topic at hand needed more discussion. So from a chance meeting in a school corridor or from a structured classroom, the conversation moved to a much more comfortable and informal setting.

I was fortunate to experience such relaxing conversations with many professional educators as I struggled to shape the direction of this writing. This sharing of perspectives helped me to keep the writing in focus as the old stories unfolded and new ones emerged.

Ellen Faith and Benjamin Head of the CBU community; Mary McDonald, Superintendent of Catholic schools; and Chris Fay, Principal of CBHS each gave me new energy to keep exploring. These people shared their deep involvement in their work and passed on to me many thought-provoking ideas for Lasallian education into the future.

Pleasant and stimulating phone conversations with our storytellers, Monsignor Val Handwerker and Monsignor John McArthur, who were students with Jesse Turner back in the '60s at CBHS; and with Robert Crone and Jack Moran, teachers at CBHS during Jesse's high school days, who each added new dimensions to the story. A focus group of twelve black students who are now attending CBHS added their views on what "education by association" is today.

Our readers: Brother Joel McGraw of Memphis; Brother Konrad Diebold, Chicago; and Benjamin Head of CBU, did so much more than add commas and periods or talk about the mood, matter and

manner of the presentation. They entered into the story, added polish here and there, and suggested new approaches while adding perceptive insights about the content. Their conversations and corrections were most helpful.

Cory Dugan, CBU, upon whom I have leaned for help in formatting three previous publications, was present again to help me put the final touches on the writing and to make it print-ready for the publisher. His help was invaluable.

While my conversations with Jesse Turner, now president of Tri-State bank in Memphis, have mostly been of a casual nature, we did appear together for a panel discussion at CBHS almost ten years ago. Our most recent conversation was a phone call in which we agreed to meet for lunch in the near future. At times when I wondered if this writing was worth the effort, I thought back to Allegra Turner, Jesse's mother, and I feel that it was this reflection on her "can do" spirit that got me to the finish line. This year, the actual happening is entering its 50th year; and the author is entering his 90th. It seems time to put my quill to rest.

# introduction

*Silent Acceptance* is the term being used to describe how the white and black communities of Memphis accepted their roles in the city's segregated society. The white community accepted their privileged position and enjoyed it; the black community accepted their obsequious position and endured it. This culture, established both by law and tradition, remained unchallenged in the Memphis educational community until beyond the mid-twentieth century. The reader is introduced to this silent acceptance in the first chapter of this writing and picked up again when the challenges of Lasallian education for the next fifty years are discussed in the final chapter – status quo or silent acceptance.

The story of Jesse Turner's entrance into CBC became a direct challenge to the prevailing culture of Memphis. The culture of the South, and Memphis in particular, is presented in great detail to show how this new form of "education by association" did not fit gracefully into wider society. CBC had its challenge in 1963; the public schools of the city met their great challenge ten years later.

A black student entering a high school today in Memphis is a common occurrence. No heads turn; it is a non-event. This, after all, is twenty-first century USA. Students of all races are able to learn together. Neighborhood patterns may say otherwise, but educational opportunities are presenting themselves to everyone. Turn back the clock fifty years and you will see a completely different picture.

This is a story of a young black man asking to enter an all-white Catholic school in 1963 in this two-culture city of Memphis, Tennessee, and the school's willingness to break ranks with the city's cultural

code to welcome him. The student is Jesse Turner Jr. and the school is Christian Brothers High School, known then as CBC. Tensions did arise, but from an unexpected source: the Catholic leadership of Memphis. It is a credit to everyone involved that these discussions remained, for the most part, behind 'closed doors.'

Jesse's entrance to CBC was merely a prelude to what was to come to the public schools of Memphis ten years later. For CBC, the transition would be a few students at a time entering a private school. For the Memphis public school system, after all of its delaying tactics were spent, it became a cultural clash which involved thousands of students in many schools.

It was the racist culture of Memphis that had been developed and nurtured through the years which created the racist mentality of the 1960s. The Memphis mind was formed by a slanted press during the era when newspapers were the only source of news in the city. Later when the theatre became a medium to bring new ideas into the city, Memphis movies were censored to protect the viewer from seeing blacks in any role other than that of being inferior to whites. The Memphis parents and grandparents of thse days (l963-1973) were the recipients of this filtered information.

It is within this racist climate that this story takes place. The Civil Rights movement was just beginning to gain momentum, but it was getting little traction in Memphis. The white churches of the City, Protestant and Catholic, and the Memphis School System, public and private, were hesitant to be identified "as those for whom the new is tried" and were quite content "to be the last to lay the old aside." (Alexander Pope) The two-school system of education in Memphis is gone, by law, but the schools today still remain mostly separated black and white institutions by neighborhood or by choice. The final chapter will focus on education in Memphis today (2012) and what some of the possibilities may be for the future in this poorest, majority African-American city in the United States today.

# chapter one

## DEVELOPMENT OF A MINDSET
MEMPHIS – 1900-1963

In a sense, a society is a product of its own environment, an environment that is also creating itself each day. A society develops its own rules of acceptable behavior and acts out of the wisdom of the resources available to it. Societies, being the human institutions that they are, can be progressive or have blind spots which slow their growth. The background for this story will focus on the blind spots in segregation. It was segregation that stunted educational progress in Memphis and throughout the South for many years.

Racial injustice existed throughout the country during the years that are being reviewed. Both the North and the South became stories in contradiction. In the South, the black person could come close to the white. Black women took care of the white children in the home, cooked the meals and did the housekeeping. And black yardmen, known to the family by first name, never "Mr.", had a friendly working relationship with the family. As close as the contact may have been, it was always understood that in this society the black people had their "place." They could come close on the white's terms, but it was not wise to attempt to move out of one's assigned spot in society. Don't get 'uppity'! In the North this closeness was lacking, the attitude being that you may aspire to any job, but stay away from me, 'not in my neighborhood.' This approach led to neighborhood zoning, red-lining

and sometimes rioting. Segregation was alive with contradictions: "come close but never try to become equal to or above me," said the South; "go above me if you wish, but do not come close to me," said the North.

It needs to be remembered that racism was active in many other sections of the country and it took many forms as well. Even in the mid-1960's in Chicago, three years after CBC in Memphis was integrated, Martin Luther King, Jr. was pelted with stones as he marched in a white neighborhood protesting discrimination in housing in Chicago's southwest side. "I have seen many demonstrations in the South, but I have never seen anything so hostile and so hateful as I have seen here today," was his response.[1] This was an example of the "not in my neighborhood" mentality.

I must admit to being shocked when reading about race relations in the country during the twentieth century and finding that a most heinous crime was committed way up north in my home town of Duluth, Minnesota, in the 1920s. Black circus workers had come to town, and within a short time six of them were accused of rape, but later to be found not guilty. After being put in jail, a white mob broke in, dragged the men out, and hanged three of them right in the center of the city. I was not alive when this happened and had never heard it spoken of at any time after. In 2003, the city created a memorial plaza near where the lynching took place. One of the participants in this early crime confessed to one of his grandchildren what he had done. This prompted a movement to publicly admit the crime and to memorialize the event.

I feel that these two events – both Northern incidents – needed to be mentioned to demonstrate how prevailing this racial hatred was in the United States through the years, and that it was not just a southern attitude. Racism during these years in the South was 'packaged.' It was controlled; the black was subdued. It had custom and law on its side. In the North, racism may not have been openly expressed very often, but there was a subtle form of the same evil. It was not until the black migration to the northern cities in the mid-twentieth century and beyond that the feelings that were hidden surfaced, and rioting became more common.

## "examining with careful curiosity"

Joseph J. Ellis in his history writing, *Founding Brothers,* quoted Lytton Strachey on his method of writing a modest account of a larger historical event. Strachey said that the explorer of the past "will row over the great oceans of material, lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen from those far depths, to be examined with careful curiosity."[2] Our bucket is being lowered here and there, generally at twenty-year or so intervals, to set the stage for the story of integration at CBC in 1963.

## Plessy vs. Ferguson – "legalizing the Jim Crow"

It was the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision in 1896 that made segregation legal as long as the facilities and public services that were given to blacks were equal to those given to whites. This became the famous 'separate but equal' segregation policy that spread across the country. Two sets of schools came into existence, and public buildings created separate areas for each group. Public toilet facilities and drinking fountains became "White Only" or "Black Only." These became known as the "Jim Crow" laws. (Jim Crow was said to be a black character in a minstrel show.)

The education abuses of the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision were addressed in *Brown vs. Board of Education, Kansas* in 1954. The general discrimination abuses of the country were addressed in the Civil Rights Act of 1965. Today, these names take on a new twist in a most interesting story. The challenge begins when Homer Plessy boarded a white-only railroad car in New Orleans in 1892 and was promptly arrested. A citizens' group which supported his action sued the state. Judge John Ferguson ruled in the state's favor. The case went to the U. S. Supreme Court where the state's decision was upheld. Today, Keith Plessy, who knew that his great-grandfather's cousin was the Plessy in the case, and Phoebe Ferguson, who grew up in New York and did not know that her great-great-grandfather was the judge in the case, met by chance as both were involved in civil rights work. Today it is the Plessy & Ferguson Foundation which honors the civil rights movement and

erected plaques to identify historic sites in Louisiana. It is no longer *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, but Plessy & Ferguson.[3]

## Role of the Press – "honoring segregation"

The morning newspapers of October 16, 1901 mentioned that Theodore Roosevelt had invited Booker T. Washington, the most influential black educator of his time, for supper at the White House the previous evening. It did not take long for the Southern newspapers to react. Edmund Morris, in his biography of the President, *Theodore Rex*, mentions that black people, of course, felt honored, and that some white people, too, reacted favorably, at least those of liberal instinct. But during the afternoon, distant rumblings warned that a political hurricane was on its way up from the South. He chose the *Memphis Press Scimitar* to show how violent this storm was.

*"The most damnable outrage which has ever been perpetrated by any citizen of the United States was committed yesterday by the President, when he invited a nigger to dine with him at the White House. It would not be worth more than a passing notice if Theodore Roosevelt had sat down to dinner in his own home with a Pullman car porter, but Roosevelt the individual and Roosevelt the President are not to be viewed in the same light.*

*"It is only very recently that President Roosevelt boasted that his mother was a Southern woman, and that he is half Southern by reason of that fact. By inviting a nigger to his table he pays his mother small duty....No Southern woman with a proper self-respect would now accept an invitation to the White House, nor would President Roosevelt be welcomed today in Southern homes. He has not inflamed the anger of the South; he has excited their disgust."* [4]

The word "nigger" had not been seen in print in years. Its sudden reappearance had the force of an obscenity. Within hours, newspapers from the Piedmont to the Yazoo were raining it and other epithets on the President's head. "Roosevelt Dines A Darkey"; "A Rank Negrophilist"; "Our Coon-Flavored President"; "Roosevelt Proposes To Coddle The

## The Political Scene – "Boss Crump and his $2 poll tax"

Memphis was the only Southern city where African Americans were able to vote. In most Southern cities, Democratic primaries were white primaries. The black community had voting strength in Memphis, but it was not sufficient to determine the outcome by themselves, but important enough to influence some elections. "Boss" Crump was the man in Memphis "at the gate," so to speak. He was committed to segregation, but realized the practical benefits of having the black vote on his side. His machine used the money from its liquor and vice interests to pay the poll tax for blacks and other ethnic groups. The machine then held the receipts until election day before distributing them to reliable voters. The Crump machine was as committed to white supremacy as anyone, but the machine depended upon the votes of blacks, Jews, Italian and Irish Catholics. The "Boss" took care of each group in his own way – a handout here, a special service guaranteed there. This was truly a paternalistic society. People kept quiet and were satisfied as long as some of their needs were fulfilled.[8] Crump's method worked to the extent that race relations were controlled. The city remained calm under his leadership, and many civic improvements were developed. But segregation remained!

## The Freedom Train of 1947 – "no whistle stop here"

In 1947, the American Heritage Society sponsored the country's first Freedom Train that crisscrossed the country to showcase some of America's most famous historical documents. The red, white and blue colored train sped across the 48 contiguous states serving as a visiting museum for all to see. The *Declaration of Independence Document*, George Washington's *Farewell Address*, Abraham Lincoln's *Emancipation Proclamation*, and Francis Scott Key's *Star Spangled Banner* were all part of this grand display. But the train did not stop in Memphis!

The local newspaper announced that the decision of the American Heritage Society to strike Memphis from its calendar was made after Mayor James Pleasants announced that the City and County

Commissions had decided that "the white people and negroes should see the train separately." This was in clear violation of the Society's resolutions. These rules stated that: "No segregation of any individual or groups of any kind on the basis of race or religion be allowed at any exhibition of the Freedom Train held anywhere."

The mayor and his commissioners met and decided upon an arrangement which they offered for the Heritage Society's consideration and announced it to the public. It stated: "The City and County Commissioners have met with the representatives of the Freedom Train. We have told them that we wanted the Freedom Train to come to Memphis and for the people to see it. We have told them the white people could see it half the time it is here, or six and a half hours, and the negroes the other half, or six and one-half hours, thus giving equal opportunity to everyone to see it.

"Because of the large negro population in Memphis, we think the white people and the negroes should see the train separately. The good relationship between the races in Memphis has been maintained by this policy and we do not think it should be changed.

"Boss" Crump, not actively involved in the decision, fully approved of it and said that 'we are getting along well unless interfered with by people who do not understand our situation.' " [9]

Once more, Memphis was left out of what was happening in mainstream USA. The train stopped in Jackson, TN and Little Rock, AR. It even went down into Mississippi and stopped at Jackson and Hattiesburg. Memphis was one of only two cities in the country, the other being Birmingham, AL, where the Freedom Train refused to visit because its sponsors felt that the position taken by Memphis was a direct violation of what many of the documents on display were showcasing.

Memphis, as viewed in many sections of the country, was developing a reputation for backwardness. This country which had worked together so closely during World War II, which had ended two years previously, and which saw the armed forces integrated in 1948, was moving in a different direction than Memphis. Even as late as twenty years later, when Martin Luther King was killed in Memphis, *Time* magazine described Memphis in terrible fashion, but it was someone's reality. "The proximate cause of his death was, ironically,

a minor labor dispute in a Southern backwater: the two-month-old strike of 1,300 predominantly Negro garbage collectors in the decaying river town of Memphis." [10]

## Catholic Church Influence – 1920-1960

The work of Church leaders in the forty years preceding the integration of Jesse Turner into CBC consisted of bold steps forward and embarrassing steps backward. A pastor in a black parish, or in a parish open to both black and white parishioners, had a different perspective from that of a pastor in an all-white parish. Some of this latter group wanted to move more slowly on these justice issues, but realized the time for change was coming; a few other pastors in this group fought to hold the status quo. The following glimpse into the life of the Church during these years will be taken from Father Milton Guthrie's historical analysis as presented in the Memphis Diocese's publication, *Between the Rivers.*

## The Black Community – "change is coming – slowly"

"In 1921, the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus was asked by the Josephite Fathers to help establish a school to teach and train African-American men and women in blue collar professions as well as nursing skills so that they could apply to work in the job market in Memphis and points north. This program was extremely successful with hundreds of people gaining skills as well as being a source for obtaining converts to the Church.

"Unfortunately after a few years of success, the local council of the Knights of Columbus complained of the potential competition with the white workers in the job market and the support for the St. Anthony Training School dried up, as did the opportunity for reaching many men and women who could be introduced to the compassionate spirit in the Catholic Church.

"...In 1937, St. Augustine Parish was established in Memphis with the Franciscan Fathers, Fr. Bertrand Koch, OFM. in charge. Fr. Bertrand

would visit businesses owned and operated by African-Americans. He was surely the first priest in Memphis to challenge the myth that whites must associate only with whites. St. Augustine Parish would minister to the African-Americans who lived south of Madison Avenue, and St. Anthony (the Josephite Parish) would continue in existence but minister only to those living north of Madison Avenue. These two parishes were established and conducted as national parishes, although they were really not national, but racial. All African- Americans living in any "white" parish boundary were assumed to belong only to St. Anthony or to St. Augustine.

"The vision of ministry among African-Americans began to change radically after the Second World War. There was a strong impulse for decent housing and better education through the G. I. Bill. This threatened the old paternalism in the white community. No longer would African-American women work for a dollar and a half a day in someone's home doing housecleaning, washing clothes, and child-caring besides being involved in some, if not all, food preparation.

"The returning African-American soldiers did not want to live in alleys or in shacks behind the landowners' homes as had often been the general case in North and South Memphis. There was also the larger migration from rural areas as tenant farmers were replaced by mechanized farming. With few exceptions, pastors of white parishes had no understanding of what was taking place.

"Before the Second World War, talented, skilled and even not-so-skilled African- Americans "escaped" the South and settled in ghettos in the North to find well-paying jobs in industry. After the war, the static demographics in Memphis and Jackson suddenly became dynamic.

"Generally speaking, from the end of the Civil War until the Second World War, the African-American man or woman was seen as servant with very few exceptions; therefore, no threat to the status quo of society or the church. In the 1954 Supreme Court decisions which gave equal entry to all public schools for all children, the barrier was broken down. Its effect on Catholic schools and Catholic parishes was barely recognized at first. However, now there was no turning back.

## Attempt at Parish Integration – "in the back pews"

"...Father Joseph Leppert became pastor of Little Flower Church (St. Therese) in 1953. He was the first priest to be ordained for the Diocese of Nashville, from Memphis, February 2, 1926. There had been a few Memphians received into religious orders before that time. Monsignor James Whitfield (founder of the parish) was a good man, a builder, a man of definite opinions. Father Leppert, later to be named Monsignor Leppert, had a strong and determined spirit for social justice. A quiet man of intense prayer and personal sacrifice, he would be the lightning rod to challenge the status quo.

"From the outset he announced that all people would be treated equally at Little Flower, that the church would not be segregated during Mass. Although St. Anthony was an African-American Parish, there were always some whites in attendance. In February of 1949, a visiting African-American Missionary priest celebrated Mass on Sunday to the joy of the African-Americans in the parish. At the end of the Mass the white communicants approached the white pastor, Fr. John Coyne, SSJ, and asked that he distribute communion to them. He asked why they had not received at Mass. One person, spokesperson for the rest, stated that he would not receive communion from a black priest.

"The first Sunday that African-Americans sat freely in St. Therese Church, some white parishioners got up from their pews and moved in front of the newly-enfranchised: 'No black person is going to be in front of me.' That first Sunday saw several events: white parishioners trying to push ahead of African Americans in the communion lines and some white parishioners overfilling center aisle pews to force African-Americans out of the pews to the side aisles. Father Leppert gently but firmly stated that there would be no turning back, and he met with African-Americans and encouraged them to be brave and prayerful. He also met with the white leadership of the parish and asked for their assistance. Dino Chiozza, a former professional baseball player, demonstrated great courage in his support of Father Leppert by challenging his fellow white parishioners to live out their baptismal promises as true Christians.

"Father Leppert wanted to accept children of African-American parents in the school, but Bishop Adrian forbade that. In the 1950s

Nashville Catholic Schools would be integrated but the Memphis pastors and the Superintendent for Catholic Schools in the diocese of Nashville insisted 'the people aren't ready in Memphis.' 'This change must be done gradually.' In fact, if priests like Father Leppert had not been always there and a constant conscience, who knows what changes would have occurred? In 1963, Christian Brothers High School broke ranks and admitted the first African-American, Jesse Turner, Jr. The following year, Turner Gilmore was admitted to Catholic High School for Boys." [11]

## The White Church Mentality – "the good, the bad, the ugly"

Not all whites were of one mind, of course. The white Catholic community that wanted to see change in race relations within the church did not, except in a few cases, have the clergy leadership to support them. The clergy who wished to make changes in race relations generally received little support from fellow clergy and expected general opposition from the lay people in their parishes.

