

Sarah Heavren 0:01

We are recording. The following introductory conversation and questions have been structured off but not copied from the suggested introductory script and questions provided by Indiana University as part of the Journal of the Plague COVID-19 Oral History Project. My name is Sarah Heavren and I'm here with Fr. Michael Weibley. Today is March 2, 2021, and it is 1:04pm. And coming to you from my dorm room on the campus of Providence College, and Fr. Michael is speaking from his office, which is also on the campus of Providence College. Fr. Michael, I would like to review the informed consent form that you've signed for participating in the project. This interview will be part of a collection in the Rhode Island COVID-19 Archive, as well as the Providence College Archives and Special Collections. As stated on the release form that you signed, the Rhode Island COVID-19 Archive is a public digital archive project created and maintained by the Providence Public Library and the Rhode Island Historical Society in response to the COVID-19 public health crisis. The Archive seeks to document and share the lived experience of Rhode Islanders from all walks of life during the global health crisis. Any audio or video recording of this interview today text-based transcript of the interview will be contributed to both the Rhode Island COVID-19 Archive and the Providence College Archives and Special Collections. Do you verbally agree to this?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 1:30  
Yes.

Sarah Heavren 1:32

I'm briefly going to review the license on the release form that you signed. Under this CC-BY 4.0 license the creator will retain the copyright to their work and allow uses such as the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence Public Library, and the Providence College Archives and Special Collections to include the materials in the permanent collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society and the Providence Public Library; and the public to have access to and share, adapt, modify and cite the work. Per the CC-BY 4.0 license, the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence Public Library, Providence College Archives and Special Collections, and the public must credit the creator when making any feature uses. Do you verbally agree to this license?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 2:19  
Yes.

Sarah Heavren 2:20

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 2:24  
Nope.

Sarah Heavren 2:28

Fr. Michael, do you mind sharing what your role is on campus and what your day to day job is like?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 2:37

Sure. Thanks, Sarah. So currently, I am the Assistant Director of Residential Education in Residence Life here at PC and an instructor in the theology department, as well. So I teach as well. I teach, at least right now, one section of foundations of theology. And I do various administrative tasks with educational opportunities within Residence Life and Student Affairs at large in addition to being a priest on campus, and so providing pastoral care for students, and just regular priestly work as friars are called to do here at Providence College. And so I'll just say it creates a whole day for me pretty much every day.

Sarah Heavren 3:29

Where are you from? And where do you live in relation to campus?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 3:34

So originally, I am from Cleveland, Ohio, the great state of Ohio, the heart of it all, as we call it in Ohio, the Buckeye State, a fantastic place. And I live on campus here in the Priory, which is on campus. And so I am an on campus resident.

Sarah Heavren 3:59

So to now go back when all of this pandemic stuff started about a year ago, do you remember where you were and what you were doing when you found out about spring break being extended? And how did you react to that?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 4:16

Sure. So last spring, last year, I was not in the current position I'm in now. I was one of the campus chaplains on campus. And so I had a different role. And I don't recall the exact moments when hearing about like spring break was extended. I had inklings that that was going to happen before it did just based on how sort of trends were going in the world. But the more of the watershed moments that I realized was I think it was over the spring break and a number of the friars we were in our rec room in the Priory and we were watching the Big East tournament. And I remember it was just the beginning of the Big East basketball tournament, which was being played at Madison Square Garden in New York City. And I believe one game had been played. And they were into the second game of the tournament, when there was like a news flash that the NBA was going to be canceling their rest of their season. They ended up postponing it and playing it, but there was like, we're just like, kind of like stopping everything right now we're suspending the season right now, full stop. And then shortly thereafter, the Big East just like canceled the tournament. And that to me was kind of the watershed moment of like, okay, things are just going south with all things COVID, like things are going to be put on pause. And, and that was kind of like, the moment. There was a number of friars together, we were watching the game. And they were just like, that was like, Alright, this is going to be something very serious. And now it looks like it's going to take some time, and it has.

Sarah Heavren 6:02

Were you teaching any classes at the time? Or were you solely devoted to your chaplain role?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 6:09

So I wasn't teaching at the time. So I was just doing full time pastoral care as one of the chaplains on campus.

