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Oral History Project of Colton, CA – 6/23/14

Dr. Rivera: Good morning, I'm Dr. Tom Rivera. I'm a retired employee here at California State University San Bernardino, and as a retired employee, we decided to do a project in partnership with the Pfau Library here at Cal State San Bernardino. The project is an oral history of South Colton, and we've contacted various people in the community who have information about different areas of development as they were growing up in Colton. The committee started working with the project in November, and so far, we've had 26 or 27 interviews that we've done.

For this morning's interview our guest is, Deacon Robert "Bob" Amador; Deacon Bob it's very nice and thank you for being with us this morning—it's truly appreciated, especially on such short notice. We only discussed our meeting last week – so thank you very much for being with us.

Deacon Amador: You're welcome.

Dr. Rivera: Also, another one of our guests is off to the side, Mr. Tony Vilches, who retired from Cal State San Bernardino after many, many years – so Tony, if we miss something in the history of our church, San Salvador, please chime in, alright?

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera) Will do.

Dr. Rivera: Before I get started, let me just give you a little preview of things that I've learned as I was reading to get ready for this this interview.

First of all, 184 years ago in 1830, Franciscans from Mission San Gabriel built the first chapel in the San Bernardino Valley. It was considered a mission outpost, and the first pastor was appointed to the parish on September 15, 1852, 162 years ago.

The first settlers that arrived from New Mexico in 1842 celebrated their first mass in 1843. The communities of Agua Mansa, La Placita, and Jurupa Rancho were combined into the township of San Salvador.

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Over the years, several chapels and church buildings were built and were destroyed either by flood or by fire; and the church's present location is located on the corner of 7th and 'L' and that was established in 1918.

I know we've had many, many priests since 1852, however in 1937 we had a wonderful priest that came from Pajacuarán, Michoacan, Mexico in 1937, and that was Father Jose Valencia. That was during the Depression years, you-know, when things were not steady; but there was still a lot of not only economic changes but also changes in our community. Father Valencia came in and did a tremendous job in organizing our church. Starting with Father Valencia, what do you remember about him, Deacon Bob, as you were growing up in our parish, San Salvador?

Deacon Amador: Well, you-know, we looked up to Father Valencia a lot because he is one man who really helped the poor...

Especially, what I liked about him is catechism time – when I was about 7 years old. Every time I finished my lesson he would come out and say: okay boy, how many lessons did you do today? I would answer, 5, and he would take out his little coin purse that had nothing but nickels, and he would give me some money. So if I did 5 lessons he would give me 25 cents. [He did this with all of us kids after catechism]. After we'd get the money we would go across the tracks to the A & W Root Beer stand and buy our drinks.

He was a very strict priest that every time you wanted to talk to him, if you were able to tell him what you did... he would fricking lose it and say: "*andale* boy, *andale!*" So you'd have to get down on your knees... You didn't want to say nothing because he was real strict; but he loved his people and everything, and he was a very devoted man. He used to tell us, when I'm outside the church I'm like you and I, but when I'm inside the church, in the temple of the Lord, it's a different ballgame.

Dr. Rivera: So he was really dedicated to Jesus Christ; and he made sure that the community, as soon as they stepped into his house of the Lord – that they would obey the teachings of Jesus Christ.

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Deacon Amador: Every Sunday after collection he would take the money straight to the bishop in San Diego.

Dr. Rivera: So he was dedicated... Whatever was collected on that Sunday, he would immediately take it to the diocese in San Diego.

Deacon Amador: Right.

Dr. Rivera: Also, he had a wonderful reputation with Easter services. Can you tell us a little bit about his Easter services?

Deacon Amador: Every Easter Sunday [the church] was packed, and out in the parking lot he would burn Judas. He would make a big celebration with a big piñata made out of a Judas, and the kids would look forward to it because every time they burned Judas they would break it open and the kids would get a bunch of candy and everything else. He was devoted to his Easter Sunday; a man of God all the time; even though he went through a lot of pain in his own country back during the executions... But he was a devoted man of the Lord everything else—real strict.