"In 1961, the Catholic Human Relations Council was formed and met at Little Flower Church. The organization which called for fair treatment of all people in and by the Church, no matter their race, creed, or color, was seen by some Catholics, active in the John Birch Society, as a Communist front organization. To avoid the appearance that the Catholic Human Relations Council was a part of Little Flower Parish only, the meetings were transferred to Christian Brothers College campus. Usually the meetings were well attended by African-Americans and white Catholics: young, middle aged, and old. One pastor, convinced that the council was a Communist cell organization, came to one meeting believing that, if he could break up the meeting, he would save the Church from the clutches of Communism.

"In the early '60s, several priests suffered badly because of the efforts they made in favor of social justice. During the early days of school integration, Mrs. Allegra Turner tried to enroll her children in Immaculate Conception School. In an attempt to avoid integration of the school, the pastor had the boundaries of his parish redrawn, effectively gerrymandering the Turner family into St. Thomas

Parish which, with the closing of St. Augustine parish, had become predominately African-American. Father Theodore Weisner, OFM., pastor of St. Thomas, opposed the action. He was supported by several diocesan priests who received a very harsh rebuke from Bishop Adrian, demanding that they mind their own business, 'that there was plenty of work to do in their own parishes.' The Turner children were admitted into Little Flower grammar school, a great distance from their home.

"Professor Louis Hobson, principal of Manassas High School, also lived in Immaculate Conception Parish. In frustration with the rejection he received at Immaculate Conception, he enrolled his children at Little Flower and became himself the first African-American to be a lector at Mass in a 'white' church in Memphis.

"When Bishop Joseph Durick became ordinary of the Nashville Diocese in 1966, Louis Hobson and Herbert Robinson, both educators and both African-Americans, were named by Pope Paul VI as Knights of St. Gregory, a prestigious honor for any Catholic.

"Each year the Catholic Human Relations Council at their only fund raising event of the year put on a banquet and gave an award to some person who exhibited leadership in human relations and justice. Most of the recipients were Catholic; one was Jewish. After Bishop Joseph Durick became ordinary of the diocese, he participated by accepting the award and offering a Mass and being present at the banquet. As expected, he received vilification from some priests and white laity for involvement in this ministry."[12]

## Personal Reflections – "memories that linger"

My first assignment to Memphis lasted four years, 1949-1953. I began as a teacher, coach, athletic director and then finished as principal of the high school department. These were generally quiet years in the city as the Brown vs Board of Education, Kansas case, which was to bring such a dramatic change in education policies across the country, was still in the courts. The impact of Sputnik on the curriculum of the schools was a few years into the future. The City Beautiful Commission set a nice tone for the city with its emphasis on city cleanliness, quietness and civic pride.

I now realize in being busy with many school activities in an all-white setting, I was leading an insular life. However, the mix of students — Catholic, Protestants of many denominations, and Jewish - did give a perspective that was really valuable to me as an educator. The black community was not on my radar screen — maybe "passing like ships in the night" is too sharp a comparison, but I was just going my way and the blacks were going their way without really noticing one another. However, the topic of race relations and the Christian message of concern did arise in Religion and history classes at CBC.

I realize today more than ever that people rarely question their own culture. People ordinarily just fit into, and adopt, the lifestyle culture that is in vogue. I was sympathetic to the plight of the poor, and friendly with the blacks who were part of the high school and junior college work force. We talked about the conditions in Memphis in some of our Religious Community discussions, but there were no crusaders for change among our group. Today, some people wonder why the schools and churches did not take a more forceful position on the inequality they witnessed in these early 1950s days. This prompts me to wonder what the generations in the future will ask about us. Will they ask why we did not take a proactive, even radical, position on some of the present day questions which for many people lie just below their level of consciousness and action? It seems that only a few people at any time step out to question the culture in which they live.

There are a few events which are still very much alive in my memory some sixty years later. They are being shared here to further describe the conditions that existed in Memphis in these early 1950s days. The stories begin with my feelings upon arriving in Memphis in 1949; a white classroom scene in 1950; and black-white happenings around 1951.

I arrived in Memphis on the L & N (Louisville and Nashville) morning train from Cincinnati. It moved slowly into the Memphis city area and as I looked out the window, I noticed a large building under construction. I wondered if this could be CBC, the school that was to be my destination. A few blocks later, the train stopped, and I believe that a few passengers got off, and then the train moved slowly on to downtown Memphis. Yes, this was the CBC Barry Building under construction and the nearby place where the train had stopped was

not really a depot, but just a stop to let passengers off, much as a city bus does today. This stopping point was at Cooper near Central, called Lenox Station. These railway tracks still form the north border of the CBU campus today.

As I stepped into Union Station, I was quick to see a very prominent sign indicating that the "Colored Entrance" was just ahead. This was a quick reminder to me that I was entering a city with special social protocol. A week or so later while playing golf, I noticed that there were two drinking fountains, one on each side of the third hole driving tee; one for whites and one for blacks. I had been told that golf courses in the city were segregated so I wondered why the separate fountains. I discovered one was for the white golfers and the other for the black caddies. This was the day when white caddies were very rare and golf carts were not a part of everyday golfing.

This next reflection is a high school classroom scene. It was an opportunity for the teacher to sort out with the students a rather harsh historic reality. The class had just returned from a visit to Shiloh National Park on the Tennessee River. This is a memorial to the famous Battle of Shiloh during the Civil War. The students had followed the trails very carefully, for even in these days long after the Civil War had ended, the War was one of the most interesting parts of their history course. The boys were quick to notice that the Confederates were buried in mass graves while monuments honored many of the Northern troops. In a question and answer period afterward with the park officials, they asked, in a rather determined manner, the reason for such terrible treatment for the Confederate troops. Apparently the guide, in official park uniform, stood before them and bluntly announced that traitors are not buried in national cemeteries! This was a shocker for these students. It was a moment of disbelief, of hurt. This harsh statement was difficult for them to absorb, but they were thankful to be able to discuss their feelings about these trying times in Southern history with their teachers in the days that followed.

One other memory involves my being caught in the segregation trap. CBC was presenting a choral performance in the city's municipal auditorium. Two of us Brothers thought it would be nice to invite two of the women who worked in the school cafeteria to attend. We agreed to meet at the outside entrance. As we entered the building an usher, or

other employee in uniform, came right at us, shoved the women out the door and told them in a loud voice to go down the street and to enter a side door which led to the special balcony which was reserved for blacks, known in popular parlance as the 'nigger heaven.' We protested and told the man that this was our special show and that we had rented the place for the evening, and that these people were our guests. We were treated with disdain, like two little kids out of order, our pleas completely ignored. It was a helpless feeling. My lingering memory is seeing the hurt on the face of one of the women, almost a cry for help, as she was pushed out the door. My hope is that she saw the look on our faces, too. She needed to know that other people were also hurt by this offensive behavior and also realized the injustice.

A brief comment, mentioned by Ralph McGill, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, follows nicely after this painful story. He is quoting John Hope Franklin, a distinguished member of Fisk University's faculty who said: "I could never understand those white persons who would say, with apparent sincerity, that they couldn't see why segregation really made much difference. It never seemed to occur to them that a Negro might like to take his family out to dinner or lunch at a decent restaurant. He could not do so in the South. Or, he might wish to take his wife to a movie or concert without going down an alley to an entrance and climbing two or three flights of stairs to a seat. The average non-hostile white person never seemed to comprehend that his enjoyment of such simple services might not be experienced by a Negro." [13]

Ralph McGill was the editor of a moderate southern newspaper which helped to bring the religious, business, and social groups together in Atlanta to form a vision for racial harmony that continues in that city today.

Memphis is located in the Cotton Belt of the South. The numerous cotton offices along Front Street highlighted this economic connection. The early days of slavery and later the share-cropping system were part of this economic system. This relationship of Memphis to Mississippi was clear. Memphis was not nearly as closely aligned to the rest of its own state. It had a different economic base and political base. Racism was always present in both Memphis and Mississippi. One big difference, however, was that the blacks had the right to vote in Memphis (subject

to poll tax payment) so by a paternalistic consideration here and there by Boss Crump, peace between the races could prevail. This part of the culture separates itself from Mississippi. In Memphis, segregation was "controlled and manipulated"; in Mississippi, local citizen's groups, and determined individuals, the KKK among them, working with political approval or neglect, set the violent pattern that segregation took in many parts of that state.

## A Sharecropper's Daughter and a Catholic School in Mississippi

Marge Baroni, a white Catholic laywoman and civil rights activist, a poor sharecropper's daughter, tells her story about Catholic education in Natchez, Mississippi.

"When Dr. King began to get prominent with the Montgomery boycott, naturally everyone was beginning to discuss race more openly than in the past. I had children in school at Cathedral during these years, but they wouldn't discuss it over at Cathedral. Up until 1960, they would not teach the students the church's position on race. The children never heard it mentioned.

"I'd talk about the race issue with my family and friends. They used to listen to me, and we used to discuss issues that were academic – up until the time of the school desegregation in Little Rock in 1958. Before that, it was perfectly acceptable for white people to sit down and talk about how black people were mistreated, so long as one didn't do anything about it. You could deplore it. You could be upset about it. You could say it was wrong. You could read the Bible, and you could study your religion, but you couldn't practice it.

"I remember we went to a party, and our oldest son's basketball coach was there, and he kept baiting me about race. The coach was even the Godfather of one of our children, a close friend. But he kept on saying that blacks were inferior, and I told him I tried to approach it on a scientific level. That was probably the hardest thing I had to face – that the people teaching my children, and the nuns and priests, too, were like that. Not as stupid as that man; their thing was prudence, you know; 'God's going to take care of it.'

"When the decision was made to integrate Cathedral School the rule was that only blacks who were Catholics could go there. This was in order not to integrate it too fully and not to make it too open – not to do the job thoroughly. Still there was an exodus of whites. This was in 1966. So white Catholic children went to the still segregated public schools, and then the next year the public schools were integrated. Then these private academies began to go up around here, the so-called "Christian academies." So those Catholic children, whose parents didn't want them mingling with blacks, would go to the Christian academies. That was their last resort.

"Meanwhile, some of the Episcopalians, Methodists, and others didn't want to send their children to these inferior academies. The first ones were started by people who had been in the Klan, and they were looked down upon by the aristocrats. So some of the higher-class types wouldn't send their children to what they considered low-clas academies, so they sent them to our nice Catholic school, Cathedral. They felt that a little bit of integration was better that a whole lot in the public school.

"It was such a dreadful time for the children, because there had been no preparation by the administrators of the school. They were afraid to sit down and give the children a course in human relations. Some of the Sisters did, but they were on their own." [14]

## End Notes - Chapter One

[1] James, Frank. *Chicago Tribune.* "Martin Luther King Jr. in Chicago." (Politics Section) August 5, 1966.
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[8] Ibid., pp. 89, 90, 105.
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[11] McGraw, Br. Joel; Guthrie, Fr. Milton; King, Mrs. Josephine; *Between The Rivers.* ( Catholic Diocese of Memphis Publication) J. B. Sanders & Co. Nashville, TN 1996. pp. 434-441.
[12] Ibid., p. 441, 442
[13] McGill, Ralph. The South and the Southerner. Little, Brown and Company. Toronto. 1963. pp. 296, 297.
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# chapter two

## CBC OPENS ITS DOORS
STEPS LEADING TO INTEGRATION

I returned to Memphis in 1962, having been away from the city for nine years. My new position was president of the college, and since the high school was on the same campus on the Parkway, the schools operated as one educational unit, known as CBC. In this position, I was also the spokesperson for the high school in what may be called today, the role of superintendent. The principal of the high school was in charge of the academic and other day-to-day student activities in that department. The high school was in the very capable hands of Brother Stephen O'Malley.

There were no search committees, no interview process for the position of president. As in most Religious Congregations at that time, when a person was assigned to a special mission, the provincial, or in the Brothers' terminology, the Brother Visitor, made the appointment. This term "Visitor" refers to his oversight duties of the Brothers' community life by his twice-yearly visits to the schools. I questioned the Visitor's choice in this instance, but he assured me that he had given much thought to this appointment and that he felt that I had the leadership qualities needed for the position. I was still wondering about his decision, since I was moving from the position of community director and principal of one the Brothers' smallest schools, Central Catholic High in Vincennes, IN. This was a gratuitous school, a four-

year education at no charge.

I decided to speak to Brother Julius Winkler, academic dean at St. Mary's College (now University) in Minnesota, to get a better understanding of what college administration was. I must have shown hesitancy, for at one time in our conversation, he leaned over his desk toward me and said; "When you walk up to the front door from the Parkway, you go in as President!" He then handed me a book by Robert Maynard Hutchins, former president of the University of Chicago, to take with me. I knew a little about this educator because of his work in setting up the "Great Books Program," a much-discussed education innovation through the years. He also drew down the wrath of sports-minded Chicagoans by eliminating the university football program. Hutchins thought that the emphasis given to athletics was a distraction to the main purposes of a college education. I presume Brother Julius felt that I was capable of this new assignment, and he wanted me to take a pro-active stance and to continue to move the college forward. I still wondered, however, because I was a rookie in college circles and was just on the edge of turning 40 years of age.

Upon arrival on the campus I found a college and high school in motion, led by true educators with faculty to match. The city had really grown in these nine years, for what I had remembered as a city of charm with Midtown being the center of activity, was now expanding, north, south, and mostly east. In fact, the school had already purchased property for a new school that was still in the planning stages; the address at that time being Walnut Grove Road at the Fowler Expressway (now the 240 Expressway). The big event of the 1962-63 school year was to be a capital campaign to secure funding for this new school; that is, until later in May, when CBC reached across the racial divide.

Memphis during the 1950s had experienced great growth in population and in city expansion. While many other cities in the South were directly involved in Civil Rights struggles, Memphis was moving along at a slow pace. One of these happenings, far away as it was in a Kansas school setting, was to become a shocker for years to come for education in the city, and for the South in general. A few other troubling incidents, closer to home, drew national attention to what was really happening in some states of the South. All of these events were signs, each in its own fashion, that the "Old South" would have to

change.

A class action suit was brought to the attention of the courts in Topeka, Kansas, by parents who were protesting the segregated schooling that their children were receiving. This case became known as *Brown vs Board of Education, Kansas*, The verdict rendered in this case was to change schooling in this country forever. It stated very clearly and sharply that "separate but equal" education was unlawful and called for desegregation of all public schools with deliberate speed. Although the decision referred only to school segregation, the implication was that all legal segregation was unconstitutional.

The South was outraged. Nineteen Southern senators and 77 representatives, including Memphis' Representative Clifford Davis, issued a "Southern Manifesto" condemning the Court decision as a usurpation of state powers, a decision bent upon "destroying the amicable relations between white and Negro races that have been created through ninety years of patient effort by the good people of both races." Among Southern senators, only Lyndon Johnson of Texas, and the two Tennessee senators, Estes Kefauver and Albert Gore, refused to sign. (The Memphis mentality was closer to Mississippi and the other southern states than it was to the views of the rest of Tennessee.) In 1955, one year after the *Brown* decision rendered separate schools unconstitutional, the Memphis City School Board built Lester High School for blacks, less than a mile northwest from all-white East High. [1]

The battle continued for the minds and hearts of people in states which had to face the problems that such a change demanded. Both blacks and whites quickly sprang into action. White Citizens' Councils rose to defend segregation; the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to demand integration. The KKK even came back to life in a few states.

By this *Brown* decision, the Court was saying that education was now "perhaps the most important function of state and local governments." Education, the Court recognized, is that which inculcates the young to good citizenship and enables their performance of basic responsibilities. Education, the Court found, imposes cultural norms, awakens understanding of one's environment, and opens the door to economic participation in the society at large. The Court recognized that the states were under no obligation to provide at all for public

education, but having done so, they were under an obligation to do so on equal terms, irrespective of race. It is not only the facilities that mattered. It is the message we are giving to students when we force them into separate learning centers. [2]

Throughout the rest of the South during these years (1954-1962), "unrest" would be too tame a word to describe what was happening in states such as Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi. There are many stories that could be told about what happened when a black dared to cross the color line. Two incidents which were conversation topics in Memphis at the time were reviewed more recently in the *Commercial Appeal* in 2002.

## Emmett Till – "a lynching in the Delta"

*It was a war... a nightmare no one will ever see the like of again unless fighting erupts again tonight like everyone fears it will. Here in northern Mississippi's cotton country, a store stands in ruin, its roof caved in and its interior a jumble of rotted timbers. Sunlight dapples its glass-littered floor, and dying vines twist up its sides. But the red-brick walls stand straight and solid.*

*It was in this store, 47 years ago, that a 14-year-old black youth visiting from Chicago was said to have whistled at a white woman working behind the counter, an act that would elicit his death. A few days later, in that August of 1955, two white men forced their way into a shack where the boy was staying with relatives and took him.*

*A few days after that, the boy's body was found in the Tallahatchie River. The two whites were arrested and tried, but not convicted. Others who were rumored to be part of the crime grew old, anonymously.*

*Outside this place, the story of a murdered boy named Emmett Till would shame the nation and become a ghost tale to caution black children about the worst of human nature in a time when racial prejudice was justification for almost anything, even the murder of a boy who was said to have whistled at a woman in a store.*

*"Of the thousands of lynchings that occurred since Reconstruction, the one name everybody remembers is Emmett Till," said Chris Benson, a Chicago lawyer who grew up with the specter of Emmett's death. "It*

*burned the race problem into our consciousness, the first international coverage, the first real media event of the modern civil rights movement. And no one ever had to pay."* [3]

## James Meredith – "white supremacy challenged"

*This event occurred just seventy miles south of Memphis, at Ole Miss U. in Oxford, MS. The words, from a 40-year old letter he wrote to his parents, don't allow Curtis Wilkie to forget the battle for racial integration at the University of Mississippi on Sept. 30-Oct. l, 1962.*

*Wilkie, who is white, was a senior at the school in '62 and witnessed the riot protesting the enrollment of James Meredith, the first black man to integrate a Mississippi public school.*

*Wilkie remembers the tear gas, caustic and suffocating. He remembers the storm of bricks and glass bottles. He remembers the blood. President Kennedy sent thousands of federal troops to Oxford to show the federal government's determination to integrate Ole Miss.*

*One of the most dramatic confrontations took place Sept. 30, when Meredith, flanked by federal guards, tried to register. By then, the Mississippi legislature had made Governor Ross Barnett the registrar of the university so he could circumvent federal court orders and block Meredith's enrollment. By the time the riot ended in the wee hours of Oct. 1, Wilkie had been gassed, was angry at what he had seen and felt pessimistic about the future of his school and state. Later that day, Meredith registered at the University of Mississippi and graduated the following year. Last May (2011) his son, Joseph, graduated from Ole Miss and went to North Carolina to teach college.* [4]

This was a sad time in the history of Ole Miss. The morning after the rioting, that Wilke witnessed, found two people dead and others injured. The campus looked like a war zone with thousands of federal troops on campus, and sections of the campus severely damaged.

Memphians were spectators to all of these happenings, and because of the closeness to home, this Ole Miss rioting was of special interest and concern. The students at CBC got a glimpse of the seriousness of the controversy upon their arrival at school the next morning, as they

saw the excitement on the Parkway. Many army vehicles were passing in front of the school, and others remained parked for hours across from the school, while their drivers awaited further instructions. East Parkway South became a traffic lane for these vehicles as it furnished one link to Highway 78, two miles distant, which was the selected route to Oxford, Mississippi.

In the meantime, the Jesse Turner family was laying plans for their son's entrance to CBC. This is also what many other parents were doing at this time. But the Turners were black and the school was white. This special arrangement would be new to Memphis.

## The Integration of CBC, Memphis

Mrs. Jesse Turner (Allegra) attended Mass at St. Peter Church in downtown Memphis one Sunday during the summer of 1962. Leaving the church, she picked up a few leaflets and a card which was an application to Christian Brothers High School. Brother Joel McGraw, present assistant principal of CBHS and lead writer of *Between the Rivers*, will guide the reader for the Turners' introduction to CBC.