Sarah Heavren 6:20

So with the students being sent home, with spring break being extended, and students ultimately remaining at home for the rest of the semester, how did that affect your role as chaplain? And how did it affect your ability to perform your ministry as you were previously accustomed to doing?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 6:43

Sure, it changed it drastically. So when there are no students on campus, pastoral work is different. And in many ways, much lighter, just because a lot of the work that a chaplain does on campus is like kind of does a lot of meeting with students regularly, seeing them, being present at events on campus, being present for clubs, being present in all kinds of different functions that are going on. And when there's none of that going on a lot of that is lessened. So in a sense, part of the workload went down. But then we also, there was a lot of work that I ended up doing reaching out to students when they went home. So either emails, lots of text messages, phone calls, Zoom calls that we've all been accustomed to. Now, within the past year, I was reaching out to students and just checking in on them, you know, when we started implementing live stream Masses and things like that, so trying to translate some of what we were doing on campus in person to more remote and digital options was some of the things that we started to do, which presented a lot of challenges. And it was a strange time. And then but, I was here, I stayed here on campus full time. So it's been, so while all the students left, then the friars were still here. And while most of the offices on campus were closed, except for some bare bones, essential employees, the friars were still here on campus. So it was a very sort of, there was a very just vacant deal on campus once that all hit. So.

Sarah Heavren 8:29

What was it like trying to do live streamed Masses? You know, usually in an ideal setting, you are celebrating the Mass and there is a congregation assembled there to celebrate with you and physically received the Sacrament. But now you're doing Mass into a tiny little camera that you're hoping is going to reach, you know, people scattered across New England and the surrounding states. So what was it like trying to adjust that way to doing Masses that were now being recorded and live streamed instead of being able to have the presence of people with you?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 9:14

Yeah, it was strange. It's odd. You know, there's, you just don't have the congregation there. You might have a couple other friars who are concelebrating at the Mass with you, or maybe it's doing a little singing on the side and they're kind of like your congregation and just maybe they're there to help also help to say the responses that the congregation would normally say. And this certainly was just very strange. It's just like an odd kind of feeling. And part of the communal element was definitely lost that you had, you know, you're going from celebrating the 10:00pm Mass on a Sunday night which is, you know, packed with well over 300 students sometimes even into a bit of standing room only in the back to, you know, celebrating Mass in the Harkins oratory with just like, a laptop on a stand, like watching you do your thing and, you know, some people tuning in, but also their participation in the Mass is also in a digital form, which is not the same. It's not as if they're really present there in the same way. And they obviously couldn't receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist because they're not there. So it was

just, it was very odd. So you lose a lot of just the regular elements that you would have in a church building, you know, you know, and it becomes a much more sort of simple and perhaps less solemn affair. Perhaps, when you don't have a congregation, it's like, well, what, how can we simplify this? How can we do that? But so that was one thing, but it didn't make it what one thing that really stood out to me while doing this was how grateful I was to be able to offer this for people, and a lot of churches and, you know, we're providing these kind of livestream and recorded opportunities for people. So it wasn't as if, like, we were the only show in town, it's as if like, well, you know, nobody you, you can find a Mass digitally online and find a Mass on TV all the time on EWTN and different things like that. So it's not that but it was like being able to provide that for students with familiarity with us, you know, who like wanted the familiarity, who wanted to hear the friars speech was a great privilege, but also just knowing like, that, while many people for a number of months, weren't able to attend Mass, like I was, as a friar, like, as a priest, you know, I could, I could celebrate Mass every day. And I have celebrated Mass every day throughout this pandemic. And so I'd like to be able to proceed with you, Christ, while many people were deprived of that for some time. And so that's like a, that's something that I'm just grateful for. And I understand that that's a privilege. And then part of that comes with the fact that I am a priest. So it's kind of, you know, my duty to offer worship to God, and this form of worship is in the sacrifice of the Mass, it's a great gift. But it, I also just felt for people who weren't able to come to the Eucharist and to the mass as a source, and comfort and refuge, a source of strength for them in their lives. Because watching Mass on TV is not the same. Just like doing this interview over Zoom is not the same as doing it in person in some ways. So, yeah, that's how it kind of all affected me.