Dr. Rivera: You mentioned Judas, a kind of piñata Judas. Was it a huge piñata?

Deacon Amador: Oh yes, a big one. It was a big picture of him standing up there like a human being with his feet and everything else, and a big hat...

Dr. Rivera: So it was maybe twice or three times as big as a human person?

Deacon Amador: Oh yeah, yeah.

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Dr. Rivera: How would they exhibit Judas? How would they exhibit Judas out in the public for the parish? Would they string him between the church and the building across the street?

Deacon Amador: They would use a big old rope to get him up there. First, they would beat him with a whip or a branch off the pepper tree... Because he did something evil and he's got to pay for what he did to God... Everybody knew this, all the devoted Catholics they always remembered this.

Dr. Rivera: So before he was lifted off the ground, he would get a whipping by the priests, and then they would raise him up. Then, what would happen? Would they swing it back and forth?

Deacon Amador: Yeah, they would – then there was fireworks. They would light him up and...

Dr. Rivera: Oh-shucks! That must have been fun to watch... They would swing him back and forth; and then at one point, they would lower Judas and light up the firecrackers. Then, they would lift him up again, and low and behold, you would have fireworks and do away with Judas.

Deacon Amador: That was the end of our brother, Judas.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Well you-know, the other thing is that I do remember if we got too close to the piñata Judas, Father Valencia would come up with his little whip and just whip us...

Deacon Amador: Yeah, he was very strict with that thing. One thing about it was you learned to respect him. He had rules and regulations that you don't go behind the line.

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Dr. Rivera: Yeah. You mentioned that he didn't have a good time in Mexico. What happened in Mexico that he came to the United States? Was that during the time of the Mexican Revolution when there was a conflict between the government and the Catholic Church?

Deacon Amador: Yeah. What I understand about story is that he suffered a lot of pain. At that time, every priest was getting punished... Once you're found as a priest you got executed. Some escaped, some didn't escape. He was one of the one's who suffered a lot of persecution from the people over there.

Dr. Rivera: That was a big conflict between the government and the Church. The conflict rose out of the Church not wanting to go along with the government; the new government that was established after the 1910 revolution.

(He asks the videographer, Mr. Frank Acosta) Frank, what was the name of that movement?

Mr. Acosta: La Cristeros.

Dr. Rivera: La Cristeros movement. Do you have any background on that, Frank?

Mr. Acosta: No. They recently made a movie about it with some of the basic elements of what happened back there. The government appropriated a lot of the Church holdings and properties, and forbid the practice of the religion... That's one of the reasons the priests had to leave to survive.

Dr. Rivera: That's possibly what happened with Father Valencia. Then, he came to Colton, and that was the best thing for Colton.

What was his relationship with the parishioners?

Deacon Amador: From what I know, I think he had a beautiful relationship with all the parishioners. Of course, some didn't care too much about him, not personally, but the

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way he was real strict with the religion and everything else. He had his ways with the people, good people... If you did something to him, he would let you know. But I think he was a man of God. [He had his ways] because he went through a lot of persecution in Mexico.

Dr. Rivera: So he practiced what he preached, then?

Deacon Amador: I think so.

Dr. Rivera: And that drew the membership in.

Deacon Amador: Umm-hmm.

Dr. Rivera: They said, well-wait-a-minute, this guy serious about what he wants to do here for us in Colton.

Deacon Amador: Right.

Dr. Rivera: They've told me that the membership during that time was very, very low. And when Father Valencia came in, the membership improved tremendously. Is this true, Tony? Is this right?

Mr. Vilches: That's what I remember.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah. The other thing that I kind of heard was that he established a nice choir at the church, and he got the help of Margarita Gomez. He would go to Margarita's house and ask her for her help to establish a choir. Margarita [didn't really want to, at first], but he would not leave the house, he'd stay on the porch until she agreed to help him establish a choir. Is that true?