"Taking her card and leaflets home, Allegra showed the application card to her husband and told him of her intentions to enroll their eldest son in the high school department of CBC. Jesse Turner was in accord; over the years the media kept Christian Brothers schools in high regard – positive and impressive!

"Allegra had a certain fascination with the Christian Brothers' motto, 'We Make Men Out of Boys' which the Turners observed many times — living in Binghampton for five and a half years, going west on Poplar to East Parkway South and zooming downwards passing Christian Brothers campus. The Turners visited several families in south Memphis regularly. Their two small and curious sons frequently asked; 'Dad, what is that?' Concerning CBC, their father responded; 'I believe that is a school for boys... and, I think it is run by your mother's church.' Four-year-old Jesse Jr. said; 'I want to go there.' Jesse and Allegra exchanged quick glances which meant, THERE'S NO WAY WE WILL TELL OUR SONS THAT THEY CANNOT ATTEND THIS OR ANY SCHOOL!

"The Turners – Jesse Sr. in particular — had already suffered so many indignities over the years both as soldier and veteran. Jesse had graduated first in his class (with "distinction") in Mathematics from LeMoyne College, had attained the rank of captain and commanded the 758 Light Tank Battalion, and was awarded the Bronze Star (blacks were not then awarded the Medal of Honor). Returning on furlough, Jesse was arrested five times in Memphis, Tennessee, for impersonation of an officer. Jesse Turner was one of many black veterans who were determined to achieve equality for all upon returning to the United States of America!" [5]

On August 20, 1962, Allegra prepared and mailed Jesse's application to Christian Brothers High School. The application was processed, and the Turners were notified of Jesse's acceptance in October. It had been assumed by the administrators of Father Bertrand High, the Catholic school for black students, that Jesse, one of the top students from St. Augustine Grammar School, would be coming to their high school. The Franciscan Fathers for many years had been doing excellent work with the black Catholics in Memphis. Most probably they were disappointed that they might lose such a fine student, one on whom they could count upon to be a future leader in the community. Back at CBC life went on as usual, that is, until May, 1963. From that time on there was turbulence on the school front.

Jesse's registering in CBC in September, 1962, was not a topic of conversation at the high school. Most probably few of the faculty and staff were aware that he had registered. But in May, 1963, Bishop William Adrian announced his policy of gradual integration for the Catholic schools in West Tennessee. It stated: "that starting in the Fall of 1963, grades one through four would be integrated, followed by grades one through eight in 1965, and the high school grades in the fall of 1966."

When Mrs. Turner learned of this gradual integration policy, she contacted CBC to see if this new policy would affect her son's registration at CBC, three years ahead of the proposed schedule for racial integration set forth by the Bishop. I thought that this new policy was a real step in the right direction and welcomed the change. I then sent a letter to Bishop Adrian to inform him that CBC had accepted Jesse for the coming school year. CBC wanted to keep the Bishop

informed so that he would be aware of the school's decision. I felt that both the Diocese and CBU were moving forward in the spirit of the new decision and true to Gospel values with the Bishop's recent announcement.

Some students today who are interested in this school's integration have asked if the school needed to contact the Bishop, since the school is not a diocesan school and is listed as an independent Catholic high school. The letter was written to assure Mrs. Turner that everything would be all right. It also would serve as a courtesy note to keep the Bishop informed. In another way, too, it was recognizing the Bishop's position as leader of the Catholic schools in his diocese. The Bishop has control of any organization in his diocese that expresses itself to be Catholic. However, this control does not usually mean interfering with the internal affairs of a school which is run by a Religious Order within the Bishop's jurisdiction. We will find that opinions differed sharply on this topic

I recalled that back in the late 1940s in Chicago, Samuel Cardinal Stritch, who had once served as a priest in Memphis, urged the school principals to open their doors to any black student who requested entrance. I anticipated a very positive response. The letter that arrived on my desk was a real shocker. I set it aside, stared out the window, and wondered how this could be. I was jolted from my daily work as a college president, from my challenging leadership role in the fund campaign for a new high school, and from my responsibilities as Director of the Religious community of 28 Brothers, to enter what would shape up to be a distasteful confrontation.

The Bishop's reply to my letter appears on the next page, written as usual for Bishop Adrian in long hand. The Bishop was quite clear as to the way he felt about our school's decision. It is easy to jump to conclusions as to his reason for his position. Could it be a touch of racism? Or the usual acceptance of the status quo? Or fear of reaction from priests who had the ear of some of the voices in the pews? The letter from Msgr. John Elliott, Superintendent of Schools in Memphis, arrived a day after the Bishop's letter.


OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF NASHVILLE
421 CHARLOTTE AVENUE
NASHVILLE 3, TENNESSEE

May 22, 1963

Dear Brother Terence, –

It seems unfortunate that you should have taken this step to register a negro student for your high school without first consulting the Diocesan Superintendent of our Catholic Schools. This can be a cause for much trouble.

Up to this, we have followed the policy that integration be authorized only when the pastor of Shelby Co. approved; this included high school integration. Evidently you misunderstood or ignored this.

I shall submit the matter to Father Ellisth, and we will await his decision.

Sincerely in Christ
+William L Adrian
Bishop

*May 25, 1963*

*Brother Terence*
*Christian Brothers High School*
*650 E. Parkway*
*Memphis, Tennessee*

*Dear Brother Terence:*

*The Most Reverend Bishop has referred to me your letter requesting clarification on the possibility of accepting a negro student in the high school next year.*

*The Bishop's action in integrating the schools of Nashville in 1954 indicates that he is not opposed to this in principle but he does not wish to have violence and turbulence. There were many discussions preceding the adoption of the plan which was read from the pulpits of all the churches in Memphis. This explicitly stated that colored children would be accepted in white schools in grades l through 4 in September 1963; in grades l through 6 in September 1966.*

*It is acknowledged that conditions could change in the meantime to advance this time table but for the coming year it is intended that it be adhered to.*

*On a matter as controversial as this, it is to be expected that there are all shades of opinion from one extreme to the other. But even in business or social organizations, strength is to be found only when all members unite in their policy – and certainly it is the prerogative of the Bishop to establish the policy of His Diocese. It would be contrary to the plan adopted by the Bishop, therefore, for CBHS to accept a colored student at this time.*

*With all best wishes, I am*

*Sincerely yours in Christ,*
*(Rev.) John A. Elliott*
*Superintendent.*

*JAE'mcl.*

I wrote a reply to Bishop Adrian, a brief response, to tell him that in accepting a black student in the high school, we were following our non-discrimination policy that we had established for the college department. And, so as not to antagonize him further, and seeing that the final decision would in reality be made at the local level, I added that we would await his final directive. This non-challenging reply made reasoned negotiations possible and the school ultimately won the day, but in today's times, I admit that it sounds soft.

It is interesting to note how a student could attend the college, almost unnoticed, while a student entering a high school attracted so much attention. The prevailing attitude throughout the country on education, and definitely in government policies, state and at the federal levels, is that high school students are more vulnerable, impressionable, and undergoing a period of formation and therefore need to be kept free of private social and religious influences. This is the reason the state and federal governments will grant scholarship aid to college and university students in private and religious schools, but will not do so for private or religious affiliated high schools. The high school students needed to be guarded, protected. The college student was beyond this close parent supervision.

Msgr. Elliot's reply that "conditions could change" gave some hope that the decision "was not yet fixed in concrete." I also felt that the Bishop and his priest advisors in Memphis were not on the same page in these replies. The Bishop stated that that his policy was that "integration was authorized only when the pastors of Shelby County approved." Msgr. Elliott's letter stated "that it was the prerogative of the Bishop to establish the policy of his Diocese and that it would be contrary to the plan adopted by the Bishop for CBHS to accept a colored student at this time." The Bishop said that the pastors were determining the policy; Msgr. Elliott said that it was the Bishop who made the policy.

It is important that we find out more about Bishop Adrian in order to get a true perspective on his reasoning and motivation. It is the fair way to treat this topic rather than to just rely on one's own perspective. Also, to gain a more accurate view of what was happening around us, a look at what the Bishops in nearby dioceses were doing about integration at the same time will be most helpful.

At first, it is easy to assume that Bishop Adrian was either afraid to take a stand on his own, or that he was a racist, or that he was disturbed that someone had usurped his authority to speak out on such an important issue, or for some other reason. *The Catholic Church in Tennessee, a book* by Thomas Stritch, puts the Bishop's policies in better light. "When in the spring of 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that public schools must be integrated 'with all deliberate speed' Bishop Adrian was no less decisive. 'This is the law of the land', he said, 'and it must be obeyed.' But his interpretation 'with all deliberate speed' had a touch of genius. He instructed the priests of each of his four deaneries to decide how deliberate their compliance with the law would be." [6] It was really the timid view of some of the leading priests in the Memphis deanery that caused the Memphis struggle to escalate.

The work of the Church in the South through the years of segregation at times was the one hope upon which the black community could count. In many places it was a shelter for them in time of trouble. This was at the parish level and in the black schools. But on the topic of school integration, the Church lacked progressive leaders. There are reasons for this: some acted out of personal fear; some out of fear of losing white support which they would later need to help them change the society.

To put things in perspective, let's look at Memphis' two closest states and see how the Bishops there were handling the integration problems. These states were each one-diocese states. The Bishop of Nashville (TN), the Bishop of Little Rock (AR), and the Bishop of Jackson, (MS) were the spokespersons for the Catholics in those three states. In so many words, they became the "Catholic Church teaching" on integration in those states.

Bishop Adrian's position on school integration unfolds as the story of Jesse Turner's case is debated. But what about Bishop Adrian the man? We need to put a human face on him. He was said to be a rugged individualist, self-sufficient and self reliant. He lived a private life and loved carpentry work, just fixing things and gardening. At times he appeared progressive, promoting Catholic Women's organizations, Catholic Youth movements, and in establishing a diocesan newspaper, and was considered a leader in integration for Father Ryan High School

in Nashville. He proceeded with the yellow light of caution by putting restrictions on these first students' participation in school activities. [7]

"Yet Bishop Adrian's image in Nashville and elsewhere was that of a conservative, opposed to all change. This image comes largely from the writings of his later years, especially the columns he did for *The Wanderer*, the arch-conservative privately-owned Catholic paper published in St. Paul, Minnesota. But in the 1950s Adrian was a cautious pioneer in integration." [8]

In neighboring Arkansas, Fr. Albert Fletcher became Bishop of Little Rock in 1947. James Woods, in his story of the Church in Arkansas, *Mission and Memory*, describes the difference between this new bishop and his predecessor (Bishop Joseph Lauro). From this we get a look into the Church and the South that will help us get a better view of these times in the South. Neither was overly racist or bigoted, and theologically, both would have rejected such views. Both generally accepted the segregated social norms that were prevalent throughout the South, but in this they were not very different from their fellow Catholic prelates of the time. As with most white denominations in the South at the time, they were more shaped by their society than interested in shaping it.

In response to *Brown vs. Board of Education*, Bishop Fletcher issued a pastoral letter to the diocese concerning race relations and Catholic schools. In it he mentioned that the Church has never made any distinctions of race. In places where segregation is enforced by laws and customs, the Church does its best to help both groups in separate churches and schools. He did not want to alienate either side, so he moved cautiously because he felt that few whites in his diocese shared his opinions. As a Southerner and native Arkansan, he grew up in the segregated South, and like many other southern Catholic prelates, he went along with the prevailing social patterns. As the head of a religious minority, Bishop Fletcher was concerned about stirring up religious and social animosities and giving anti-Catholics more ammunition to attack the Church. [9]

Our source for the Mississippi connection is *The Catholic Church in Mississippi*, by Michael Namorato. Bishop Richard Gerow in Jackson, MS lived in the midst of much Civil Rights activity, most of it violent, in the early 1960s. Many black churches were burned out

and black Civil Rights' leaders killed. The Bishop became one of the founding members of the famous Committee of Concern, a group of church leaders that was formed to see how they could help stop the violence. The final and most important area in which Bishop Gerow was involved was the integration of the Catholic schools in Mississippi. Bishop Gerow, urged on by his Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Brunini and Father Bernard Law, slowly realized that more had to be done to help African-American people. At first he asked his clergy for advice on the integration of schools. The initial reaction was not favorable. Some thought that there was not enough time to prepare for the changes that integration would entail. Also, preparations for the new school year had already begun. But, as the situation in Jackson remained tense, and as Bishop Gerow himself was encouraged by Bishop Brunini, he decided to take the next step – the integration of the Catholic schools. In 1964, he opened his schools to first graders who were Black and in 1965, he opened the schools to all qualified Catholic students.

"First, his decision was not sudden but evolved gradually and was impacted by the civil rights movement occurring in Mississippi and the nation. Second, Bishop Gerow was definitely influenced by his auxiliary bishop, Joseph Brunini, and others in the clergy such as Bernard Law. Finally, Bishop Gerow explained his hesitancy in integrating initially by saying that he wanted the public schools to fight the legal battles that integration would necessarily entail. In the end, though, too much had happened, and Gerow himself had been affected by it so much that he believed he had to move forward." [10]

I set out to visit two priests in our Diocese who were known for their forward approach to parish integration, Father Joseph Leppert of Little Flower parish and Father James Murphy, pastor of St. Anthony Church, a black parish. I wanted to find out how to deal with the Bishop on this question. They were both very understanding, but offered no immediate solutions, other than to continue pressing my efforts, but with a gentle approach, for that might work better. In a short time I picked up comments from Father Joseph Wesley, college chaplain, that in a Forty Hours Devotion gathering of priests in the city, rather sharp differences of opinion were expressed on the topic. I had been in contact with Mrs. Turner to keep her informed as to what was happening. I told her of the Bishop's letter and the follow-up

letter from Father Elliott. She then knew that the responses were not promising. I mentioned to her that I did not feel that this was the final decision because the clergy in the city were not all of the same opinion. I continued to spread the word; but I realized that CBC was not to be included in the decision-making process. On July 24, Bishop Adrian sent us his final reply via his Chancellor.

It was a letter from Msgr. Charles Williams, the Chancellor of the Diocese of Nashville; a devastating blow to our hopes. It finished with "kind regards" and "best wishes" but it was a definite "NO." The letter, as it was received, follows:

*June 24, 1963*

*Dear Brother Terence:*

*After giving further thought to the proposed plan to accept a Negro student this September at Christian Brothers High School, His Excellency directs me to inform you that he prefers that you follow the policy which has already been announced in the parishes in Memphis and not accept the Negro student this year.*

*With kind regards and best wishes, I am*

*Sincerely,*
*Rt. Rev.. Msgr. Charles M. Williams*
*Chancellor*

*CMW' I*

The church leaders in Memphis had spoken; the Bishop listened. I cannot believe that these priests feared any real disturbance or violence if CBC accepted this student. It was certainly possible, though, that some of their parishioners would be upset, and this they feared. It is this "silent acceptance" that I found so hard to take, a going along with the status quo without speaking out on Gospel values. I definitely foresaw no real disturbance, and definitely no violence if CBC became an integrated school. What was happening here was foreign to me.

Was it that the "dogma of the Delta" was more persuasive than the lessons of the Gospel? In reading from the story of the Diocese at a much later date, we will find that Msgr. Williams, who wrote the final letter, indeed was, himself, living in fear. As diocesan director of the Catholic Students Mission Crusade in Nashville, he had been asked by the Bishop to attend a student debate which included a black girl, a program promoted by Father Daniel Lord, an outstanding leader of Catholic Youth programs nationally. He is described as going "in fear and trembling." Anonymous phone calls threatened rocks and rotten tomatoes. But the actual speech came off without incident. Monsignor Williams was even more apprehensive at a later CSMC contest in Chattanooga, a city somewhat rougher in texture than older Nashville. But once again everything went off smoothly. [11]

This opens a new phase in this integration process. I went to visit Mrs. Allegra Turner at her home. This home visit, I feel, was to become the real turning point in the debate. A true trust was established; there was a meeting of minds; the family was encouraged; and, it was a visit that renewed my energy to see that right prevailed. Before I go into more detail about this visit, I wish to introduce the reader to the Turner family's views on education. This will be described in Allegra' own words.

*"Jesse Hosea Turner firmly believed that everyone should get a good education. He often said, "If education is not really necessary, then try ignorance." On May 17, 1954, the day of the decision Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas, Jesse was elated, anxious, and nervous all at once. Prior to this historic day, he had thought about the decision during his waking hours and dreamed about it as he slept. He had held discussions about it with those of his smartest friends and had read everything he could read and listened to all the news he could hear. Jesse was so anxious about there being a positive outcome of this decision because he had a vision that it would forever change education and other areas of this country's treatment of black people. His feeling influenced me so that even now I say that black people should be dancing in the streets every May 17, because of the impact of this decision that reversed the principle of separate but equal education in our country.*

*"Despite all of our anticipation and excitement back in 1954,*

*however, May 17 came and went, and afterwards very little changed. Jesse and I, and blacks across the South and the nation, waited patiently year after year, but seemingly no doors of equal education were even cracked open to us, Every evening when Jesse came home from work, he would ask, "No news?" referring to Brown v, Board of Education. Since there was none, he'd say, "We'll just have to fight!" By this he meant that we would have to use every means at our disposal and with all deliberate speed!*

*"During one of our many conversations on the topic, Jesse said, "Separate but equal is unconstitutional! Separate is not equal! It just can't be. Do you realize the impact of what the Supreme Court has ruled? Can't you see that all kinds of cracks have been made in the practice of segregation? The bottom will fall out of all kinds of customs adhered to since the Emancipation Proclamation and Reconstruction. Certainly, we are going to experience a new kind of Reconstruction, more advanced than ever. And I'll bet you that there will be all kinds of resistance."*

*"Why do you believe that?" I asked.*

*"You don't think white folks are going to willingly let you into their comfortable turf without a fight?" he responded.*

*I said, "Why not, if it's the law?"*

*I shall never forget his reply: "Don't you realize that they took much pain and planning to keep you out and down and ignorant? As long as you remain ignorant and without skills, you cannot function on an equal basis. That keeps you subservient, ignorant and poor. They are ahead before they get off the boat...you are forever displaced, even if you have lived here... [or] barely existed here for several generations. You have never been on the boat, nor your parents, not your grandparents, yet you are the scum of humanity, always at the bottom of the heap. Do you understand?*

*"I did understand. We would have to fight to make the Supreme Court's decision a reality. The fact that the Court overturned the separate but equal policy did not automatically ensure integrated schools. The Court's decision would help us, but we would still have to fight to bring about change. It seemed that Jesse's and my fight for equal education was destined to take place not only in the public arena, but with our own children, who were enrolled in Catholic schools because we believed in the value of a Christian education."* [12]

It was while speaking to Allegra on the phone to set up a time for my visit to her home that she suggested that I phone her husband, Mr. Jesse Turner, to acquaint him with the proceedings. I did not know what to expect. Our conversation turned out to be quite pleasant, mostly I feel, because I made it clear that CBC wanted to welcome Jesse, Jr. to our school and the resistance came from our headquarters, so to speak. He asked questions, but not in a combative manner. To him, it must have felt like "here we go again; when will some people learn?"

I recently came across a quote which reminded me of those days long ago in 1963. The quote itself has nothing to do with the integration issue, but to me it really connects with what we were doing back then. It was given by a Religious superior to his congregation of Brothers. "In Jesus we find one who is constantly calling on us to break out of the boundaries that we find ourselves in, or should I say we bind ourselves in. We are prone to fix ourselves within boxes that have labels like 'mine' and 'yours.' We organize things into neat categories and draw lines around what is acceptable behavior. And the poor and disadvantaged are always the ones outside the boundaries and separated by the lines we draw. People must know their place, we say. And it is always said by those on the right side of the line, those with something to protect. The story is told about the husband of a suffragist, who when women were given the vote and knowing that his world was falling apart said; "Where are we going to draw the line?" To which his wife replied; "Who gave you the pencil?" [13] The Bishop had given the pencil to the local clergy leaders in Memphis!