Sarah Heavren 12:51

What was your summer like? You know, probably at some point of the summer is when you switch over from being chaplain to now your current role. And also a lot of preparation with trying to bring students back in the fall. So what was it like on your end?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 13:11

Summer was a strange time. In many ways, it was extremely relaxed. In other ways, it was a total cluster. So on the relaxed end of things, I'll start with that, you know, not having students around for most of the month of March, April, May. It just kind of, you got used to the campus being very vacant, and the the summer months of June, July, the weather is much nicer, beautiful here in the summertime. There were a few students around needed to stay in the residence halls and a few more staff members were coming around more often, but still pretty vacant. And so the summer months, I, myself and a lot of the other friars, we had a lot more free time. But we weren't really permitted to do a whole lot, like we weren't really, we really couldn't go out and do a lot of things. We were just kind of here. So PC's campus just kind of turned into our backyard in many ways, which is kind of nice anyway, but it like became even more so in the summer. And so we would often just like hang out on various patios, or on, the in the evenings, because of you know, beautiful summer nights here in New England. And you know, we'd go and fill up our little cooler with some beers and go hang out on one of the patios and just like, relax a little bit. And because we're all living together, like it was fine, you know, we can be in close contact with our guys. We're just living together and stuff like that. And so in that sense, there was kind of a relaxed element and we kind of had free rein to go about on campus and do what we wanted and see different things. On the other hand, it was a cluster because I'm starting a new job in

Residence Life. We had an interim director here at the time in Residence Life who was exactly that, very interim. And she provided, well, she didn't, she didn't provide a lot of stability to the staff because of that. She also, I think, increased some of the hysteria around that people had about COVID in a negative way. So it's coming into a new environment of where there's a lot of questions, concerns about what's going on, how's the college going to handle bringing students back? What are we going to do, this is completely uncharted territory, no one knows what's going to go on. And so it's, it's very chaotic, crazy. And so there's a lot of trial and error, and the state of Rhode Island was imposing a lot of things on the college and the you have to do this, you have to do that, you follow this guideline, you have to follow this protocol. So Residence Life had to implement a lot of things. And so there was a lot of stress with that. And, you know, with any kind of large-scale logistical endeavor, there's always going to be things that don't work, turn out perfectly well. And that certainly was the case in the fall. There was a lot of, you know, live-and-you-learn kind of things, we put our best foot forward. But, you know, we'll just see how you know, how the dominoes line up and fall out at the end of the day and see what worked and what didn't. So it was kind of stressful. There were some long days, especially in August, when we got ready for just move-in. And so the summer was kind of this weird mix, for me as a friar here on campus, or just the relaxation in some respects, but there was also just a lot more just stress, especially like, when we got closer to move in.

Sarah Heavren 16:46

Were you planning on teaching any classes in the fall?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 16:52

Yes. So once I knew I had to change to a new job, part of that was also like, my desire to begin teaching as well. So I very quickly and with relative ease, you know, got all my ducks in a row with the theology department to be hired as an instructor there to teach at a limited load, given what I, my other, my current my job here and Residence Life, so it's kind of, I was able to balance both, and so I was able to teach a section of the fall, of foundations of theology.

Sarah Heavren 17:31

How was that class administered? Was it in person or split?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 17:38

Yes. Yeah. I totally wanted to teach in person if I could, so I was grateful that I could. And so I was an in person class, but just because of how things went in this semester, it was like in person. And then we had like a three week like remote hiatus, and then we were back in person. And then the semester went back remote after Thanksgiving, so kind of did this oscillation back and forth kind of thing, which was more annoying than anything, it was just a pain in the butt. And then when you're in person with people with masks, it's really annoying. You can't see their faces. You can't hear them half the time because they're all spread out. And they don't speak loudly so then you have to ask them to speak up. And so it's kind of annoying. And fortunately, all but one of my students in the fall was on campus. I only had one student who had taken the remote option. And so for that student who had taken the remote option from the get go, I offered to do a one-on-one tutorial with him. And so instead of having him come to the regularly scheduled classes to tune in via Zoom, he and I would just meet once a week for about an hour and we go over the material for the week. It offered him the opportunity to do some more like

one-on-one instruction, it can be catered more towards him. And so I know he was extremely appreciative for the flexibility. I was grateful I was able to do that. It kind of made it fun for me to teach in a different style, because it was more just a one-on-one tutorial. And it was more personalized. And so that was, I really appreciated being able to do that.