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Deacon Amador: Well you-know, I actually couldn't tell too much because, like Tony was saying, we heard rumors... We were small, about 7 or 8 years old, we didn't know much, you-know... But I heard that (inaudible) the choirs were good, and everything else, and I think Ms. Gomez was one of them – and I heard stories about them... They had the Padilla family and everybody else were involved in the choir.

Dr. Rivera: Then they mentioned that there was a woman's auxiliary where Father Valencia got all the women in the area and in the parish together, and he solicited their help... And the information tells us that he was able to get women to help him build, not only membership, but also some of the activities that they had there at the church. You mentioned Tula Padilla, who were some of the other people?
[I know] that you were a little kid, maybe not born yet...

Deacon Amador: The Robleros was one of the biggest families; the Lopez family... Savas Roblero and Jose Lopez. As a matter of fact, they're neighbors up there and they have a house in the back...
Father Valencia was a good motivator, he would motivate a lot of [people]. If you can't, he would get it out of you.

Dr. Rivera: If not, he would beat you with that little whip...
(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: I understand that he also was very supportive and he provided help for people that were passing through. During the '30s we had a lot of people that were unemployed, they'd hop on the train because right there in Colton we had the south and east passage through Southern Pacific. Back then we had the Santa Fe North and South, and we had a lot of men who were out of work that passed through there. So if they wanted to go through Southern California and up to San Francisco, they would take Southern Pacific. And if they wanted to come to New Mexico or the Chicago area they would take the Santa Fe. So we had a lot of unemployed men that would stop by

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that area, and many of them were homeless – we used to call them “hobos”. I understand that Father Valencia had a little program for them to feed them. Is this true?

Deacon Amador: Yeah, he used to feed them every day. They’d get off the train, cross the street to the rectory, we had showers for them—so they’d take showers, we had towels, socks anything they wanted they could do at the church. But the line was always 50, 100, 150 people.

Dr. Rivera: A day?

Deacon Amador: Everyday they would come to the hall and the pantry in the church... But later everything started dying down. People would come from Michigan, Minnesota... [Folks passed the word] to stop by Colton [because that’s] where they will feed you.

Dr. Rivera: So the word was out?

Deacon Amador: Oh-yes!

Dr. Rivera: Father Valencia would feed you...

Deacon Amador: And if you wanted to work... He would take you to El Sombrero [to do some work; and when [the work was done there] he would take you to Lala’s, the little market...

Dr. Rivera: Where was Lala’s located?

Deacon Amador: Right there on 7th Street... Chuchi Morales would feed them all bologna, a loaf of bread, *la comida* – everybody would get their food...

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Dr. Rivera: Jesus Morales?

Deacon Amador: Yeah. Father Valencia had good points with all the stores for *la comida*, and everything else. It was good – that's how all the people found out who we were, and they gave them food.

Dr. Rivera: And he provided this for the hobos who were passing through?

Deacon Amador: Umm-hmm.

Dr. Rivera: What was the feeling of the parish with him doing something like this? How did they feel about it?

Deacon Amador: I didn't know too much about them getting involved. I think the people were happy he was feeding all of them. He would make them work, you just didn't get [something for nothing].

Dr. Rivera: So you didn't get a free meal, you had to work for it?

Deacon Amador: Yeah, you worked for it...

Dr. Rivera: Did he have some parishioners help with giving the food out?

Deacon Amador: A lot of people, yeah. He had a lot of people working at the kitchen.

Dr. Rivera: I understand that Father Valencia loved sports. He was a wonderful, terrific supporter of Colton High School. He would go to the football games, the basketball games, and the baseball games.

Deacon Amador: Right.

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Dr. Rivera: Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Deacon Amador: Well, I remember when I was going to high school, when Colton was playing another team at the McIntosh Gym...