The woman whom I was to visit, Allegra Turner, I found out later, was born in a small Louisiana town. She said that like many other such places "there were hateful folks who grinned with blacks in the daytime but wore white sheets at night." She left her town to get her high school education and lived in an orphanage during these years. The orphanage had space for other students because the number of orphans had declined. She worked to pay her room, board and tuition. She experienced racism in her visits to the white Catholic churches, even being drawn out of the confession line to be told that she could go later to receive the sacrament in the sacristy. She went to Southern University for awhile. Later when she found that she could not attend

Louisiana State University because it did not accept black students, but that the state of Louisiana would pay state students to attend another university outside the state, she attended the University of Chicago. After graduation she was to pay back the state, and she did this by working two years in an assignment acceptable to the University. [14]

I will never forget my visit to the Turner residence. As I entered, Allegra asked the little children who were in the living room to go outside to play. They quickly scurried out of the room. Allegra then turned to me and said: "I will not permit these children to be hurt by what you are going to tell me." I felt terrible, having to deliver a message, the content of which I was unable to support.

Now, looking back on this long-ago visit, I realized that this was the turning point in this whole integration process. I spoke very frankly to her and she, I feel, was quick to observe that CBC was real, that she was not alone, that it was not the Church against her, and that there was indeed a splinter group on her side. I feel, too, that she realized that I was no longer in a power position to make integration happen because the Bishop had decided otherwise. I think that maybe it was here at this visit that she realized it might be time to play her cards, and her ace just might be her husband's position in the NAACP. She must have felt that, as a Catholic mother who wanted a Catholic education for her children, she had something to say about it. She was now holding the pencil that made it possible for her to draw a new line!

Mr. and Mrs. Turner met with Msgr. Elliott in his office at Catholic High School. It must have been an exciting meeting, and for this part of the story, *Between The Rivers* will once again be our source. Msgr. Elliott did not want a NAACP crowd at this meeting, so the group was limited to Allegra and Jesse, Allegra's sister and Allegra's pastor. "They passed through the secretaries' office space to reach a classroom for the meeting. Inside the classroom were painters using ladders. The principal, Msgr. John Elliott, came inside the room, made the proper introductions and began the meeting. The painters were not requested to leave the room... Monsignor began talking about the history of abuse/omissions of blacks in the Catholic Church in the U.S. compared to better treatment in South America. In response to whatever he said, the women were quite vocal. He was somewhat apologetic, but the women were not merciful. They were, however, impressed with his

knowledge of history and his compassion.

"Jesse Turner sat quietly until he observed a brief lull, then he chimed in, "I have only one thing to say – that is, no one forced CBHS authorities to accept my son. We have a letter of acceptance of our son by Christian Brothers High School which can be construed as a contract. He cited a case in New York City where a Jewish student was denied graduation because of his race and he won in court. Based on this case, I will sue Christian Brothers High School. Monsignor Elliott started lamenting, 'I'm so sorry.'" [15]

That weekend, Allegra quickly mailed a letter to the Bishop. Written with the proper salutation, the letter appeared in this fashion:

*July 15, 1963*

*Your Excellency:*

*I am appealing herewith that the case of Jesse H. Turner, Jr. — our son and a Negro — be reopened for two reasons:*

*1) that he be permitted admittance to Christian Brothers High School in September, 1963 in a quiet manner*
*2) to avert a most probable ugly situation which I am positive will develop if he is not admitted and informed of this shortly*

*We applied for Jesse in August, 1962; he was accepted October 31,1962 — enough time for all pertaining to his case to be cleared. Yet, after eight months of planning for his next year's work, we were informed that he is rejected because of race.*
*In conference with Father John A. Elliot* [sic] *State Superintendent of Parochial Schools, on Friday, July 12, 1963, my husband and I learned that no orders of policies on desegregation of Memphis parochial schools — high or elementary — existed at the time our son was accepted. We know that the present orders on limited desegregation (only 1-4) came in March, 1963.*
*Further, my husband — who is a non-Catholic — is President of the Memphis Branch, NAACP. He has informed Father Elliot*

*that he will take legal action, if necessary and possible at an early date. CBC has been informed of this and other possible moves, unless some positive word is received that Jesse will be admitted in September, 1963.*

*Kindly send Your Excellency's reply at the earliest possible moment.*

*I have the honor to be, Your Excellency,*

*(signature)*

*Mrs. Jesse H. Turner*

*ccs:*
*Rev. John A. Eliot*
*Brother Terence*

About ten days later I received a call from Father Elliott to say that under the circumstances it would be permissible to accept Jesse into CBC. I asked for a direct statement, something in writing to clarify this new position. This letter followed:

*July 26, 1963*

*Dear Brother Terence:*

*You have a copy of the appeal the Turners made to His Excellency the Bishop concerning the admission of their son to Christian Brothers High School.*

*The purpose of His Excellency always has been to prevent turmoil. Particularly because it develops that the Turner boy is the son of the NAACP President and they are determined to make it a test case, you are authorized to accept him as a student at Christian Brothers High School. This should be done as quietly and with as little publicity as possible.*

*May I suggest a wariness and caution in what is said to them. I conducted my interview with them in as friendly and conciliatory*

*a manner as possible, yet deliberately and calculatingly they misquoted me, apparently to lay a basis for further action. Knowing the basis on which they were appealing, I was very careful to insist that there had been a policy in effect previous to the pulpit announcement made in March – which on orders from the Bishop I had reiterated to the pastors a year earlier. However, it suited their purpose to say I had said there was no such policy. Also they attributed statements to you, during the interview, which I am certain that you would not make.*

*All things considered, the most peaceful solution will be for you to accept him as you originally indicated to the family, as a student of Christian Brothers High School.*

*Sincerely yours in Christ,*

*(signature)*

*(Rev.) John A. Elliott*
*Superintendent*

There is quite a difference between my feelings toward the Turners and Monsignor's. We were poles apart, it seems. I knew of no diocesan policy on school integration. This is possibly due to the fact that I arrived in Memphis in 1962 but also possible because Monsignor mentions that he announced the policy to the pastors. Obviously no one from CBC was invited to the meeting. Also, the comment about my need to be prudent in conversation with the Turners brought a smile to my face. To me, it meant that my true feelings about the Church's position in Memphis were understood. I was very frank in my conversation with Mrs. Turner, and I feel to this day that it was in this meeting that a trust relationship was formed which made it possible for the case to proceed. I simply felt that some of those who were expected to preach the Gospel were too timid, or maybe too political, to deliver the message.

Jesse Turner entered Christian Brothers High School on August 26, 1963. Two days later, August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King gave his

famous *I Have A Dream* speech in Washington, DC. A quote from this speech really fits the situation in Memphis.

*"In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men – yes, black men as well as white men – would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness... America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.'"* [16]

The Turners were cashing in their new check!

### A Brother Shares His Boyhood Reflections of Segregated Memphis

Brother Joel William McGraw, FSC

"I was born in 1945 and raised in Memphis until 1964 when I joined the Brothers. My dad, Elton, was raised in rural Mississippi and came to Memphis in 1920 as a sophomore in high school to live with his mother who had given him up for adoption when he was three. This sophomore year was to be his final year of formal education before starting his 46-year career at Gerber's Department Store. My mother, Helen, was raised in Lucy, Tennessee. She completed her high school in Millington, then enrolled in St. Joseph Hospital School of Nursing where she completed her RN in 1933. Helen's mother, Beulah, died when Helen was ten, leaving seven children to be raised by their father, and a freed slave by the name to Tom Ward. She and her siblings obeyed Tom and loved him and had never questioned why he entered the house only from the back door and slept in a shed behind the house. Though he was an adult, he was called "Tom" and not Mr. Ward, yet her father, Jack Dwyer, would care for Tom in his final years when he was paralyzed and Jack would bathe, clothe and feed him.

"In the McGraw household there were times when black domestics helped with the cleaning, washing and minding the children. Their last

names were never known and they were called by the first names, a practice not permitted when addressing white adults. Yardmen never came into the house and were fed in the garage on a card table, lined with newspaper, and the dishes were boiled after the meal was finished. The yardmen never entered the house to use the toilet.

"In Memphis the white people rode in the front of the bus, the black people in the back. On one occasion, I was so tired from a day downtown with my mother that once on the bus on our way home I headed for the first open seat and it was next to a black woman. My mother sided up next to me, pulled my sleeve and we stood the rest of the way home up Poplar Avenue. Nothing was said… just the tug on the sleeve and "the look."

"I had joined the Brothers and left home before racial integration in Memphis had hit the news. I was first stationed in St. Joseph, MO. My mother sent me news clippings about Memphis events now and then. I remember particularly the clipping about labor supporters picketing St. Joseph Hospital. The one and only black person ever to take supper at the McGraw table was a Brother from Sri Lanka who had been studying in Memphis. My mother had met him at the Stritch Hall Scholasticate and she and my father had taken to this cultured, educated gentleman who spoke with a foreign accent and was so different from anyone of the black race they had ever known.

"So… attitudes towards black people in the McGraw household were somewhat similar to other white households. There was respect; there was affection; there was segregation; there was discrimination. Only with time would those barriers begin to crumble, but the remains still held on and were never completely removed. This was to be the scene in Memphis in middle-class white neighborhoods and schools where Jesse Turner, Jr. would enter in a quiet and determined manner… and introduce a new and more moral world to Catholic Memphis."

## End Notes - Chapter Two

[1] Bond, p. 14.
[2] Cottrol, Robert. *Brown vs Board of Education*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas. 2003. p. 179
[3] *Commercial Appeal.* December 8, 2002. p. B3.
[4] *Commercial Appeal.* September 29, 2002. p. A1.
[5] McGraw, p. 382.
[6] Stritch, Thomas. *The Catholic Church in Tennessee.* The Catholic Center, Nashville, TN. 1987. p. 334.
[7] Ibid. pp. 322-335.
[8] Ibid. p. 334.
[9] Woods, James. *Mission and Memory.* Diocese of Little Rock, AR 1993. pp 240, 241.
[10] Namorato, Michael. *The Catholic Church in Mississippi.* Greenwood Press. Westport, CN 1998. pp. 91, 92.
[11] Stritch, p. 334.
[12] Turner, Allegra. *Except by Grace.* FOUR-G Publishers, Inc. Jonesboro, AR 72403. pp. 169,170, 179.
[13] Pinto, Br. Philip CFC. "Our of Darkness Breaks." Address to Religious Superiors in Ireland, May 7, 2011. p. 3 of transcript.
[14] Turner, pp. 2, 3, 48.
[15] McGraw, p. 384.
[16] King, Martin Luther. "I Have A Dream" speech. August 28, 1963. Cited in Google six-page printout, p. 3. (Internet)

# chapter three

## THE INTEGRATED HIGH SCHOOL
VIEWS AND PERSPECTIVES

We all have our comfort zones. It is only natural to want to be part of a group that really understands us, and we them. We generally fear to explore the unknown alone. Should we happen to be in an unfamiliar situation, we look for some person with whom we can identify; someone who may recognize our awkwardness, our aloneness. We look for someone who may offer to help us, be it by a smile or word of understanding. In such new and strange environments, whether it is a social event or a business meeting, we hope to find someone to make us feel less a stranger. I remember a young teacher telling me upon her return to the suburbs from a downtown Chicago field trip, that some of the students who barely spoke to her in school, but hung very close to her as they walked through the crowded city streets. They were out of their comfort zone, away from their familiar school setting.

Students upon entering a Catholic high school may also find themselves outside their comfort zones. Since such schools do not have distinct enrollment boundaries, students may be coming from different parishes, neighborhoods, sections of the city or even across state lines. A new student, therefore, could be the only one from his own grammar school who is attending a particular high school. This student will remain alone until new friendships are formed. The first week or so may be "cultural shock time" for such a student. Consider

for a moment Jesse Turner, that thirteen-year-old boy entering a school where he saw not one familiar face, not a single person of his race with whom he could speak, and no other student stepping out to welcome him. As the freshman student schedules were handed out to each student at the orientation program in the school theater, groups of boys did gather around Jesse, but just to see if he was to be in any of their classes. These students were curious about what was happening, but not to the extent of welcoming the newcomer, for this was also a first experience for them.

We must not assume that by admitting a black student into a white school integration is automatically taking place. It is what happens within the school afterwards that determines whether integration is truly alive. The academic programs in some high schools, which are rather permanently established at entrance time, can keep black students from interacting with white students even in their junior and senior years when such social interaction is pivotal for well-rounded student development. When Father Ryan High School in Nashville, TN opened its doors to a few black students in 1954, years before Jesse's entrance to CBC, the opportunity to participate in school activities was not at first given to them. Shortly after Jesse entered CBC, a local radio station called to ask if black students who attended the school would be able to participate in school activities. The school's clear answer was that any student accepted at CBC was able to participate in any school activity for which he qualifies. All school activities were open to each student. Jesse was to make his own choices.

Yes, Jesse was a courageous volunteer to break new ground for blacks in Memphis. Yes, he made many sacrifices so that other could benefit in the future. But, no, Jesse did not look upon himself as a crusader for social justice. He simply was a young boy who was fulfilling his mother's wish for him to receive a strong academic program in a Catholic school. She was a true believer in her son's capabilities to succeed in such an environment. He was a young boy who was remembering his father's advice that "you are not going to CBC because sitting next to whites makes you any better. You are going to learn what it is that they know that keeps them ahead of you." [1]

Jesse's entrance to CBC went very smoothly. This was a Brothers' school and in Memphis this meant that the school leadership knew

what they were doing. I received but one protest call, that from an irate mother who asked if it was true that we had a black boy in attendance. I told her that I would be passing through the school cafeteria in a few minutes and would check to see. I asked for her phone number — end of conversation. If other calls were censored by school secretaries, I never heard. In these pages we will hear Jesse's comments on his personal experiences. Mrs. Turner's experiences with her membership in the Mothers' Club will add an interesting perspective. Jesse was part of a "tight ship" school where students were conditioned to respect one another and each violation would be handled immediately. Mrs. Turner's participation in the Mothers' Club activities seems to indicate that the students handled integration better than some of these parents. Others — teachers, students, classmates — will also share their views on those high school days, 1963-1967. Black students at CBHS today (2012) will offer their views on life at CBHS today. (CBC was the high school name until 1965 when it moved to its present location and became known officially as Christian Brothers High School – CBHS). Our first reflections on Jesse's years at CBC will be taken from his interview in 2006 with Richard Chandonnet, a graduate history student at the University of Memphis.

"On his first day of school, Jesse Jr. recalls feeling somewhat nervous, although not particularly anxious. None of his classmates from St. Augustine's Grade School were attending CBHS (CBC), and although everyone knew him, he sadly knew no one. His first months at the school were spent alone, going silently from classroom to classroom without incident. The work load was tremendous and Jesse consistently spent four hours each night on homework. Finally in late September, long after he had become accustomed to the familiar routines of the school, he took his customary seat alone in the cafeteria. On that day a young man, Jack Young (a junior at the school), asked if he could sit with him, initiating what would become a close friendship. Although it was uncommon for juniors and freshmen to associate, Jack was apparently both curious and open-minded. Jack actually received more abuse from the other students than Jesse, as he was inundated with taunts of "nigger-lover" and other ignorant comments from many of his less-enlightened schoolmates. He remained undeterred and others joined them throughout the next few months, and by the

middle of the school year, a solid group of five or six would regularly meet for lunch." [2]

Jesse did not participate in many extracurricular activities during his freshman year, as his focus was on his school work. In his first year he remembers being assigned forty separate compositions for his English class, and Latin he found quite difficult. He felt that racism simmered below the surface of his daily interactions, and he often heard racist comments, but rarely any outright challenges. Most other students ignored him, and he felt that the teachers treated him like everyone else. Jesse remembers that during his sophomore year a second black student entered the school, and by the time he graduated there were five blacks at CBHS. He was elected to the Key Club (school service club) during his sophomore year. He attended the football games, most often alone. He remembers that the school band played Dixie after every home touchdown, and he recalls the subtle intimidation of the fans in his section as they were standing and staring at him as the song was played. In his junior and senior years all of the black students at CBHS attended the games together and endured the same treatment.[3]

Jesse felt that while paddling was an acceptable form of corporal punishment at the time, he was never so admonished. He mentions that most of the Brothers were outwardly non-racist, and some went out of their way to assist him. On the plus side he recalls Brother Roger giving the students a lecture on the evils of denying citizens the right to vote. It was he who also helped him on his science project. On the negative side he feels that racism played a part when the school committee decided that none of the science projects was worthy of first place, and he was being technically awarded third place and therefore not allowed to enter the City Fair. Since the school's "second place" project was allowed to enter the City Fair and won the overall competition, he feels that racism played a part in the decision to exclude him from this participation. [4]

Jesse was active in several clubs and school organizations, including the Yearbook, Chess Club, Science Club, Mathematics Club, Physics Club, and the Legion of Mary (Religion group). He feels that he was not given some leadership positions that he felt he deserved. He supports this feeling by saying that he remained as assistant editor instead of being appointed editor of the yearbook in his senior year,

this despite his seniority, experience, and academic standing. Jesse, on reflection, downplays his struggles at the school, although he acknowledges the ongoing difficulties of each day and the strong will that was needed to keep things in balance. On viewing his experiences in their totality, he feels that the positive far outweighed the negative. He found the school work incredibly demanding, and the training that he received could not have been duplicated in any of the all-black high schools in Memphis at the time. He was kept very busy during his time at the school and his only regrets were the scarcity of leadership positions available to him in the many organizations in which he participated. [5]

These are some of Jesse's reflections on his years at CBHS. No students left school because of his presence and according to some of the student and teacher comments, school life remained indifferent to Jesse's presence among them. A few students who were in school with Jesse were also included in this 2006 interview. Walter Phelan, who was a freshman when Jesse was a senior, recalls that Jesse and his brother Ray were simply a part of the school and mentioned that Jesse was considered very bright and a born leader. Mr. Phelan remembers that there were three black classmates in his graduating class (Percy Brown, Thaddeus Horne, and Carl Cooper) and recalls their presence at the school as a non-event, with CBHS being a safe, " non-racially charged" atmosphere. William Matthews was a junior at CBHS when Jesse entered school, and he recalls an undercurrent of resentment, but no direct harassment or confrontations. He recalls his fellow classmates commenting that they "did not want to do anything that would bring media attention to his presence at CBHS or give CBHS a bad image." Apparently many of the students viewed Jesse's appearance at the school as routine, even though racial tensions throughout the city were extremely high. [6]

Conversations with students and teachers who were at the school during Jesse's time bring new life to the story and give the reader a personal glimpse into school life at the time. In addition to comments about integration itself, many little human interest stories add a flavor to the conversation and bring the culture of the times into clearer perspective. These background stories help to frame the actual integration event into a panoramic of activities which put the initial

event into its proper setting.

Monsignor Val Handwerker, Pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish in Memphis, was a sophomore when Jesse entered school. He and Jesse, when upperclassmen, worked together on the yearbook and school paper staff, Val being editor and Jesse assistant editor. Msgr. Val felt that he and Jesse worked very well together. He also felt that Jesse's entrance to the school was accepted by the students without any special conversations or critical review. He mentions, though, in later years, when speaking to some alumni, there was mention of some student conversations in the corridors which were not appropriate. He feels that the total school tone, though, was positive.

One of the incidents that Msgr. Val uses to describe life in the early 1960s was a scene in front of the church where he is now pastor. Jesse's mother, Allegra, pushed her two youngest children in baby strollers as she picketed the parish school in hopes that the pastor, Msgr. Merlin Kearney, would change his mind and permit her son, Eric, to enter the grammar school. She was careful, Val said, not to picket directly in front of the church because she felt that this would be disrespectful to the Blessed Sacrament on the main altar. Eric was the Turner sibling who was to later become CBHS student council president!