Sarah Heavren 19:27

How much of a role did you play in part of the process of bringing students back to campus? Because that's under Residence Life. So were you part of that whole moving plan and the bring students back to campus plan, and how do you think implementing it went in those first few weeks?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 19:52

Yeah, I was heavily involved because I work working in Residence Life and so a lot of it was just trying to facilitate that. What often happened was we didn't make any decisions about how like, dates or what some of the protocols were going to have to be. We decided to implement a lot of things and create sort of actual plans, logistical plans of like, how flow would be when people come to campus, go to the testing center, and then get their meals or have to quarantine and do this and that. So we had to do a lot of that. So yeah, I had a, I had a large role in that. And it was kind of like a crazy cluster of things that, like some of it worked well, some of it didn't. Some of it was extremely difficult for a lot of the students, some of them put a lot of stress on many staff members here in the College, while other staff members kind of went home and like work remotely and probably even had less to do, others at those times increased in work because of this habit of like jump through a lot of different loops for things to make sure we were up to par with everything the state wanted. And you know, and so things like that. So that's kind of how I would describe it.

Sarah Heavren 21:11

I think we made it about three weeks before the outbreak happened. So how did the outbreak affect you as a as a professor, as a friar, but also now as someone working in Residence Life?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 21:30

So in the fall, like, I mean, it was strange because like, it certainly affected me mostly in the classroom because like, then I had to go completely online teaching and there's an 8:30am class, a morning class, people getting on there. Some people went home, some people were still on campus in their dorms. It was just, it affected me because like teaching online is very different than teaching in the classroom. Just different methods for modes, just kind of, you see students respond in different ways. So just kind of getting adjusted to that, getting used to it. As far as like, affecting me personally, as a friar on campus, it just, I mean, it didn't really change much of how I had to go about my day to day and come to work and put in certain things to do. A lot of students were still on campus, even if they weren't allowed to do a lot of things, even if they weren't allowed to go to class. So I just kind of rolled with it, because like, that's all you really can do. That was kind of my M.O., my, and I'm fairly good at doing stuff like that, just kind of roll with the punches and like accept whatever, accept the crazy is kind of how I would say it. Like, all right, here's another crazy thing that's completely out of our control and, but what are you going to do like about it? Nothing, because you can't do anything about it. So accept, accept it, and make the best of it. It's kind of just how I, that was my mentality with it.

Sarah Heavren 23:14

So we made it through the fall semester. And usually students are on campus for a good portion of Advent. And I've talked to a few other friars about this, too, because there's certain Advent traditions that are pretty intrinsic to the school, one of them being Lessons and Carols, but there's also just other activities that we do in anticipation for Christmas. So what was it like, you know, being a professor, but also just a friar living on campus, now having students home for Thanksgiving, and then not coming back and missing out on that time that's usually pretty exciting and people are looking forward to and now just having campus be pretty desolate?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 24:06

Yeah, I mean, it just, it just went back to sort of like the summertime or like, last spring. It's like oh, well, they're not here again, so and so things get kind of bare bones again. And like I mentioned before, like, throughout this whole pandemic, you know, I've been able to, fortunately, celebrate Mass, the liturgy, pray with my brothers and do all that sort of thing. So that maintained, you know, they continued, and so just kind of where the focus was even though we couldn't do some of the normal things. And by time, you know, by the time Advent came around, we were all pretty much well adjusted to the fact that, like, we were used to not doing a lot of the things that we would normally do. So like, not having certain things wasn't as big of a shock, in a sense, as maybe it was earlier on in the pandemic, being like, oh, we can't, we're not going to have this, we're not going to have that,, it's kind of like, well, by the time you get to Advent, it's like, well, of course, we're not gonna do any of this or that because like, we can't. And so it's like, no surprise, it's not even worth putting a lot of effort or energy into, like, you know, even commenting on it in the sense of like, oh, yeah, of course, we can't do that. So just another casualty of COVID in a sense, you know? So yeah, it was just, you know, students went away, and we got used to that again. And then they, it was like they had a longer break, in a sense, in some senses, they did, even though they still had work to do in the classroom. So yeah, that's kind of what it was like.