Dr. Rivera: That was a basketball game?

Deacon Amador: Yeah, a basketball game. All of a sudden you'd hear this big old voice, and it was Father Valencia (inaudible) [directing a bunch of 4 or 5 year old boys to sit down].

He used to take people to the drive-in, he'd pay for him and somebody else, but the rest of the guys were inside the trunk. He'd open up the trunk and everybody would come out to watch the movie...

A couple of times, I know for a fact, when he was going to a football game – he was devoted to the football games at the Orange Show, he got stopped by the police officers. [He told the police he] was going to the hospital. The police would say: okay Father, follow me and I'll lead you to the hospital. The police went that way, and he went straight to the Orange Show...

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: So he was a little conniving, then?

Deacon Amador: He was, he was.

Dr. Rivera: He was not going to give up his football game at the Orange Show.

Deacon Amador: I always told people he invented the drive-in theatres... Because at the (inaudible)... He would actually drive up on top of the driveway, onto the sidewalk, to the window and order his food.

(Laughter)

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Deacon Amador: He would drive his little Plymouth and [honk his horn].

Dr. Rivera: Tell me about his little Plymouth? What was it, a 1937?

Deacon Amador: Yeah, I think. I forgot what year it was. It was *blanco*, a white one or a cream [colored] one... Everybody [knew when Father Valencia was coming] because he would honk his horn. He didn't have any rules or regulations when driving.

Dr. Rivera: So he was the first one to do the drive-in...?

Deacon Amador: Yeah, he would drive up on the sidewalk, on top of the curve, and order his food; he never got [out of his car to order food].

Dr. Rivera: Did he contribute to the sports activities of the high school?

Deacon Amador: I think he did, yeah.
But he was always there for all the kids...

Dr. Rivera: Was there anybody from the parish that was a great basketball player, or a great baseball player, or a great football player?

Deacon Amador: Yeah, some of the kids who went to the high school turned out to be good ballplayers. Carrasco was one of them.

Dr. Rivera: What about the basketball player, Ramos?

Deacon Amador: Yeah, he was one of them, and a next door neighbor.

Dr. Rivera: Mike Ramos, was a good ballplayer.
And Father Valencia was a big supporter of all of them.

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Deacon Amador: Yeah, he loved all the sports kids...

Dr. Rivera: He was a good handball player, himself. Father Valencia was a good handball player, he liked *reboté*.

Deacon Amador: But he wasn't a good sport.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Why is that?

Deacon Amador: I can't think of his name, [it was a guy who] only had one arm. One day, Father Valencia [said], he's good. [So,] to make it even, [he wanted someone to tie down one of his arms]. He said, I'll play him with one arm.

Dr. Rivera: Okay, okay.

Deacon Amador: The other guy beat the heck out of him real bad. He was mad [and wanted the tie or sling taken off his arm, immediately].

Espinosa was the guy's last name with one arm.

But Father Valencia was always playing because we had a handball court next to the church...

Dr. Rivera: Tell me about the handball court next to the church? Is this the old church?

Deacon Amador: Yeah, the old one... We played a lot of handball with the kids... The whole neighborhood would come play basketball.

Dr. Rivera: He had a little recreation area there.

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Deacon Amador: Yeah, a little recreation area there for the kids. He was always there with the kids and he had a lot of involvement with the kids.

Dr. Rivera: And he knew these would be potential parishioners.

Deacon Amador: Well, he was recruiting for altar service – he would get a lot of the kids that way... We had good altar service...

Dr. Rivera: So his thing was to provide something that the kids liked, and at the same time, [he asked kids if they would be interested in being altar boys]?

Deacon Amador: Yeah...

At that time we didn't have girls – there were no girls allowed, yet.