Monsignor John McArthur, Pastor of St. Louis Parish in the city, was also a student at CBC, having entered in 1962. He remembers his own opening day as he experienced the usual first day jitters that most new students feel, but also he wondered with some fear what all those army Jeeps were doing in front of the school along the Parkway. Violence was in the air for this was the weekend that James Meredith entered Ole Miss in Oxford, MS, about seventy miles south. These Jeeps were ordered by the Federal Government to go to Oxford. Two people were killed in rioting that night on the Ole Miss campus. He also recalls the violent TV scenes which he watched in May of his freshman year when Sheriff Bull Connor swept black protestors off the streets of Montgomery, Alabama, with water hoses and dogs. And then a month later in June, Medgar Evers, a leading civil rights leader, was brutally killed in Jackson, MS. Adults did not know what to expect next, and one can only imagine what effect these events had on an impressionable fourteen-year-old. So, when asked about Jesse's entrance to CBC, Msgr. McArthur feels that CBC was a sanctuary of

safety, a place of acceptance, a peaceful place. The students went about their school concerns in peace and security. He contrasted the violence outside with the school serenity inside.

Msgr. McArthur did not experience the violence in the country directly, of course, but he was at an age when these actions were mighty disturbing. There was a subtle form of violence in the air during those days: people having fun at other's expense and reinforcing a behavior that is degrading. He remembers attending a football game at Crump Stadium in central Memphis between Memphis State (now University of Memphis) and Ole Miss (University of Mississippi). This was 1962 when Ole Miss was being forced to integrate. The yells that resonated across the field from bleacher to bleacher set the tone for our understanding of what was considered acceptable behavior by many during the beginning of the civil rights movement. From one side went the yell: *Two, four, six, eight. Ole Miss gotta integrate.* The response: *Two, four, six, eight. "Niggers" go to Memphis State!*

Mr. Jack Moran, a nephew of Msgr. Joseph Leppert, the Catholic priest who had welcomed black Catholics into his parish, was a teacher at CBC when Jesse came to school. He remembers Jesse fitting in nicely to the school and being respected for his serious study habits. He recalls that Jesse participated in many school activities, such as academic, religious and service groups. As did the students, Monsignors Val Handwerker and John McArthur, Jack felt that the integration was accepted as routine – no announcement, no fanfare — life in the school continued as usual, and at CBC that meant serious study in a friendly atmosphere.

Jack has an integration story of his own to tell about this school year, 1963-64, Jesse's first year. Jack was the track coach and in his work he came to know the track coach at Melrose Public High School, a black school. The Melrose track team was preparing for its meets on its cinder track, a disadvantage if the team was to qualify for the State meets. Jack invited coach Jiffie Wilburn to bring his runners to the CBC campus to give them the opportunity to get the feel of a regular track. The boys from each school exchanged ideas on how best to get out of the starting blocks and the quickest way to hand off the baton in the relays, among other sports talk. This practice took place quietly and just seemed so natural. And guess what? Melrose won the State

track meet for the black schools; CBC won the State championship for the white schools. This cooperative venture, unknown to almost everyone, was in its quiet way telling all of us that this is how things should work in the wider community.

Mr. Bob Crone, an Affiliated Member of the Christian Brothers since 1997, taught Jesse history and algebra during his sophomore year. Bob is one of the teachers whom Jesse praised in his earlier interview. Bob mentioned that it is hard for him after these many years to recall specific events, but he said that he could not remember any negative incident that occurred as a result of Jesse's enrollment in CBHS. He felt that there were two things that contributed to the successful integration of the school; the fact that Jesse came to the school as a student and not as a crusader and immediately went about the business of education; and the fact that he was intelligent and articulate stopped any pre-conceived notions anyone might have as to the abilities of the African-American student.

It is a real plus to learn that these students and teachers could remember that the school went about its business as usual in a quiet and undisturbed manner. This is the way the school officials felt it would go. It was those who did not understand CBC, its tradition and its culture, who feared trouble would result from this decision to integrate.

Richard Chandonnet in his summary statement on his research about this school integration concludes by saying "for young men and women whose natural tendency is most often to avoid distinction from their peers, it took a courageous person to volunteer for a role that was destined to contain scorn, and to isolate. Such a sacrifice would be necessary to open access to new routes of mobility, and Jesse H. Turner, Jr. made such a decision. Although most private schools remain relatively segregated, as do most all schools within Memphis, the courageous choices of young men such as Jesse cannot be discounted. Growing up in the 1950s and '60s, he was painfully aware of the racial situation within the city, and he fully understood the difficulties and loneliness he would encounter at CBHS. Despite this knowledge he brazenly advocated for the opportunity to open doors and help others 'emerge from the fog, and learn how society operates.' In this sense he succeeded, as over 300 black students have graduated from CBHS

since his enrollment, and all hopefully learned what 'white America knew as a people that kept us behind' — the lesson so dear to the heart of Jesse H. Turner, Sr." [7]

To get the perspective today (2012), I met with a focus group of ten black students, a mix of all four years at CBHS. They knew very little about the times when Jesse entered. It was very interesting to hear that their parents entered them in the school for the same reasons that Jesse had given for coming to the school: strong academics; excellent reputation of the school: and the opportunity to mix with whites, for that was how they would be living their future. They did not feel alone, for they knew that there were some sixty other black students in the school. They participated in such activities as sports, band, Spanish club, environmental club, Lasallian youth, and some were proud to mention that they were on the honor roll, or student executive board, and one was a member of the National Honor Society. They did note that some of the whites had different speech patterns, and spoke often of topics familiar to themselves, but not part of their own vocabulary, such as golf and tennis conversation topics. These students expected to meet differences in life styles in their daily associations, but they did not feel that racism was a part of any experience they had at the school. One student summed up his experience this way: "I'm the only colored student in one of my classrooms at an already predominately Caucasian school. It can be easy to feel like the outsider. But for the most part, there is no feeling of isolation because the racial tension does not play a major part of our lives, in this generation." When asked what they liked best about the school, such words or phrases as: friendship, cares are met, school is a family, the education, and sports, were frequently cited.

Racism is the result of false perceptions and false conceptions, and for this final review, let us just say that it is associated with the fear of what might happen if integration is to take place. Peoples' estimates of "what may happen" differ, and this is a big part of the problem. To lighten up the conversation, we will end this particular part of the integration story with a quote from E. W. (Ned) Cook, a Memphis businessman who urged Mayor Henry Loeb to become more flexible in his stand on segregation in the city. There were all kinds of estimates about what would happen if various procedures were followed. Cook's

answer was: "One man's estimates may not be the same as another's. That's why they have mats under spittoons." [8]

One person who faced the future with trust and hope, but never through fear, was Allegra Turner, Jesse' mother. The story of this remarkable woman, especially her years as a member of the school's Mothers' Club, needs to be told, for it displays racism at the adult level. The school had its rules and regulations, and all students were to lead their lives within these boundaries. The behavior of adults in groups depended upon the standards that their members developed themselves. The CBC Mothers' Club was the biggest day-to-day support group that the school had at this time. They were responsible for many significant changes on campus, the Bell Tower that has been a CBU icon for many years, for example. Apparently, however, operating on the side was a disturbing element of racism, as Allegra will identify.

I feel that Allegra's presence in the Mothers' Club annoyed some members from the start, and this put her in a very unfavorable position. Each year, in May, the club held its final meeting with a special luncheon, usually at one of the city's country clubs. Because Allegra had now become a member of the Mothers' Club, and since these clubs did not permit blacks to enter as guests, the year-end gathering had to be held on campus, in the CBC cove. This move, of course, was a real downer for some members.

A few of Allegra's comments will help to explain the culture of the times, again adding to the total integration story. "All along, during my sons' attendance at CBHS, I was a member of the Mothers' Club. At the outset, when Jesse Jr. enrolled, I attempted to pay the required $50 annual membership fee. The mothers sitting at the membership table acted as if they didn't want my money. Not one of them reached out to take it. I left it on the table and walked away.

"Another time, when Jesse and I, with our guests Vasco and Maxine Smith, went to the CBHS parents' dance, we were given seats just outside the door. We went inside anyway and danced, but only a couple of Christian Brothers and one other couple talked to us that evening.*

"When I attended the first Mothers' Club meeting, no one spoke to me. For eleven years, in fact, I remained a silent observer. One year the president of the Mothers' Club, Elizabeth Chiles, lost her son, a

twin, who drowned. When I attended the funeral, a young mother condescendingly asked me; 'Are you the maid?' I replied with a smile; 'I'm in the family.' She turned bluish red.

"By the time our third son, Eric, was ready to graduate, I had had enough. Abandoning my silence, I asked for the floor at our club meeting. I stood up and praised the mothers for their consistent hard work and urged them to continue. As I was leaving the room, the president walked up to me and said that she had planned to assign committee work to me. I thanked her and said that I had given my final remarks. My last son was graduating, and I would no longer be a member of the Mothers' Club.

"After she and I talked, I took stock of myself. I realized that I was feeling disappointed. I was feeling that my eleven years as a CBHS mother had been wasted. After all, I held a B.S. from Southern University and a master's degree in human development from the University of Chicago. I had completed some 60 hours in guidance and administration at MSU (Memphis State), UT-Memphis (University of Tennessee), and UT-Martin (a city about 100 miles north of Memphis). I had also completed twelve hours in a summer workshop sponsored by CBC (college). I was better educated than most, if not all, of the mothers in the club, yet because of my color, they had not deemed me worthy to work alongside them, and their children had been taught to shun my children. If this was the attitude in a Christian school, how much worse it must have been, I thought, in public schools that were being integrated at the same time." [9]

*The party to which Allegra refers was the annual Parents' Appreciation dinner dance that was becoming part of the tradition and scheduled during the second semester of the school year before the spring rush of events took place. In 1964, it was held at a hotel in downtown Memphis. These were the days when the city did not permit alcoholic beverages to be served in hotels, but guests could bring their own liquor and serve themselves. The hotel would, however, supply the mix. (This was the time when people could be seen entering a restaurant, with at least one member of the group carrying his preferred beverage for the evening usually wrapped in a brown paper bag).** A table had been reserved for the Turners but as the evening drew on, it appeared that

the Turners might not be attending. Since we had an overflow crowd, when asked by the chairman if the Turner table should be opened up for others, I said "yes." Shortly after that, Mr. and Mrs. Turner appeared with their guests and a hasty table-switching maneuver had to be performed. The first table was cleared off, the table by the entrance to the dance floor, that Allegra mentioned. I can fully understand the feeling of the Turners because this table by the door could give them the feeling of not being really welcome.

Soon after the Turners and their guests arrived at the the party hall, a few policemen arrived. Their job, I imagine, was to make certain that no disturbance was to occur. They had no work that evening. This may have been the first mixed race social event ever held at the hotel. This was the year that the Memphis Restaurant Association and the city hotels agreed to allow such gatherings. No one wanted to be first, but since all were beginning to feel the pressure of a changing society, they all agreed to do it in unison.

I had my own feelings of disappointment that evening. Shortly after the Turners arrived, a CBC staff member left the hall with her guests. It was this woman's way of letting me know that she did not approve of the school's integration. Since she did not work in the high school building and would not come in direct contact with the students, I let it pass. She certainly did not represent the feelings of the faculty or staff of CBC.

**An added note about the drinking laws in Memphis at the time might be of special interest today. The various private clubs in the city, the Knights of Columbus included, used an interesting ruse which allowed them to drink alcoholic beverages, and not break the letter of the law. A new member to the club simply brought a bottle of his favorite whiskey and drank from it. Upon leaving, this person would have his bottle put on the shelf in back of the bar with his name taped to the bottle. The next time that he visited the club, he would simply order a drink from the bartender. If he was ever challenged by law enforcement, that person would merely point to the bottle on the shelf to give the impression that he was drinking from his own bottle, and not being served by the club.

Allegra revealed her feeling, also, in letters after her active days at the school. She always remembered Jack Young, the student who befriended Jesse in his first days at CBC, and in 1993 mailed a special letter to his father, Dr. Jack Young. She was to receive the Christian Brothers University Dozier Award for Peace and Justice that year and had planned to add a special tribute to young Jack, now deceased, in her acceptance response. She wanted Dr. Young to know how meaningful his son's conduct was to her and Jesse. She closed the letter in the following manner: "Jack would speak and show concern for Jesse's well-being. Jack's library period was the same as his in freshman year. Also, Jesse said a couple of days ago, 'I would have eaten alone had it not been for Jack Young.' Thank you for a wonderful son who accepted Jesse Turner, Jr., my son, as a human being back in 1963-1965. You and Mrs. Young must have reared Jack as a caring person. I shall be forever grateful to you and will always remember Jack with love and gratitude." [10]

Allegra and I exchanged Christmas cards and letters through the years. One of these, dated November 17, 1975, when I was in the Chicago area, is mentioned here because the letter captures the feelings of Allegra about her total CBC experience. Its appearance here also gives me the opportunity to respond to a comment in the letter that may need clarification.

*Dear Brother Terence,*

*For a long time I have wanted to share some of my impressions with you regarding CBHS and our three sons, Jesse, Jr, Ray A., and Eric M. who are now alumni of this excellent school. So far, I think they are good men who were made out of boys by the Christian Brothers. I like to think of the thorough academic grounding, the scholarly examples, the strict and consistent discipline, and all else, that I am limited to describe, as "The CBHS Experience." That kind of perseverance builds the kind of stamina necessary for adjustment and for achieving some measure of success in our society.*

*I am especially grateful to you for your part in Jesse's desegregating CBHS peacefully and without fanfare. I owe a*

*tremendous debt of gratitude to Brother Stephen for staying on top of each and every potential difficulty the first four years. The opportunity for advancement afforded them enabled them to take advantage of numerous subsequent experiences. Perhaps one day, I'll get to chat with you at length. I might even call one day.*

*I have never dismissed the feeling that you suffered because of the incident of Jesse's enrollment in high school at CBC. I remember mentioning this to you briefly, and you brushed it off saying; "Oh no," and you'd explain later.* ***

*Brother Stephen, God bless him also, was so helpful! He always talked quietly and softly, but positively; his actions were similar. He is a scholar and genuine Christian. You are, too. That is not to say that I am unmindful of fairness and firmness, acceptance and concern on part of others at the school. Of course, our boys (and even our two girls –Frances 14 and Lisa almost 13 years old) love and are loyal to CBHS. In fact, the girls wished to attend there. But, Frances is a freshman at I. C. and Lisa hopes to be admitted at I. C. very soon. Here's hoping you are well and happy in your endeavors.*

*Sincerely.*
*Mrs. Jesse H. Turner*

*P.S. We think the world of Brother Adrian. He was not here, however, when history was made. We still work together. I see Mr. Waff and Mr. Higginbotham at meetings (Guidance, etc. Mostly I refer a boy to CBHS)"* [11]

***I was transferred to Chicago during the summer of 1964. Jesse had just completed his first year at CBC. My last contributions to the high school were to be present for the groundbreaking for the high school on Walnut Grove Road and to sign the contract for the building of the new school. That new school, once constructed, would be known as Christian Brothers High School. Teaching assignments for the Christian Brothers who were teaching in the various schools were reviewed each year and transfers were made depending on local

and district circumstances, or upon a Brother's personal request. The administrators of the schools were usually given three-year assignments renewable for another three years, but with a limit of six years. These administrators were usually at that time also the directors of the religious community in residence, and the six-year term was a Church canonical regulation. I was transferred from Memphis after a two-year period. It was this early transfer, and one that happened shortly after the integration of the high school, which caused wonderment among some in the black community, and perhaps more so in the CBC community. My personal feelings are that the change had little to do with my stand on integration, but was caused more by my management style and policy differences with the new Provincial. This Provincial, Brother Lambert Thomas, had been the President of the college immediately preceding me. He was the builder of the modern CBU. He had, I am certain, plans for the future of the college. It was in the second year of my administration that Brother Thomas became Provincial. I was not the type of leader to carry out his dream, at least not without much discussion.

This was not his style. I was assigned to a new public school/ Catholic school cooperative venture which was to be developed in Chicago. I may be naive, but I did not know of any correspondence or conversation between Brother Thomas and Bishop Adrian. I am comfortable in the feeling that there was no such communication.

Allegra consistently challenged segregation whenever it occurred in any area where her voice might help to bring about change. In those most troublesome days in Memphis in 1968, before Martin Luther King's assassination, a few church groups in the city attempted to intervene in the city garbage workers' strike because Memphis was at fever pitch. It is from one of these meetings that we get another view of Allegra, the person who is calling it as it is. The Catholic Human Relations Council, led by laypeople, had taken a public stand in support of the strikers. Phone calls poured into Catholic parish rectories to condemn this interference and the newspapers denounced the Council.

Msgr. Leppert, the founder of the Council, was not pleased. He had urged moving more slowly because he did not want to antagonize those members of the white community who might be able to help

them. He mentioned that he attended a city council meeting a week before and that he was disturbed by the racial comments that were openly stated and other harsh comments made, and the obscenities. These hurt the movement, he said, and the Human Relations Council must not become involved in racial hatred and obscenities.

This brought Allegra to the floor. "Obscenities!" Allegra Turner's voice rose wildly. She was Louisiana Catholic-born, wife of the president of the NAACP. "I'll tell you what obscenity is. It's answering the phone at two o'clock in the morning and hearing someone say; 'Your husband will be dead by tomorrow night.' It's having people write letters saying 'Get out of town, you goddamn niggers.' It's watching your children go off to school and not knowing if they'll come home again because they've been threatened, too. That's obscenity!" [12]

Allegra passed away on February 21, 2008. This strong woman of the Gospel spent her life motivating the black community to leave their complacency and challenging the white community to rethink their established traditions. She is the woman in 1957 who was not permitted to take a book out of the Memphis Public Library because she was black. She is the woman who was appointed to the Memphis Public Library Board in 1990. She is the woman who fought for acceptance into the Christiana Brothers High School Mothers' Club in 1963. She is the woman who was elected to the Board of Trustees of Christian Brothers University in 1981. She is truly a success story!

## End Notes – Chapter Three

[1] Chandonnet, Richard. *Private School Integration in Memphis: The Experiences of Jesse H. Turner Jr. at Christian Brothers High School.* (Hist 7070 – Spring 2006 Project), P. 24.
[2] Ibid. pp. 19, 20.
[3] Ibid. p. 21.
[4] Ibid. p. 22.
[5] Ibid. pp. 22, 23.
[6] Ibid. p. 24.
[7] Ibid. p. 29.
[8] Beifuss, Joan Turner. *At The River I Stand.* St. Luke's Press, Memphis, TN 1990, p. 218
[9] Turner, pp. 179, 180.
[10] McGraw, p. 386.
[11] Ibid. p. 388.
[12] Beifuss, pp. 233, 234.

## SELECTED RACIAL EVENTS IN SCHOOLS IN TENNESSEE & NEARBY STATES, 1954-1963

**1954** Father Ryan High School integrates quietly. Black students at first were restricted in their participation in some school activities.

**1956** Autherine Lucy, aided by the courts, enrolled in the University of Alabama. She was expelled later, the university stated, to insure her safety.

**1957** Nine students prepared to enter Central High School in Little Rock, AR. Governor Orval Faubus used the National Guard to prevent their entrance. President Dwight Eisenhower sent federal troops to guarantee the students' entrance.

**1959** After years of delaying tactics Memphis State University (now University of Memphis) admitted eight black students. Police escorts were provided them but they were denied the use of the cafeteria and student center, and were required to leave the campus by noon each day.

**1960** Ernest Donohue transferred from LeMoyne College (Memphis) to CBC in 1960, becoming the first black student to enter CBC (College). He left CBC in 1961 to enter the Christian Brothers Congregation in Glencoe, Missouri.