Sarah Heavren 25:44

What was your winter break like, once, once your class ended? Did you just go straight into now planning the classes that you were teaching for this semester?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 25:56

So what I did was, because I had not visited my family in a very long time, because of all of this, as soon as I submitted my grades from the semester, I got a car here at the Priory and I drove back to Ohio to visit my family. And so like, which was great because you know, I just got tested right before and I drove, like, minimal stops, pretty safe. And then just like, went back to Ohio. And I just spent time with my family. And so I didn't see anybody else. And it's like, saw my parents, saw my sisters and their families for a little bit for, about 10 days. And I helped out in my home parish for Christmas and Christmas Masses, liturgies, and things like that, which was great. So I was able to do that. And that's, yeah about 10 days or so I was in Ohio. I came back shortly after Christmas, right before New Year's. So it was a quick little visit. It was great to see my family. And then I spent the next sort of, you know, about four weeks to get ready for the new semester. So just sort of like planning stuff for Res Life. And but that also prep for, class prep for the semester ahead. And things like that. So that's, I was grateful to go see my family.

And then, and then when I did come back from seeing my family, I had to do this sort of quasi-quarantine in the Priory, where I got tested, and came back negative and the College's protocols, which were basically you can go back to functioning on campus when you get a negative test, but the Priory was a little more cautious. That's the thing. So like, I wasn't able to attend some of like the common elements of Priory life for a little while. So like, common prayers, common recreation, common meals, these sorts of things, I wasn't able to go to just in case want to be extra safe for the older guys. And that was kind of the mentality. And so that was kind of what my Christmas break was like.

Sarah Heavren 27:59

What are the formats for your classes this semester? Are they entirely person or partially remote, or entirely remote?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 28:09

Sure. So I got stuck with the hybrid model, which means I teach, one class meets twice a week, one day is online one day as a person. I would have preferred all in person, but this is what they gave me just because of restraints. You know, classrooms that are big enough to hold X number of students and how big my class is, it has 23 in it, so it's like a, one of the, that's on the larger side of classes here at PC. So there's only so many rooms that can hold that many students. And so, Monday mornings, I teach online, Thursday mornings I teach in person, it's kind of how it goes for me.

Sarah Heavren 28:55

How do you think your classes are going so far? Do you feel adapted to that model?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 29:02

Yeah, I mean, it's, I've gotten used to it. And there are certain advantages of being online. There are definitely certain advantages of being in-person. And there's also like disadvantages both ways. Students react differently in different ways. I've found, oddly enough that students respond more often when we're on Zoom, as opposed to in-person, which is strange to me. But maybe it's because they don't have a mask on when they're on Zoom. And maybe they feel more confident to speak. I can certainly hear what they're saying better when their on Zoom than when they're like mumbling behind the mask in the classroom. It's—that was kind of an interesting phenomena. So it just changes certain dynamics, but it's also different when you're just sitting at a desk, sort of like lecturing, asking questions, commenting, facilitating discussion from your chairs, staring at a screen. It's much different than when you're in a classroom and you can like, kind of walk around a little bit and, you know, be a little more dynamic with your gestures and all this sort of thing. So yeah, I think I've adjusted things, which is like, like I said, I'm just kind of like going with it. So just, it's what I have got to do so try to make the best of it.

Sarah Heavren 30:24

What has it been like living in the Priory and having this communal living situation where you know that certain friars are on the older end of things so they're more at risk? I was talking to Fr. Patrick earlier, and he was talking a bit about that dynamic. But I'm curious to see what your perspective is of it.



Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 30:49

No, I mean, there's a range of friars, and so a range of risk levels based on either age and/or health conditions or both. And also ranges of actual concern. So there certainly were some older, there are certainly some older friars in the Priory who did not really care that much, honestly, about COVID. Like, they were just like, they're not worried. They, I wouldn't say they were reckless, but they weren't super paranoid either about trying to avoid getting it. They're just like, No, I'm going to continue to live my life, do what I need to do, and if I'm going to go out and say Mass somewhere then I'm going to say Mass somewhere and like not going to be overly concerned, where there were others who were more cautious or have been more cautious. And so like, my M.O. has been like, All right, common good here. We want to take make sure we take care of guys don't do reckless things, or put yourself in harm's way. And thankfully, that hasn't happened. But it seems like yeah, most of the men in the Priory took more or less that kind of approach. Even though some were more worried about things than others, I would say.