Dr. Rivera: Deacon Bob, I had no idea there was *reboté* next to the church. I knew that Father Valencia played *reboté* at the Veterans Park... Every time he would arrive in his grey-white Plymouth, he would also bring watermelons. So after a few games of *reboté*, we would go ahead and have watermelons, and he would share with everybody.

Deacon Amador: He probably got them from Cooley, huh?

Dr. Rivera: Possibly.

(Laughter)

Deacon Amador: That's how everybody got watermelons – from Cooley.

Dr. Rivera: Well, Cooley Ranch was the agricultural farm that grew watermelons, other kinds of melons, and it had a dairy in that area...

But Father Valencia was good at that – playing with the *reboteros*.

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Deacon Amador: His presence was felt every time he'd go all over South Colton. He was a good man of the people.

Dr. Rivera: Then, in 1936, Deacon Bob, he had an accident. What do you remember about Father Valencia's car accident?

Deacon Amador: Well, not too much. It was on Agua Mansa Road, and from what I understand, he just ran a stop sign.

Dr. Rivera: Was it Agua Mansa and Rancho?

Deacon Amador: Yeah...

Dr. Rivera: Because he had the reputation of not stopping at stop signs. He never recognized stops signs, right Tony?

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). That's right, he didn't. His sister lived in that area and he was going to see his sister. Because I lived on 5th and he would always go down there. And like Bob was saying, he would be honking going down the street – and we'd say, there goes Father Valencia to see his sister.

Dr. Rivera: So his sister lived on 5th?

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). No, she lived on Agua Mansa just past Rancho.

Dr. Rivera: Going towards Agua Mansa Road?

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). Well, yeah, on Agua Mansa Road, and then you would pass Rancho, just about 2 or 3 houses there on the left.

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Deacon Amador: Where Socorro Rosales lived?

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). Yeah, where Socorro Rosales lives right now, somewhere in there – Father Valencia’s sister lived there.

Dr. Rivera: Socorro Rosales lives in the 2nd house on the corner of Rancho and Agua Mansa Road.

Deacon Amador: I guess he ran the stop sign.

Dr. Rivera: Well, he had the reputation, Tony, of not noticing stop signs. So he didn’t stop and the other person who had the right-of-way hit him – and that’s what happened.

Deacon Amador: It was real tragic and everybody felt that loss... People were mourning everywhere. He was loved.

Dr. Rivera: That was a tremendous loss to the community. Even now, I think people do remember Father Valencia; they have fond memories of him. I know you do, Tony.

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). Oh-yes!

Dr. Rivera: You were an altar boy, weren’t you?

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). No.

Dr. Rivera: You look like an altar boy...

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). I look like one but I never was one.
(Laughter)

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Dr. Rivera: Also, I understand that we talked about sports players from Colton who did well, like Mike Ramos in basketball.

We also had some of our young people who went into the priesthood. We had Pete Luque who went into the priesthood; we had Ray Rosales who went into the priesthood; and also, Michael Urea who went in the priesthood.

What can you tell us about Father Luque?

Deacon Amador: (Inaudible) Luque was a lovely guy—he's the one who got me involved in the religion, to be honest with you. (Inaudible) I joined the Cursillo Movement one weekend in 1978. Father Luque was our spiritual director and leader of the Cursillo Movement. I got all [my] spiritual [guidance] from him, and he's the one who got me more involved in the church; and eventually he catered me a little bit in the academic program, and everything else. He was a man that loved everything; and he was a very, very intelligent man...

Father Ray, (inaudible) me and him got a long real good. I usually got along with all the priests... (inaudible). [Father Ray] was only there 1 year at San Salvador Church...

Dr. Rivera: Ray?

Deacon Amador: Ray Rosales, yeah.

Father Luque was there for quite a while, 5 or 6 years, or maybe more.

Dr. Rivera: Well you-know, Father Luque was almost part of the San Salvatore Church because he lived across the street.

His father was very active in the church activities, as well as being a council person, and his whole family was involved with the church.