**1962** James Meredith attempted to enroll in Ole Miss (University of Mississippi). Rioting broke out on the campus but Governor Ross Barnett's defiance broke under the pressure from federal troops who were sent to the Oxford, MS campus.

**1963** Governor George Wallace literally stood in the schoolhouse door to keep out a group of black students who were seeking entrance to the University of Alabama. President John Kennedy federalized the National Guard and forced the governor to permit the students to register.

**1963** Jesse Turner quietly enters Christian Brothers High School.

**1963** Mississippi State University qualified for the NCAA basketball tournament and was slated to play Loyola of Chicago in the first round. Loyola was known to have black students on their team, so before the State Legislature could serve an injunction to ban the team from playing, Coach Babe McCarthy secretly got his team out of Mississippi and the game was played.

## SELECTED RACIAL EVENTS IN CITIES IN TENNESSEE & NEARBY STATES, 1955-1968.

**8/55** Emmett Till, a black boy from Chicago who was visiting relatives in Money, MS, violated the black-white "social code" then in existence in Mississippi. He was said to have "disrespected" a white woman. He was killed for his action. This incident brought national attention to Mississippi.

**12/55** Rosa Parks refused to follow the white busing law. Her action led to the 382-day bus boycott in Montgomery, AL.

**4/63** Martin Luther King wrote his famous letter from a Birmingham jail. He addressed the letter to his "fellow clergymen" and asked them why they did not address racial injustice in their community more forcefully. (Bishop Joseph Durick, later to become Bishop of the Nashville Diocese which included Memphis, was one of the clergymen so addressed.)

**5/63** Bull Connor turned dogs and hoses loose on black protesters in Birmingham. The national TV coverage aroused the nation and motivated Civil Rights groups to increase their efforts to register black voters in the south..

**6/63** Medgar Evers, a Civil Rights leader, was killed in Jackson, MS. No witnesses dared to come forward until

thirty years later. A conviction was made in 1993.

**9/63** Four little black Sunday school girls were killed in a Ku Klux Klan bombing of of their Baptist Church in Birmingham. This tragedy evoked national outrage.

**6/64** Three "Freedom Summer" workers, who came to help black residents of Philadelphia, MS get registered for voting, were killed. Their bodies were buried, and were not discovered for weeks.

**3/65** Civil Rights leaders attempted a 50-mile march from Selma, AL to the state capital in Montgomery to showcase the State's injustices toward blacks. The marchers were twice blocked in their efforts, but with Martin Luther King's leadership the third attempt drew a national response and ministers of all faiths joined them for the march. This march became a celebrated event for the Civil Rights movement.

**4/68** Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis. Riots erupted in cities across the country. Memphis remained calm, stunned, and damaged.

# chapter four

## PUBLIC SCHOOL INTEGRATION
PRIVATE SCHOOL & WHITE FLIGHT

The integration of Christian Brothers High School was really a smooth transition. This was due, in some part, to the city administration not voicing public opposition. The Catholic schools were a minority group and were expected to be different. The political forces of the city knew that most other churches did not agree with such a move, and these formed the backbone of the public school system. Most of these churchgoers in the city wanted to live within the segregation model. The city leaders may not have liked what was taking place within the Catholic school system but they had their own turf to control, and integration was not going to happen in the public schools under their watch.

The *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision applied directly to school integration, but the implication was that all so-called legal segregation was unconstitutional. Southern congressmen were quick to swing into action and 19 senators and 77 representatives issued the "Southern Manifesto" condemning the Court decision as a usurpation of state powers and a decision bent upon "destroying the amicable relations between the white and Negro races that have been created through ninety years of patient effort by the good will of both races." [1]

The first challenge in higher education came in 1955 at Memphis

State College when five black students sought entrance. It was not until 1959 that the college actually admitted black students. These first students had police escorts to classes and were not permitted to eat in the school cafeteria, and were to leave the campus by noon.

## "The Memphis 13"

It was not until 1960 that a group of city attorneys filed a lawsuit demanding total and immediate desegregation of all city schools. This plan began with 13 grammar school children. Helped by higher court decisions, they won their case as the "Memphis 13" entered first grade.

"In 1961, seven years after the U. S. Supreme Court ruled that racially accepted schools — 'separate but equal' — were unconstitutional, Memphis City Schools were still just that," stated the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* in its 50-year review in 2011 of this landmark event. "These youngsters were enrolled in four all-white schools with no more than four students per school and only one per class.

"That MCS integrated with its youngest students was no accident. The world had watched the violent protests against desegregation at Little Rock Central High five years earlier. 'We wouldn't touch high schoolers,' Rev. Samuel "Billy" Kyles said, 'but first-graders were not "tainted".' The students met no physical violence, but according to Rev. Kyles, while the police escorted the children to school to protect them from a howling mob, 'the mob turned out to be the police. They said the nastiest things to my daughter and I as we walked through the line. They said things I couldn't repeat in any company.'

"News reports stated that parents moved about 25 white students from the four schools which the Memphis 13 attended that first day. Nearly half of the 13 didn't stay at the white schools through the sixth grade. The students, men and women today, had stories to tell about these grade school experiences. Some remembered friendships formed. Others that it was a very difficult time, having to travel a distance from home to school each day and then listening to the negativity of some students, some days more common than others." [2]

Richard Chandonnet in his report has a very interesting comment

to make. "Surprisingly, on the day of their (Memphis 13) admittance, the names and addresses of all parents of the students were printed on the front page of the local newspaper." [3]

In reflecting upon the stories these first thirteen youngsters had to tell, I recall an interesting conversation that I had while doing this research. One of the librarians in the history room of the Memphis public library shared his memories of integration back in Virginia many years ago. A black student had enrolled in a public school, the only black student in the school at the time. The boy naturally was frightened in this all-white environment. His one trusted friend was the school janitor, a black man. The janitor noticed the boy's reluctance to enter the boys' washroom for fear of getting beaten by some of the students. So to help the boy the janitor would place his mop at the door of the boys' room as a signal to the boy that the coast was clear and that it was safe for him to enter. Difficult as the situation was for the student, this wholesome relationship of the janitor with the youngster can make one smile. They had their own secret code of operation.

In the late 1960s the eyes of the country were attracted to the South, and in 1968, the eyes of the entire world focused on Memphis. The troubles in Memphis began as a labor issue and escalated into a civil rights problem. Memphis sanitation workers seeking recognition of their union and a wage increase went out on strike. The city's rejection of these demands, with its support from a large segment of the white community, moved a labor dispute into a racial confrontation. Martin Luther King, who had been turning his civil rights efforts toward economic issues and who was preparing to launch an interracial "poor people's campaign," decided to come to Memphis. His first march in Memphis stirred up some violence and his reputation as a non-violent leader was in shambles. He vowed to return to Memphis to lead a non-violent march. After arriving back in the city he spoke at a mass meeting in preparation for this special march. Before he was able to do so, he was assassinated. Cities across the country: Detroit, Chicago, New York, Pittsburgh, Boston, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. exploded in racial violence – but not Memphis. Much of the credit for the city's relative peace remains with the majority of the black community that dealt with their anger in the way Dr. King had instructed and through the efforts of a handful of black-white coalitions like Memphis Cares

and the Memphis Search for Meaning Committee. [4]

After Martin Luther King's death, the black community gradually assumed a stronger position in its civil rights efforts. They were becoming a political force in the city, and in the south generally, as they realized that they had power in their numbers and many more blacks became registered voters. On the educational front this power took the form of school boycotts. The black community demanded better schools, modern equipment, and to become part of the same school system as the white people. These boycotts, known as "Black Monday Boycotts," led to as many as 65,000 students walking out of school each Monday for six weeks during September and October of 1969. [5]

Memphis, like many other cities which opposed school integration, did what it could to avoid what it must have known was inevitable, namely, a federal mandate to support the Supreme Court decision. Most of the proposals that the city put forth were considered to be mere delaying tactics, and one after another these proposals were struck down by the courts. It was not until 1973, when Judge Robert McRae ruled, after reviewing many city proposals for many years, that action must be taken in Memphis to outlaw its two-race system. He issued desegregation orders that called for busing of students to achieve racial balance in the Memphis public school system. This was the final blow to segregation in the schools, and it was met with all kinds of protests. Some parents moved out to the county where their children could attend white schools, and thousands of students simply left the Memphis school system, many to become students in the new 'white flight' schools. The Judge received death threats and became an outcast in the Memphis community.

Judge McRae, in his *Oral History of the Desegregation of Memphis City Schools*, explained his decision. He is very clear in his report: "In its simplest terms the Supreme Court in 1954 ruled that school boards violated the Constitution by operating separate schools for Negroes and Caucasians. For more than half of the 20th century, this was accomplished in Memphis by white racism. Successive white Boards of Education and other city government officials, with the help of thousands of white individuals, businesses, and landlords controlled where Negroes lived, went to school, and what kind of jobs they could

have.

"The dictionary definition for racism, he noted, " is 'the notion that one's own ethnic stock is superior.' In Memphis, the bondage in which white customs and practices had placed Negroes as a group was more than a 'notion.' It was a fact.

"Because white racism had become so pervasive in controlling the lives of Negroes, particularly in the schools and the segregated neighborhoods where Negroes lived, I decided that an historical record should be made available to show the longstanding propensity and practice of white Board members and countless white citizens to deny Negroes 'the equal protection of the laws,' based upon the color of their skin." [6]

Judge McRae, in what he calls Tape One of his history, takes the reader for a walk through Memphis history. His writing is much like the first chapter of this book but perhaps told in a more homespun manner. He begins: "Tennessee became a separate state in 1796 and Memphis was founded in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. It was in the Cotton Belt, and the Mississippi River was one of the primary assets. It knew and recognized the slave trade of Negroes. Memphis was unmistakably committed to the Confederacy during the Civil War. It was occupied by Union troops and a naval battle was fought on the river near Memphis.

"In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Memphis suffered from yellow fever epidemics that caused considerable death and emigration to other cities, such as St. Louis. Unfortunately, the city government suffered financial difficulties. The charter was revoked and later re-issued.

"During the first quarter of the twentieth century, Memphis began its growth to become, ultimately, the largest city in Tennessee. Memphis was a tri-state hub for western Tennessee, northern Mississippi and eastern Arkansas. All of the areas were predominately rural where cotton was the major agricultural crop. This created business for Memphis with numerous cotton offices and the Memphis Cotton Exchange on Front Street overlooking the Mississippi River. This brought about a migration of businessmen and employees to Memphis. Although Negroes were no longer chattels owned by white persons, they were relegated to a status of second- or third-class

citizens. They continued to do the manual labor jobs in the growing and harvesting of cotton for low wages or income. In many cases they were exploited by white landowners who used sharecropping arrangements which laid impossible burdens on Negro families.

"During the cotton picking season, all members of the family – women and children –had to work picking cotton. In the early part of the century and until after World War II a way of life evolved in which Negroes were suppressed and deprived by the white community. This occurred partially through state statutes and city ordinances. For example, intermarriage with whites was prohibited. Also, written instruments were used as having restrictions in subdivision plans prohibiting sales by a white person to Negroes. Then there were customs and practices in governmental entities. There was total separation of the races in public education, through high school, colleges and universities. The lack of a proper education caused Negroes to be relegated to lower paying jobs, which deprived Negroes of money to educate their children. Furthermore, the stigma of being black imposed by most white persons meant that blacks were not eligible to work where blacks would be rendering public or governmental service to white persons. Black cab drivers did not transport white persons. Even without written restrictions, blacks were deprived of rights to live in white neighborhoods. Blacks could not be treated in white hospitals. They could not use public libraries with whites." [7] The Judge was not just upholding the laws, he truly believed in his heart that this law had a strong moral dimension to it.

When many Memphis city school proposals for modified desegregation of its schools were rejected by the courts as insufficient, the plan accepted by the courts and implemented by Judge McRae was announced, calling for busing nearly 40,000 students.

The order was met with a firestorm of protests. Some 28,000 white students left the City School System. Anti-busing forces included ten members of the city council withholding funds to purchase gasoline for the school buses, and then-Mayor Wyeth Chandler, who urged a boycott by white students, stated; "I cannot and will not urge any parent to send his child to a ghetto school." White flight academies mushroomed in eastern Shelby County and northern Mississippi, filling church buildings once used only on Sundays and Wednesday

evenings. In 1975, Memphis had one of the nation's largest private school enrollments: 35,000 in 90 private schools. In the process Memphis city schools remained segregated. Most of these private schools, with the notable exception of Memphis Catholic, remained overwhelmingly white. [8]

Leigh Anne Tuohy. who inspired the country with the story of Michael Oher in the book and movie, *The Blind Side*, was a middle school student when the desegregation order was first imposed. She has given the reader a first hand account of "white flight" and its effects on families and students. The scene is Memphis in 1973, ten years after Christian Brothers High School became integrated, and it then had 4 black students enrolled. This was a different scene in the public schools, where integration affected thousands of students.

Leigh Anne mentions that "for several years the Memphis School Board had willfully resisted desegregation. After Judge McRae's order, tensions rose across the city. An action group named Citizens Against Busing angrily called for a boycott, and every white politician in the city, including the mayor, backed them. As the rhetoric escalated, there were fears of local violence, moving thirty-three leading citizens to sign an advertisement pleading for calm and urging respect for the law.

"The court-ordered busing plan — issued in January 1973 — called for shifting 13,000 students to different schools, and it directly affected me. At the time I was attending a middle school called Wooddale, a perfectly homogenous institution in our East Memphis neighborhood. But, under the new plan, I'd be bused across town to Hamilton, an all-black middle school over by the river.

"My father immediately pulled me out of the public school system. He had very strong ideas about race and about which neighborhoods were safe and which weren't, so much that I was forbidden to go to certain parts of town. He wasn't alone. There was a massive exodus as parents deserted their schools. In the month of January, 7,532 children were withdrawn. As an emergency response to busing, Citizens Against Busing opened twenty-six 'education centers,' most of them in temporary classrooms leased from churches. Some families even moved out of Memphis to counties where their children could still attend segregated schools.

"My friend Tammy Scott's father was a public school teacher

and he insisted that he was perfectly fine with sending his daughter to Hamilton. But Tammy's mother put her foot down — she was too frightened by the busing issue. Thousands of other parents made the same decision, though some — like my parents — cited safety rather than segregation. But whatever the rationalization, the simple fact was that many of the whites in Memphis did not want their kids going to school with 'them.'

"That spring about thirty-five thousand white students failed to register. Memphis was the nation's tenth-largest public school system, and now it was half emptied. Meanwhile, private school enrollment exploded. Before busing, there had been just forty private schools in Memphis, most of them Roman Catholic. Suddenly, there were ninety. New private schools began springing up all over.

"Parents banged on the doors of the city's Catholic schools hoping to enroll their kids or looking for information on how to set up private academies. To her credit, Sister Gwen McMahon, superintendent of Catholic schools in the Memphis diocese, was horrified. She said; 'I believe the witness they are giving to children and adults is very bad. I think we have to learn to live together and I don't think that setting up schools at this time in history is very Christian.'

"The Baptists mobilized and filled the gap. Church groups raised large sums of money for capital building plans; in no time at all, redbrick institutions appeared on sprinkler-fed lawns and white schoolchildren began filling them. My parents enrolled me in the eighth-grade class at one of them, the spanking new Briarcrest Christian School....It is painful to say it, but Briarcrest was established as a direct result of racial fear and an almost wholesale unwillingness by Memphis whites to mingle their precious children with blacks. The irony was that a school that was set up specifically to oppose integration would one day welcome Michael Oher.

"Schools like Briarcrest emphasized a Christian philosophy, but everyone knew what was really behind them. A 'Christian education' had only become important after busing was ordered. As Louis Lucas, a lawyer who had fought hard for desegregation, said; 'The interest in God generated by busing is phenomenal.'" [9]

Thousands of white families moved to the suburbs after busing. Many black families left the inner city to more central and mid-town

Memphis. Neighborhoods continued to determine the nature of the schools. Today, forty years after the desegregation decision was implemented, the schools remain white or black. "Put another way, the chances are better than 90 percent that a black or Hispanic student attends a high school that is 99 percent or 100 percent minority and more than 90 percent economically disadvantaged. Only two city high schools, White Station and Cordova, come close to matching the city demographics as a whole." [10]

Busing alone did not create the suburbs but definitely increased the move out of the city, a process already begun in 1972. Busing came at a time when developers were building suburban office complexes and when governments were building roadways to these suburban areas. The city began to lose its "connectedness." Connectedness is described as the difference between a geographic area and a neighborhood, between school attendance and school spirit, and between a group of people and a caring community. Memphis still hurts for connectedness, and busing is partly to blame. Memphis attorney Louis Lucas, one of the legal masterminds of school desegregation, believed systematic segregation did not go away after Jim Crow laws were struck down. It continued because of neighborhood patterns influenced by bankers and realtors and school attendance zones drawn for years by a whites-only board of education. [11]

As we look at the Memphis city public school system today, the question must be asked: Did busing truly work to better education for the black community? Did it help the white community? Are the schools better today than they were forty years ago? Even without busing, would not the whites have left the city as they did in other cities across the country?

The judge who rendered the final decision in 1973 has some strong opinions on these questions. He felt that, after the city's many attempts to delay a final decision by submitting numerous proposals which did not survive court review, his order that 40,000 (Plan Z) Memphis public school students be bused from school to school had to become a reality. To the question did busing work, his reply is very forthright. "From the implementation of Plan Z in 1973 to the present there have been those who say, 'It didn't work.' In a large measure, this was based upon the ignorant belief that the goal was to achieve

a racial balance throughout the system. As we have seen, this was not the case. The goal was to order the Board to adopt a plan that would rid the system of separate racial systems under one board and have the Board put in place a desegregation plan consistent with Supreme Court decisions.... When Plan Z was approved by the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court refused to accept the case for further reviews, the Memphis School System met the standards for a unity system. Therefore the question, 'Did it Work?' must be answered 'Yes,' even though it took fourteen years after the case was filed."

Judge MacRae continues his oral history of the decision by describing the Memphis mentality and its effect on education in the city. "The root cause of white flight was the white racism syndrome which had become heavily infested in the Caucasian portion of the Memphis and Shelby County community. As has been indicated, the white racist syndrome was based on the notion that members of the Caucasian race were superior to the members of the Negro race economically, educationally, intellectually, residentially and socially. These were important signs which indicate or characterize a disease, physiological disorder or other abnormal conditions. White flight has some advantages and disadvantages. The exodus caused a reduction in operation and maintenance expenses, such as fewer bus trips and closing many schools. Also fewer faculty members were needed. The problem of who should leave was not extremely difficult because many of the white teachers were white racists also. Therefore, there was white flight by many of them who were unwilling to teach in an integrated or all-black school. Many were eligible for retirement and chose to go that route." [12]

The judge recalls in his review the various ruses that the Memphis School Board tried in order to avoid busing, and the outright opposition that he received from some of the Board officials, public school patrons, and the press. He is clear throughout his story that he was seeking to see that the black students received their constitutional rights in the city schools. He did not force the white students to leave the schools. He could not accept the code words or phrases used by the white community as having substance. He exposed them here and there in his story, for example, when white parents spoke of "quality education", he felt they really meant "white only" schools. [13]

This book began with Memphis press reports about racism that are truly an embarrassing part of newspaper history. Since that time a different perspective has occurred in their writing. This has come about for many reasons: among which are: changes in newspaper ownership; societal changes regarding the race question; court decisions; political correctness; and a general growth in understanding of what racism truly is. The local Memphis press highlighted the struggle over education in the years from 1961-1973, presenting the public with the good, the bad, and the ugly. This is what a paper is expected to bring to its readers. An editorial in the *Commercial Appeal*, November, 1973, set a wonderful tone for balance and understanding and the need to follow the law.