Sarah Heavren 32:13

Over the past year, in case you've had any downtime, have you discovered any new hobbies or pursued any new interests?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 32:25

That's such a good question. No, I'm, basically Dominicans are nerds. And we like to read. So I've had the opportunity, especially last spring, when it's like, students went away, just to read a lot more. We love to read as Dominicans, we just love it. But sometimes you don't always have tons of time to do it. And so I spent more time doing some reading of just all kinds of stuff that I've wanted to read, just didn't have the opportunities of time to do it. So that's always been a great grace. So some of the downtime that's happened.

Sarah Heavren 33:03

Not that it's a contest, but Fr. Patrick did say he wrote a book.

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 33:09

That's because he like he loves himself. Now I'll put this on record. Nobody loves Fr. Patrick more than Fr. Patrick. Let it be known on this video. Of course he would. Shameless self-promotion. I'm sure it's a great book. He's a great guy, very talented. I'm sure it's great. Shameless self-promotion.

Sarah Heavren 33:32

What have been the greatest challenges that you faced during this pandemic?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 33:43

I would say, you know, dealing with people's varying reactions to all things COVID. Like I mentioned, some of the friars, some were more like, worried about things or not worried about things. Some were more, there are a lot of people who're just really frustrated with like, COVID things and found like protocols and safety measures to be unreasonable. In fact, like ridiculous, and so they would use it as a cause to just complain about it all the time, gripe about it, and live in this very negative world. Rather than being able to accept reality as it is, that it's outside of our control. And so that let them control, it would let, the environment would begin to control

people. It's one of the biggest challenges in working with different people and like, where they're at on certain things. Some people are still very cautious and afraid of things, others are less so. Other, and it's all about risk. Like for people there's, it's all about risk management. What risks are you willing to take? You know, I'm willing, you know, for like the college students working with them, you know, many of them have like, I'm willing to risk to go and like, hang out with my friends in larger groups and things like this, because I want to see my friends, and I want to be with them, and there's more to life than not getting COVID, there's more to health than not getting COVID, there's an, in fact, there's actual living, and I have really personal, emotional spiritual needs. And if there comes a slight increased risk that I might get COVID, it's probably worth it because like, if I'm a young person in college, the likelihood that COVID, like, you know, seriously harms me or kills me is pretty low as like, for a lot of young people, you know, that's like, you know, if you're a healthy young person, the likelihood is like, you might get some symptoms for a little bit. But like, that's kind of it. You know, we haven't had any students who've been admitted to the hospital, because of this. And so students kind of like live on that level. And so trying to, but then some of them are way more cautious about this stuff. And so it's like, working with people like where they've been at all over across the spectrum of things. And, which is really a, that's kind of a little bit of a challenge. And for some people like helping some people who are, I think, overly cautious and overly fearful who have turned the virus that is COVID into this kind of COVID ideology of fear and that's become like the primary lens in which they view all things, helping them maybe to see beyond some of that, and be like, okay, you don't have to be this cautious. But like, you can take what's, reasonable steps, you know, to protect yourself, but there are actually some things you can do, that you actually want to do, that are safe even though you don't think they are. And so things sometimes bringing people back to the middle, and then that goes on the opposite end of things to people who maybe you're acting recklessly being, like, okay, maybe you don't need to be this reckless, if you actually need to think about more than like, yourself and think a little bit more about a common good here. So trying to bring people to the middle in some ways. And, um, that's been kind of a challenge, I think, you know, and also just like missing a lot of elements and things like I didn't get to see my family over the summer, which was one big thing, you know, but I did get to see him over Christmas break, which was nice. We have a lot of nephews and one little niece to get to hang out and spend a lot of time with them, you know, their cute little guys. And like, they love Uncle Mike and, but I didn't get a lot of time to spend with them. So but a little bit over Christmas, you know, which was nice. I miss that. And just some of the regular things on campus life, you know, that I just missed, like, I'm the chaplain of the field hockey team. Thankfully, they're playing a season in the spring now, but their season is usually in the fall. That's such a great time of the year. They usually, like their season is mainly like September and October when the weather is really nice. It's like, great to go to their games. And so I didn't get an opportunity to really get to know the girls this fall with that. And so that was just kind of a bummer. And normal things like that, just like that we didn't have like, not being able to have, you know, a lot of people in the chapel from Mass. In certain ways, it's just like, you know, it's been different. I'm just not being able to just as freely move about campus, you know, clubs aren't able to meet and just like being able to spend time with students in person. Yeah, so that's built in like a challenge. As part of that, you know, just you miss some of the stuff that you, that was part of normal campus life that's been here and just then I mean, just kind of, then you're just like wondering, well, when's it going to end and all this sort of thing, where it's like, also, it's out of