It mentioned its opposition to forced busing as a wasteful, burdensome technique of shuffling students hither and yon. But ever since the United States Supreme Court ruled that busing was an acceptable tool of dismantling formerly dual school systems, it has become increasingly clear that Memphis would not be the only city excused from using this tool. The editorial also acknowledged the frustrations and inconvenience that busing may cause, And in addressing the parent groups that felt very strongly about the plan, it stressed that this was a test of the public's belief in government by law and not by men. It said that Memphis has already enough racial scars. Its prosperity and livability depended on the ability of blacks and whites to work together. "Inflaming racial hostility" would set it back and increase the possibility of the city becoming another Detroit. The editorial highlighted the work of various civic and private groups to keep peace in the community. It felt that protests were not needed, but instead the city needed strong leadership to preserve its schools. Permanent changes can only be made by its people, not by a judge or legislator. [14]

The Memphis school system has weathered many rough days through the years and has the scars to show for it. The fighting apparently is not over as the city and county systems debate whether to become a unitary system. Does this mean 'white flight' again or will the people this time be able to work out a cooperative solution?

## The Cold Within

Six humans trapped by happenstance
In bleak and bitter cold,
Each one possessed a stick of wood
Or so the story's told.

Their dying fire in need of logs
The first man held his back
For of the faces round the fire
He noticed one was black.

The next man looking cross the way
Saw not one of his church.
And couldn't bring himself to give
The fire his stick of birch.

The third one sat in tattered clothes
He gave his coat a hitch.
Why should his log be put to use
To warm the idle rich?

The rich man just sat back and thought
Of the wealth he had in store.
And how to keep what he had earned
From the lazy, shiftless poor.

The black man's face bespoke revenge
As the fire passed from his sight.
For all he saw in his stick of wood
Was a chance to spite the white.

The last man of this forlorn group
Did naught except for gain.
Giving only to those who gave
Was how he played the game.

Their logs held tight in death's still hands
Was proof of human sin.
They didn't die from the cold without
They died from the cold within.

(James P. Kinney) (Douglas C. Corbett)

## End Notes – Chapter Four

1 Bond, p. 134.
2 Moore, Linda. *Forgotten History: Memphis Commercial Appeal.* (Special Section), October 2, 2011. Pages A-l, A-2. V-1, V-4.
3 Chandonnet, p. 7.
4 Bond, pp. 137-139.
5 Chandonet, p. 7 (Citing Collins, Thomas. *From Courtrooms to Classrooms: Managing School Desegregation in a Deep South High School.* p. 93)
6 McRae, Robert. *Oral History of the Desegregation of Memphis City Schools (1954-1973)* 1997, CBU Library. Catalog number: 379.263 M147.
7 Ibid., pp. 5, 6.
8 Bond, p. 140.
9 Tuohy, Leigh. *In A Heartbeat.* St. Martin's Griffin Press. New York, NY 2011, pp. 76-79.
10 Branston, John. "The Tragedy of Busing Revisited." *Memphis* magazine. March, 2011. p. 41.
11 Ibid. pp. 38-40.
12 McRae, p. 187.
13 Ibid. p. 188.
14 *Commercial Appeal.* Editorial. November 17, 1973.

# chapter five

## LASALLIAN EDUCATION IN MEMPHIS
### QUO VADIS?

I returned to Memphis in 2000. It had been 36 years since the *Commercial Appeal*, on June 1, 1964, featured a picture of the groundbreaking at the new Christian Brothers High School with a statement which read: "Brother Terence laughingly ladled a soupy shovelful of mud at Walnut Grove and the Expressway, site of the new l.2 million-dollar Christian Brothers High School, in a rain-soaked ground-breaking ceremony yesterday afternoon." [1]

The CBU Archives has a picture of this ground-breaking, posted side-by-side with another newspaper picture and comment, dated April 2, 1964. It is of the "Old CBC" at 612 Adams "as it steadily yields to the demolition crews of Memphis Wrecking Co." A handwritten quote from Ecclesiastes 3.3 is attached: "There is a time to destroy; there is a time to rebuild." It had the "out with the old, in with the new" feeling to it.

The city that I had known — Midtown with its focus directed toward downtown Memphis — had now become a city whose reach has extended far and wide — north, south and east. The new school, whose water-soaked grounds were outside the city limits in 1964, now constitutes a campus considered to be near the center of the expanding Memphis metropolitan area. Some of the old city buildings

are now gone; many new and classy structures have replaced them. The downtown area is no longer the only center for commercial and cultural activity. I was returning to a big city, but my roots were still in Midtown. Brother Stan Sobczyk, then President of Christian Brothers University, had invited me to return and to assist him in various university projects. I never intended to return to Memphis, but since Brother Stan seemed so serious about his request, I gave his invite a few month's consideration, and then decided to return.

At first, my interest in Chicago educational projects remained strong because I had made a personal investment in many schools in that area. But gradually I began to become involved once again in Memphis activities. First, I wanted to see what had happened on the educational front through the years. I was told rather clearly of gains and of losses. I heard, mostly in a subdued sort of manner, that racism and politics were still problems. I had just come from Chicago, so racism was something that I understood. And as far as politics was concerned, Chicago was a wholesale distributor of such chicanery. What I was hoping to see were examples of co-operative ventures in the city – people and organizations who were working across religious, racial and political lines.

The visitor to a city often sees things quite differently from people who have been residents in the city for many years. The city may speak to the visitor in a voice quite loud and clear but which has become muted over time for the resident. Memphis seemed to me to be a city of possibilities, with so much yet to be done. My profession is religious education and this field has become a vital part of Memphis history. However, churches and schools work within the culture of the city, country, yes, and the neighborhood in which they reside. Some personal reflections on this culture — positive, negative and reflective — will set the tone for what, I believe, is happening in the city, and what may be their impact on schools into the future. After a short time on the CBU campus, I mentioned that the University seemed to be peacefully grazing on the Parkway. The city, too, seemed to be moving very slowly, and I wondered if this was a question of lack of energy or lack of vision.

I observed changes in the city and because of my previous experiences here, I wanted to understand more about the present-day

culture. Was it much different from the manner in which the culture expressed itself in the 1960s — with the CBC integration story; the experiences of Jesse Turner and Allegra Turner; the message of the clergy letters; the stories told by students at the time; the "white flight" thinking; all those things that for me, had been expressions of the Memphis mentality at that time on segregation?

It has now been twelve years since my return to Memphis. I have attempted to keep a watchful eye and a listening ear to observe the pluses and negatives of life in the city, as expressed by its various constituencies. I began to clip articles from the local papers in an attempt to get a feel for the culture of the city. Sometimes the "Letters to the Editor" section gave me some insight into what may be bothering many in the general public; in other parts of the papers, staff writers, while admitting the need for city improvement in various areas, brought to light the city's progress and vision for the future.

I was taken back in time when I read about the inauguration of Barack Obama in one of the letters. This letter mentioned that many schools in the area had sent letters to the parents to inform them that the school would be watching the inauguration ceremonies of Barack Obama, and if they wished that their children did not see this event, they should send a note to the school in advance. [2] I felt real disgust! Were we now educating another group of racists? Some people might say that these letters were about party affiliation and not racial decisions. This, of course, may be true but I had heard such explanations in the past and this interpretation simply did not register with me.

That letter to the editor reminded me of a gray November day back in 1963, the morning after President Kennedy was assassinated, when we heard that some children in a northern Mississippi school cheered when the announcement of the President's death was made over their school's public address system.

Maybe Memphis is more polarized than I expected. One article after the election of 2008 confirms this; that is, if statistics truly reveal the peoples' beliefs. It mentioned that the voting precinct which Eternal Peace hosted had 1,190 votes for Democrat Barack Obama and 4 votes for Republican John McCain. Collierville Presbyterian hosted the county's strongest Republican precinct with McCain receiving 1,529 votes and Barack Obama getting 317 votes. This is a 82% to 17%

spread. [3]

Another letter, this one in 2011, decried dog fighting in the area and said that such behavior makes Memphis look like a Third World country. A responder replied that Memphis has been a Third World country for over forty years and would remain so until the government agencies and citizenry decide to do something about it. [4]

A writer, again in 2011, mentioned that she has never seen so many racist and uninformed opinions expressed in the letters to the paper as she has seen in the past year. She felt that too many people in the community are just interested in marginalizing others instead of studying the various causes of the troubles and attempting to understand one another. [5]

Millions are squandered on sports, writes another, while so many families are struggling to survive and to just provide food and a decent education for their children. Our children are suffering because of the greed of the self-serving millionaires so they can make more money. [6]

Each of us can select newspaper articles to support a cause which we favor. I chose these because each gives a glimpse of the culture in which schools are to operate. And, as I noted back in 1964, it is the way that people feel and the ideas which they espouse that tell educators where change needs to occur. I noticed in my first few years back in the city that Memphis seemed to be hurting itself by the news items its newspapers gave most ink to; the time and emphasis its TV stations gave to the worst in our city; and the general feeling among many people that this is the way it is, and will be for years to come. This prompted me to write Mr. Joseph Pepe the publisher of the *Commercial Appeal* in 2009.

Two paragraphs will give the tenor of this letter: "Memphis is generating a poor reputation across the country, to some extent, by all the crimes that newspapers must expose This is reality. These stories need to be reported. However, might the *Commercial Appeal* be operating in unconscious collusion with some of these negative forces, by its not taking a more proactive stance to highlight the city's more substantial positive attributes? This is just a question but one with many implications. Memphis is a great city, but it will not be perceived as such until the talented youth that higher education is drawing into the city receive more attention than the delinquents who seem to

dominate the news reports.

"I have no immediate solutions, but maybe we can engage in a conversation from which some plans might emerge. Should you wish to call, my phone number is 321- ----, or maybe a visit to your office might be preferred. I feel that Memphis would benefit from such a discussion." [7]

I did not receive a reply.

A *New York Times* article about the Memphis city/county school merger plans sets the tone for the difficult work ahead. This report described the situation in the Memphis School Board building which is located just across Hollywood Street from a CBU residence hall to illustrate the trials of communication. "For now, the two new boards are trying to combine the districts, which, improbably, have both long had their headquarters in a rambling office building in central Memphis. A corridor linking the two wings of the building, has for years, had double-locked doors whose glass panels are covered with particle board. 'This is our Berlin Wall,' said Irving Hamer, Memphis's deputy superintendent." [8] The school officials, city and county, have been isolated within their own building.

If changes in education in Memphis are ever to take place, the cancer of racism must be addressed openly. Two other letters expressed the racist polarization, one written on March 1, 2012 and challenged on March 5. The first writer mentioned how he watched the cowardly and racist white flight to the county schools, and the private schools that seemed to pop up at more "white" churches that he could count. This, more than any other thing, led to the steep decline of Memphis City Schools. The responder, calling that letter a response from the racist left, mentioned that the writer could not see his own racism because of the left's agenda belief system and that their progressive religion is so radical. He concludes by saying that the Memphis City Schools failed because "white" students were no longer there to prop up the city schools. [9]

Other articles, written by newspaper staff persons, while offering a rather realistic picture of life in Memphis, have a more upbeat feeling to them. One mentioned that even though Memphis was the only Tennessee city among the state's 20 largest cities to lose population during the last decade, and being a city whose poverty rate was around

30%, the city's problems were not insurmountable. Poverty is the real problem, but there is a glimmer of hope for improvement of the public school system because many of the right people are working on the transition — the Memphis glass is half full. [10]

In an article which appeared in the My Life section of the paper, the writer "thought that the city has self-esteem issues and we need to believe in ourselves more. We all know the city has problems, but let's make those opportunities. I suggest we stop the blame game, roll up our sleeves and believe that we are smart enough to figure things out." [11]

Another article, written by a staff person, highlights the role that racism plays on business development. The writer stated that: "The most important economic development in Memphis is learning how to deal with race, the biggest elephant in the room. Racism plagues our community — those who suffer from discrimination, those who are sick of talking about it, and those who knowingly or unknowingly use it as a means to judge. It is always around. It affects our businesses, our schools, our inner city, our suburbs, and our politics. It stifles our economic growth. If we do not take stronger strides to learn about it and accept one another, this city will never reach its potential." [12]

The editor of the *Commercial Appeal* weighed in with a challenging article about the perceived Third World mentality, a label that some people have stamped on the city. "No, we're not a Third World city. But yes, we often think like one.... Consider the public dialogue going on right now about how Memphis should educate its young people. We hear lots of talk about walling the richer kids off from the poorer kids. But who is looking at the value of training young people in the life skills needed to interact and work with all kinds of people in what is a vast, multicultural world?

"Maybe Memphis needs to be more like a Third World City — a contemporary Third World City — whose cultures are all mixed up and new ways of thinking are rewarded.... Here's what we can learn from the prospering Third World cities. Focus more on our global strengths and less on our internal woes. Prepare our best and brightest with the critical-thinking skills needed to challenge a traditional mindset. Remember that the richness of our city's cultural life matters greatly to those who have a choice of where to live. Do all of this and we can change our habit of slipping into a Third World mindset." [13]

These articles give us a starting point to discuss strategies which educators need to address in order to effect change in this environment. In addition to the stories that these writers tell, we can add our own. Memphis is a city that wants to go someplace but it can't seem to get started. Many of its citizens have a low opinion of the place where they live. The economic problems have created a large group in need of food and adequate housing and a city with many uneducated people. But also this is a city that sees the possibility of forming alliances and partnerships.

And speaking of alliances, how is this for togetherness? Rabbi Micah Greenstein, speaking at the funeral of Sam Ross, brought smiles to all the faces of the mourners with this comment: "Only Sam Ross, a Jew from Boston, could marry a Catholic girl from Chicago, move to Memphis, support the Temple and the Catholic Church, have a gallery named after him at a Catholic college located in a building named after a Jew." Sam Ross was the founder of Fantastic Sam's Hairstyling and the building cited is the Plough Library at CBU. It is named to honor Abe Plough, one of the city's great benefactors.

The races of Memphis must find a way to work together in education just as the city has done in other endeavors — religion, medicine, business. Minorities in the United States have always had to fight for equality and acceptance. The majority group has always lived off its labels and metaphors and has felt these to be their reality. Catholics had to overcome the label of being Papists and therefore un-American. Today the majority on the Supreme Court are Catholics. When I was a youngster in the mid-1930s, Japanese products were just cheap junk, like toys in Cracker Jack boxes. Today their products rank with the best in the world. The Jewish people in Europe were dubbed an inferior race in some countries. Today they lead in the arts and theatre and are foremost in philanthropy. The Irish were called "Shanty" because of their inferior housing in well-established neighborhoods. Today they rank among the wealthiest in the country. The arrival of the black community into the mainstream of American living, of course, is much more difficult because they have been kept in bondage for such a long time.

Each of the struggling ethnic groups who were trying to rise in American society found a niche in which to begin and to move up

in that society. For many in the big cities it was prizefighting and other sports; for others, music; but for most others it was their skill in industry, agriculture, or in a specialized field of endeavor. The military and the church, too, gave others a great chance to rise. Today, college and professional teams are giving opportunities for many minorities, but for most minority youngsters this is but a distracting dream. Today, education in its many forms is that first step that many African-Americans and Latinos in Memphis must take, along with their fellow associates. Our Lasallian schools, together with the many other schools in the city, offer these young students the opportunities which they will need to become successful and contributing members to Memphis society.

There are those people in Memphis who remember the days when the city was challenging Atlanta when that city was dubbed "the Athens of the South." Those were the days when Nashville had State political clout but was considered to be more or less just another Tennessee small town. People now wonder what has happened to Memphis. Why did Memphis lose its momentum? Some say that even today both blacks and whites are thinking like "back of the bus people" and that it is now time to act like "front of the bus people" and assert command of events surrounding them. Since education is one of the most talked about topics today, let's look at what is happening in that field and what might be done to move this important part of our culture forward. We know where we are. We see the value of cooperation. We need to form the vision and then all move together in the directions that will enable the community to achieve it.

**The picture is clear. The city has strong currents of racism in its midst. Memphis is the poorest majority African-American city in America.[14] Sixty-five percent of the lowest achieving schools in the state of Tennessee are in Memphis, and the entire State ranks near the bottom in academic performance in the country.**

**Memphis is a city of 662,897 citizens, of whom 10% are Catholic. The State of Tennessee has 2.3% Catholic population, the lowest of any state in the country. Memphis is bounded by Mississippi which is 3.7% Catholic, and Arkansas which is 4.1% Catholic. Forty percent of all baptisms in Memphis in 2011 were Latino!**

CBHS has been the centerpiece of this writing. This is where the

story began, and together with CBU, that is where it will end. But the great contribution of other schools to good, sound Catholic education in Memphis needs to be recognized These schools this past school year (2011-2012) enrolled over 7,000 students of all ages in their five high schools, eleven elementary schools, and eight Jubilee schools,with 35% of this number being minority students. Their contribution to the Catholic Church in this territory where we Catholics are such a minority is one of the treasures of our Catholic community.

The De La Salle Christian Brothers stand side by side with this group of educators with our educational involvement, at present, in pre-school to post graduate education in Memphis. This educational program, called Lasallian Education, has been formed to address the special needs of all its clients, with special concern for the poor, the struggling, and the "lost" student. At the same time this system is determined to educate the future leaders of the city who are now students in their flagship high school and university.

This is now the question: Given the culture and history of Memphis; its poverty and poor education; its working through racial tensions, especially in the schools; and its operating from a minority position, how can this wonderful force for good — the Lasallian Catholic Schools of Memphis – make a real difference for the future of this city? There is a real challenge ahead and that is the first thing we must know and accept. The challenges and dilemmas have been identified. Strategies must now be developed to address these problems. Silent acceptance of existing conditions is not the answer.

The Jubilee Schools Program, a home-grown Memphis creation, is one of the most innovative school programs in the country, and it is right here in our midst. It has taken all the education jargon and put it into an action commitment. It has formed alliances, broken ranks with established procedures, created lots of out-of-the-box activity, rejected the status quo and challenged the "Silent Acceptance" attitude of the city. This program, has placed the Diocese of Memphis in a much more forward looking Catholic community of educators than that of fifty years ago.

An article in the *Commercial Appeal* called the Jubilee Schools the "Intercity Miracle." It spoke of once-shuttered inner-city Catholic schools now being reopened with a new and exciting approach to

inner city education. The program is made possible by a multimillion-dollar donation from two Protestant donors who worked with Bishop Terry Steib and Dr. Mary McDonald, Superintendent Emerita of Catholic Schools. The funding, the school buildings, and the academic programs were put together through this co-operative venture. The donors wanted all other contributors – donors, teachers, staff – to feel a sense of ownership. They hoped for Memphis support, and now national and even overseas support is coming their way.

These schools now operate on a $64 million endowment, serving more than 1,400 mostly non-Catholic and poor students in eight schools. Unlike most private, faith-based schools, these schools accept any students, regardless of test scores, previous academic or behavior records, or a family's ability to pay. All families pay something, but some pay as little as $10 a month. Some students who graduate from the elementary schools receive scholarship aid to attend Catholic middle and high schools. The schools also provide all students who need them with uniforms, daily hot breakfasts and lunches, weekend snack packs, health screenings, tutoring, parenting workshops, and literacy and jobs-skill programs. [15]

## "Silent Acceptance" and the De La Salle Christian Brothers in Memphis, 2012

Our Brothers' membership across the country has been in a state of decline for the past fifty years. A blip in membership here and there from time to time indicates no significant trend for new membership into the future. We Brothers are realistic and accept what is happening to our once-flourishing congregation. We Brothers in Memphis have a choice to make. We can just let things happen and fade out of the educational marketplace or we can review what we now have in place, strengthen what is good, and, by our expertise and encouragement help others who will be carrying on the Lasallian vision into the future. The status quo and silent acceptance must not be an option.