our control, and you kind of just do the best you can with it. And just yeah, that's kind of where it's at for me right now.

Sarah Heavren 39:07

So, for a while, there's been news about the vaccine and the vaccine being distributed and all the friars actually just got their second dose of the vaccine. So does that lead you to be hopeful that there is a light at this end of the tunnel and the light is approaching? And, you know, maybe even by the fall semester, things might start looking?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 39:32

I mean, I'd love to think that. I mean, and I'm optimistic about that, especially since like, so many people actually have gotten COVID so they have antibodies, like not even get it again, and the vaccine is going to continue to roll out. You know, every day there's more people getting the vaccine, things like that. You know, I also like, one of the things that I think, you know, the news and social media, capitalize on is just fear. They love to sell fear. That's all that they, that's kind of the primary mode that they do. They promote this sort of, you know, fear. And so like, headlines are all about, like the most dire things, just about everyday and how terrible everything is, which just induces fear into people and keeps people afraid, because fear sells in the sense of dramatic. And even though people want to go back to normal, but I'm much more hopeful. I don't live in that kind of fearful mindset of the world. So I'm much more hopeful that things will move in the direction of normalcy. And I think they will for the fall, maybe not completely normal, but like, certainly closer to it. Which would be a really, really good thing. And, yeah, I mean, I've got the vaccine now. It's like, the other friars do, which is a good thing, and can provide more normalcy for how we're able to do things in the Priory, less, open up some more things for us just like being able to do stuff outside and with other people and not be afraid of like, oh, might I be bringing COVID back to somebody and getting one of the older friars sick, you know, that that's really not going to be an issue anymore. So just, that's a good thing. It's bring us closer to normal which I'm hopeful for.

Sarah Heavren 41:23

Is there anything else you'd like to talk about that we have that covered? Do you have any words of advice or positive messages?

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 41:32

Words of advice or positive messaging. One of the things that I've found to be pretty interesting with this, the whole pandemic, is how it's simultaneously in some circles, for some people, like, increased an awareness of God. And where in other ways, it has not. In fact, like, because of the whole advent of, you know, Zoom TV Masses, online streaming Masses, and now the opening up of Mass back in person, as that started to roll out as the months went on, it's really caused like a significant drop in sort of liturgical and sacramental participation amongst the faithful in some ways, in parishes, and certainly here on campus. You know, Mass attendance is not quite what it once was. It's, it's dropped off significantly. And maybe it's because there's that hiatus of when students would be going to Mass and then it went online, and now they've lost that habit. Now, it's like, can't get back into it. And I think that's going to affect the Church in some ways, even though like going through a pandemic, and the crisis like this sometimes often turns people back towards God. I'm sure that's happened. I don't doubt that at all. But it's also made it very

interesting on how sacramental practices kind of dipped. And my encouragement for people is like, go to Mass. Like what are you doing? Like Mass on TV is not the same, it's like, and it's perfectly safe, to receive the Eucharist. And, like the goodness of that, and I just really hope that people will come back to that and see, like, what they have been missing in that respect, that it's not just the communal element of being there with all people gathered together a very horizontal level, but like being able to truly worship God, the highest form of prayer, which is the Sacrifice of the Mass, which creates the kind of vertical elements in our relationship. So that's kind of I guess, I'll just say.

Sarah Heavren 43:59

Thank you, Fr. Michael, for meeting with me taking the time to talk about what the last year has looked like for you.

Fr. Michael Weibley, O.P. 44:06

Hey, well, I'm very grateful, Sarah. Thank you for having me on for this project.

Sarah Heavren 44:13

Thank you. This has been Fr. Michael Weibley sharing his pandemic experience.

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