The Brothers' two educational schools — Christian Brothers University and Christian Brothers High School — are the key delivery systems for Lasallian education in Memphis, together with the Brothers'

Midwest District, Regional and International programs. The Brothers have been directly involved in one of the Jubilee schools, De La Salle at Blessed Sacrament, since it began. The first two administrators of the school were Brothers. Two Lasallian Volunteers, members of a nationwide Brothers' program, have been part of the staff each year since 2002. These volunteers, all recent college graduates, live in association with a Brothers' community and devote two years of service to Brothers' schools. In Memphis, it is De La Salle School at Blessed Sacrament Parish.

In 2012-2013 the community of volunteers will live at CBU in a section of the campus which is taking form as an "educational village" where other teachers and graduate students will also be living. The Brothers' indirect relationship with the Jubilee schools began when Christian Brothers High School released two of its teachers to open Holy Names Jubilee School and to direct its programs through its beginning years. The Brothers' communities, together with their university and high school teachers, staff, alumni, and many students from other Catholic schools, have provided tutoring, financial aid and general support to the Jubilee School program. The Brothers, as of this writing, will no longer be directly involved with Blessed Sacrament in an administration role, but will continue to help by mentoring students and supporting the volunteers. Daniel Salvaggio, who will assume the role of principal at De La Salle Blessed Sacrament for the 2012-2013 school year, is strong in Lasallian education background. He has attended both CBHS and CBU and was a Lasallian Volunteer and a LANCE teacher. Brother Alan Parham will continue his work as assistant principal at Resurrection Jubilee School.

Another cooperative venture was formed in 2002 when the Diocese of Memphis Educational Center established a working relationship with the CBU education department to design a teacher program along the lines of the Notre Dame ACE (Alliance for Catholic Education) program. This program develops teachers for Catholic schools where such teachers are in short supply. The CBU variation of this program is called Lasallian Association of New Catholic Educators (LANCE). These college graduates live in community and will now be residing on the CBU campus. These new teachers, coming as they do from many different colleges and from many parts of the country, bring

new life and innovation to the schools where they will teach. Teachers serve for two years in the program and some remain in Memphis to teach after they leave the program. Fifty members of the LANCE program have taught in Memphis Catholic schools and half that number have remained in the city after their two- year commitment to the program has ended.

In addition to the Lasallian Volunteers and the LANCE teachers, there are other educational "missionaries" coming to Memphis through the Teach for America, Memphis Teaching Fellows, and the ACE program. CBU will admit thirty TFAs and MTFs and seven LANCE teachers into education programs, summer 2012. These programs provide great sources of energy for any school in which these young teachers are about to join the established teaching corps.

"Education by association" began in Memphis 50 years ago when CBHS accepted Jesse Turner's application for entrance in 1962 for his freshman year, 1963-64. The story has been told. It is time now to take a look at Lasallian education in Memphis today and to explore its possibilities for the future. The city of Memphis poses great challenges to this form of education — or better said — terrific opportunities to put into actual practice those strategies which Memphis truly needs for its own future. Memphis today is a city with great poverty; racism; a larger uneducated citizenry of both minors and adults than is tolerable; unemployment; and is moving too slowly in handling these problems. What a place for Lasallian education to take hold and to address the issues directly through its schools!

## Christian Brothers High School Today – 2012

CBHS has 96 black students in its student enrollment of 862, or 11%. Its Catholic enrollment has declined somewhat through the years but has remained slightly over 50% for the past decade. The biggest change in Catholic school education during the past decade is its cost, and CBHS is no exception. Tuition at the school has increased 93% since 2000, from $4900 to $9500. In its efforts to attract students who need financial aid to attend the school, the school in 2011-2012 gave $l,l00,000 in scholarship aid. This is a strong statement of the school's

desire to help any young man who desires to attend Christian Brothers High School.

CBHS through the years has touched the lives of students of all social classes, all multicultural groups, religious affiliations beyond number, and all academic achievement levels. The school has added a variety of programs to fulfill the needs of each of these groups. There are the Honors Programs and the Advanced Placement Programs for those who need this challenge. There are religion programs and ethics programs to suit the needs of Catholics and the school's many other denominations. It has had remedial programs and summer schools for those who need to sharpen their study habits. It is moving at present to a real upgrade of technology in the classroom. In fact, this coming school year the school will introduce the students to classes without the usual textbooks as we know them.

Despite all of their accomplishments through the years and the school's present strong reputation in the city now, there will always be challenges ahead. The school will need to continue to announce its Catholic and Lasallian Mission to the wider community. To some, CBHS resides in east Memphis and beyond just like the select private, assorted religious and 'white flight' schools of yesteryear. This perception may arise because of the Tennessee Athletic Association's linking CBHS with the private schools of Memphis and beyond.

This perception is not the reality, and it certainly would not be addressing the needs of Memphis, if it were so. First of all, CBHS is no longer in what used to be called " East Memphis", but is now closer to the center of the Memphis metropolitan area. However, when the school administration a few years ago began for a short time to look at property in far eastern Shelby County, some people wondered if the school really intended in the future to remain in its present location or to move further into the suburbs. CBHS may need to define its Mission for all of its constituents.

CBHS might benefit from the words of Thomas Green in his *American Journal of Education* writing on what Catholic schools should be: "Catholic schools must be flexible enough so that the good and skillful persons who dream of what is not yet, but might be so, can be free to decide and act. Catholic schools must be sufficiently resistant to change so that those people of merely technical conscience

and limited to skills of political management, but rootless of soul, may not do irreparable harm." [16]

CBHS — Catholic and Lasallian CBHS — Traditional and Flexible

## Christian Brothers University Today - 2012

CBU, due to its favorable location, has a wonderful opportunity to renew the spirit of its Catholic culture and Lasallian Mission and to become proactive, for it lies at the center of this struggling city. Memphis' educational needs run the gamut from early child neglect, to teen dropouts, to low graduation rates, to adult illiteracy and beyond.

Many writers on higher education through the years have predicted that small private colleges like CBU, which have weak endowments and attempt to operate with static lower-than-adequate enrollment, will face a dismal future. The question might then be: How will CBU be a key figure in present and future Memphis educational development since it fits so neatly into these descriptors? One answer is that CBU must challenge itself to bring to life in more vigorous form, the words that it displays so prominently:

**Catholic Lasallian Distinctive**

Let's look at how this might be done.

**The Catholic Dimension of CBU:**
Memphis has six Catholic high schools. In CBU's enrollment this past school year (2011-2012) there were 11 students from CBHS and 14 from the remaining five schools — a total of 25 students with a Catholic school experience. CBU did not enroll a single student from its 15 Lasallian high schools of the Midwest outside of Memphis. CBU will need to work this network of schools to its advantage.

The college in 1954 had an enrollment which was 78% Catholic. This percentage has gradually declined through these 58 years to 23% for Catholic students today. It is obvious that this trend was not monitored through these many years to evaluate its effect on the

vibrancy of the rites and rituals that need to be a dynamic part of the Catholic University student experience.

Today, CBU seems to be using national trends to guide its recruitment programs outside the Memphis area, rather than focusing on the special needs within the University community as its reference point. The national trends state that only 12% of students choose a college because it is Catholic, so there appears to be less emphasis put on working the Lasallian network of Midwest schools by CBU. Each successful college today pinpoints its recruiting efforts in an attempt to draw those students to its campus who will help build its programs. CBU will also need to pinpoint its efforts to selected Catholic schools in Chicago, St. Louis, Louisville, Cincinnati, Little Rock, and New Orleans — and the other small Catholic schools which lie within 250 miles of Memphis. CBU needs more Catholic students on campus so that the University will be able to keep its Catholic religious practices strong and its programs to develop Catholic lay leaders a priority. An influx of students who have had a Catholic high school education and who have had the experience of managing the cost of tuition will place the University in a position to be that help. CBU must continue to be a Catholic leader in Memphis higher education for there is no other source to fulfill this need in western Tennessee, Mississippi and Arkansas.

**The Lasallian Dimension of CBU:**

CBU will need a proactive program, a two-pronged approach to higher education in the city, to be truly Lasallian. The facts are clear: Many students who graduate from city schools are not able to gain entrance into many colleges because they lack the skills necessary to succeed in a college program. CBU cannot lower its educational standards to accept such unprepared students. However, other opportunities are present. It was nice to read in *Sky Delta* magazine, (December 2011 issue) that Christian Brothers University pre-med graduates have a medical acceptance rate 33 points higher than the national average. This is a really fine tribute to the academic quality of the University, and this must be continued. But for the special needs of Memphis itself, it is time for the University to expand its vision and to consider setting up programs for those students who miss the cutoff mark for entrance to

the University. Students who are presently lacking the necessary study-habit skills, but who are of determined nature and who demonstrate progress, might be moved to a level of acceptance at the University level. Students who are "almost' ready but 'not quite' would be the target group for such a summer program.. After an intense program, lasting as many weeks as necessary, a decision could be made by the acceptance committee as to the student's readiness for CBU; ready, that is, for special courses within the University newly-created structures. This could be similar to the programs that the UT College of Medicine and the University of Memphis School of Law offer for students who need additional preparation for their programs.

A few more students will be saved from failure each year, especially if the University adds new programs within its offerings This is Lasallian thinking about concern for the poor, for poor means lacking educational skills, too. We must remember too, that 79% of CBU's present student enrollment enters from Tennessee.

Such a change in program design means that CBU, in meeting these special needs in Memphis, will be extending its definition of "excellence" by action commitment. CBU will be excellent in terms of continuing to attract high performance students and in offering them a challenging four-year experience; CBU will demonstrate excellence in addressing the needs of the unprepared students by its pre-entrance summer programs and by adding tracks within the University that will gradually raise these students to acceptable graduation standards. The largest number of these students will be African-American and Latino having come from the city's public schools. CBU will be publicly recognizing that these African-American students are in the position they are because for years their home life, their social life, and the school life of their forbearers were controlled and manipulated by tradition and law and it is now dealing with the result of such segregation. For the Latino students CBU will be helping this fastest growing ethnic group of youngsters to take a meaningful place in the culture of the city.

Reinforcing its Catholic and Lasallian dimension is a "must" for this fine university. The academic level will be kept strong by enrolling students from those schools — Catholic, private, public and international - who intend to go to college and have sufficient financial

ability to realize their dream. CBU needs to focus its recruiting efforts.

**The Distinctive Dimension of CBU:**
CBU is one of only two Catholic colleges in the three-state area of Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas. The University has the opportunity to rebuild education in this Catholic missionary territory and has the national and international reputation of the Christian Brother Congregation to support it in its efforts.. This distinctive quality is perhaps best expressed by Brother Michael McGinniss, past president of CBU.

"CBU has a terrific advantage in its unique mission as a Catholic and Lasallian university in the heart of the mid-South. In my experience no other Lasallian university in the United States has such a clear purpose by virtue of its uniqueness. All of CBU's sister Lasallian schools are situated in areas in which there are many other Catholic institutions, some more prominent than the Lasallian school.

"In terms of institutional identity and mission, this clarity of purpose comes along with the long-recognized 'tolerance' for which CBU and the Christian Brothers in Memphis have been known. When I was preparing to come to CBU in 1994, I came across Mayor Overton's phrase describing CBU as a 'temple of tolerance' way back in the school's history. The CBU that I experienced from 1994-1999 was characterized by that same tolerance of multiple viewpoints and experiences. Among students, faculty and staff, CBU reflects its location, with evangelical Protestants in the majority, but with Catholics strongly represented, as well as practitioners of many of the other great religions of the world.

"The challenge, of course, is to take this advantage and translate it into a distinctive 'value-added' proposition for students of all ages. Perhaps it is my background as a theologian that makes this hospitable Catholicism appear to be such an advantage. But even my casual reading of most day's news reports convinces me that this is a true advantage, one that is natural to CBU, as natural as the warmth and hospitality of its fellow southerners." [17]

CBU will need to be alert to all the emerging possibilities offered by the new and developing technology. CBU, the small University with a less than adequate endowment and with static low enrollment, will need progressive and aggressive planning as it faces an uncertain future.

We must not, however, overlook the firepower that is in our Memphis mix; our Catholic heritage with its many followers; an understanding and generous Memphis community; the professions and businesses which rely on our well-prepared students; and those in the wider Mid-South area — donors, philanthropists, entrepreneurs — who just might be awaiting an opportunity to help CBU if the university can develop exciting opportunities for their support.

And where does Memphis stand 50 years after the first black student entered CBC; 40 years since the Memphis city public schools met white flight? It is still pretty much a black and white school system so one has to wonder about what could have been. A New York Times article appeared the very day when the book was coming to closure and spoke about the gains of an integrated school. The writer mentioned that it meant all the difference in the world in the lives of black children and in the lives of their children. The advent of integration had transformed their experience of going to school. The education gap between white and black students in the last 20 years shrank, not because the white youngsters did worse but because the black youngsters did better. [18]

A *Commercial Appeal* article on this same day commented on the effort of a special committee's work to bring the city schools (mostly black) and the county schools (mostly white) together into one system. It warned that after such consolidation would take place the various cities involved could splinter off to form their own school systems. It could be "white flight" again, a procedure that gives the parent the opportunity to attend a segregated school without paying a private school tuition or moving one's family. [19]

**Memphis — Quo Vadis?**

***Postscript:*** *The Tennessee Historical Commission approved a Christian Brothers High School historical marker which was dedicated on September 13, 2012 at the Walnut Grove location. Included in the school's historical accomplishments is mention that "The first African-American student, Jesse Hosea Turner Jr., was admitted in 1962. He enrolled in 1963, yielding the first racially diverse high school body in Memphis."*

## End Notes – Chapter Five

[1] *Commercial Appeal*, June 1, 1964.
[2] Ibid. Letters to the Editor (Deborah Corbin), January 31, 2009.
[3] Ibid. McMillin, Zack. Inaugural Views etc., January 19, 2009.
[4] Ibid. Letters to the Editor (Becky Muska), December 17, 2011.
[5] Ibid. Letters to the Editor (Audrey Dandridge), January 8, 2012.
[6] Ibid. Letters to the Editor (Robert D. Walker), December 15, 2011.
[7] McLaughlin, Br. Terence. Personal letter to Mr. Joseph Pepe, June 21, 2009.
[8] Dillon, Sam. "Merger of Memphis City and County Schools" *New York Times*. October 6, 2011. p. 18.
[9] *Commercial Appeal*, Letters to the Editor (David Maybry) March 1, 2012 and March 5, 2012 (Joe Sellmansberger)
[10] Sanford, Otis. "Memphis Glass Doesn't Have To Be Half Empty" *Commercial Appeal* (Viewpoint). December 11, 2011.
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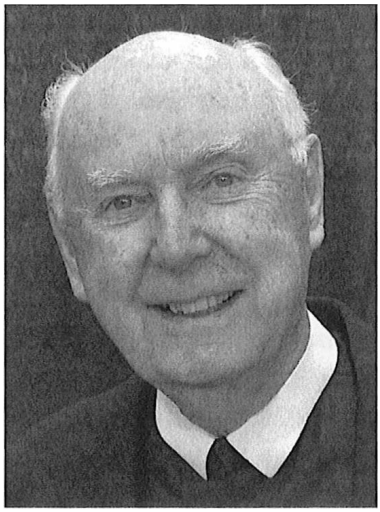
[12] Fowlkes, Andre. "Goals for Growth in Memphis This Year." *Commercial Appeal*. January 1, 2012,. pp. C-1.
[13] Peck, Chris. "Third World Examples to Follow," *Commercial Appeal* January 22, 2012. P. V4
[14] "Step Ahead on Teen Pregnancy," *Commercial Appeal*. April 1, 2012, p V3.
[15] Waters, David. "Inner City Miracle," *Commercial Appeal*. April 24, 2011, V1.
[16] Green, Thomas. "The Formation of Conscience in an Age of Technology." *American Journal of Education*. November, 1985.
[17] McGinniss, Br. Michael. Cited in *The Passing of the Baton*, McLaughlin, p. 120. CBU Archives, 2009.
[18] Kirp, David. "Making Schools Work," *New York Times* Sunday Review Section. May 20, 2012. P.1
[19] Locker, Richard. "Punishing and Pacifying," *Commercial Appeal* Viewpoint Section, May 20, 2012 p. 1, Section V.

# about the author

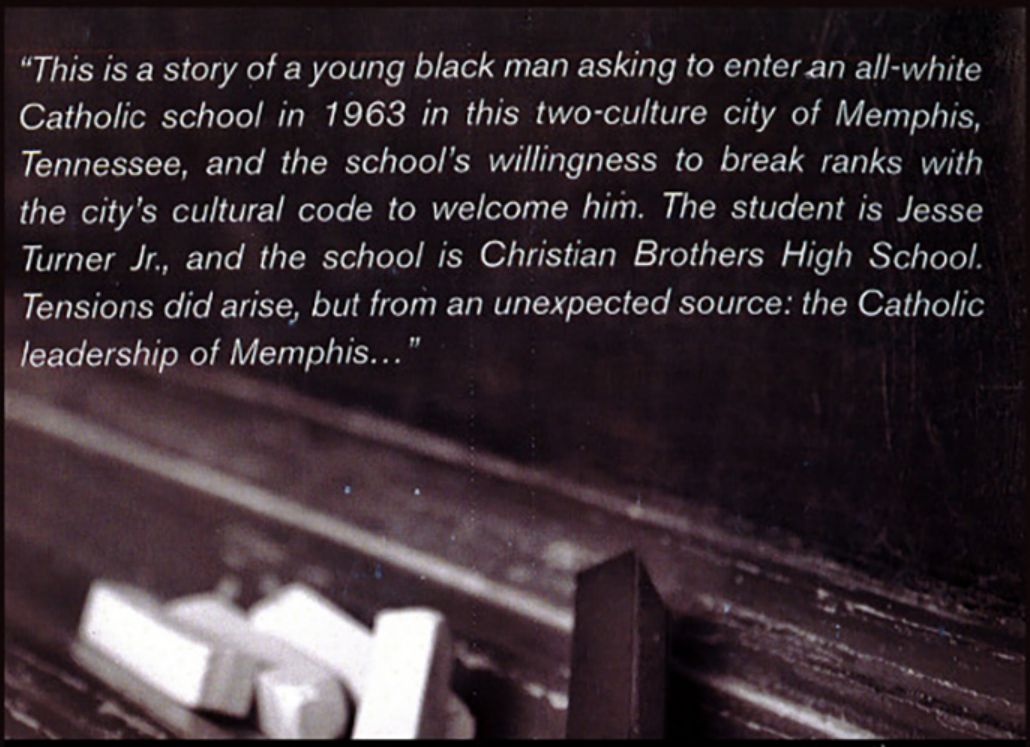


**Brother Terence McLaughlin,** now in his 72nd year as a Christian Brother, has touched all the bases on the educational playing field through the years.

He attended both Catholic and public elementary schools, one of these in a one-room schoolhouse. As a teacher he has worked the classrooms of high school, junior college, college and university. This tour of duty has led him to single-sex schools, co-ed schools, a co-institutional school, and a dual-enrollment Catholic-Public school initiative in Chicago.

He has worn the title of assistant principal, principal, superintendent, director of education, and president. His teaching journey has taken him to four mid-western states and to London, England.

Brother Terence has chosen to make this writing the final chapter of his brief exploration into the publishing field. He is telling a story in *Silent Acceptance* which he feels needs to be told, an event that he has mulled over in his mind many times during these past 50 years. Always a challenger, he gives the reader his views on "where we need to go from here" to continue the Christian Brother Legacy in Memphis into the future.




The entrance of the first African-American into an all-white high school in Memphis on August 16, 1963 is detailed in this memoir. It is written by the man who navigated that entrance at Christian Brothers High School, Brother Terence McLaughlin, FSC.... Brother Terence takes the pulse, so to speak, of our country and Memphis and its environs regarding race relations. And in that context, he opens to the reader the events that started the racial integration of the high schools in Memphis. Yes, the movement started fifty years ago and yes, the movement has quite a journey ahead.

**– Brother Joel William McGraw, FSC**
*Assistant Principal*
*Christian Brothers High School*