Father Luque went to Colton High School and graduated; he went to Valley College; and then we went to seminars and became a priest.

Was San Salvador his first church, or was he placed there afterwards?

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Deacon Amador: It was afterwards. I forgot what year it was; but no, I think he spent some time at Our Lady of Guadalupe, *tambien*.

I guess everybody [began at] Our Lady of Guadalupe because Father Ray was over there too...

I don't think [San Salvador] was Father Luque's first parish.

Dr. Rivera: When did Father Luque come to Colton, do you remember?

Deacon Amador: No, I don't remember.

Dr. Rivera: But you said he had an influence on you in '78?

Deacon Amador: Yeah.

Dr. Rivera: [San Salvador was a very old church]; and Father Luque, who was coveted as the pastor for San Salvador Church, decided to build a new church. How did he do it?

Deacon Amador: Well, I heard so many rumors – because I wasn't actually there. I was at Immaculate Conception, and then I switched in 1978 to San Salvador Church, and I've been there ever since.

Dr. Rivera: So you were at Immaculate Conception before?

Deacon Amador: Yeah, I was with Father King [who was at Immaculate Conception].

Dr. Rivera: You were not a Deacon yet?

Deacon Amador: No, no, I didn't get ordained until 1999.

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Dr. Rivera: Okay. Do you remember what Father Luque did to establish the new church in South Colton, Tony?

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). Well, he just decided that it was time to build a new church. He got the parishioners together and started raising money to buy materials because a lot of the people there had trades. There were electricians, carpenters, and everything. So, most of the labor was donated.

He figured, you-know, this was a temporary church from 1918, and here it is 1975, it's time to build a new church... To me that was the incentive of how he got the people motivated, and of course, people wanted a new church. So everybody got together behind the project, and they decided to build a church.

Dr. Rivera: So they had fundraisers?

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). Oh yes.

Dr. Rivera: Lots of Jamaicas?

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). Yes, and dances and everything. Just straight donations going to the [building of the new church] because it was something you could see that was going to be built...

Dr. Rivera: Did they have to destroy the old church?

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). Yeah. Because they built this one right [in the same location] where the old one used to be.

Dr. Rivera: Oh, they built the new church in the same location. Okay. Where did they have services while the church was being built?

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Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). Over at Wilson School for 2 years; I guess he made arrangements with the school district, and he was able to use it on weekends.

Dr. Rivera: So it took a couple of years to build...?

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). It was a two-year process.

Dr. Rivera: And you said that the community actively participated in building the new church?

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). Oh-yes.

Dr. Rivera: Because I do remember my Dad was a construction worker [with] cement. I remember him talking about the sidewalks, the curb and gutters... And you said, Tony, there were a lot of people in the trades that came in and did the electrical work, they did the plumbing, they did everything that needed to be done for the church.

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). Umm-hmm.

Dr. Rivera: It took 2 years to build the church. When was it completed, Tony?

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). I think it was 1977...

Dr. Rivera: So the [San Salvador Church] is about 40 years old, [*mas o menos?*]

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). It's getting there.

Deacon Amador: Almost 40 years old.

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). In 2017 it should be 40 years old.

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Deacon Amador: What I understand, *tumbo la viejita*.

Dr. Rivera: *Si*

Deacon Amador: There's no choice, you had to build a church.

(Laughter)

...When you deal with the Church, you have to go through a lot of formalities... What they did at that time, you can't do it now because everything's got different rules and regulations... The reason I say this is because I remember that they told me when Monsignor went on vacation, when they came back the doors that were facing the alley should have been on the other side – [which would] have been the main entrance... So the whole church [had to be] turned around.

(Laughter)

[He asked what happened, and they said, well, you went on vacation]... The double doors, instead of being in the back they were supposed to be on the side of the main entrance...

Dr. Rivera: Father Lague by passed much of the bureaucracy that was needed to build a new church.

Deacon Amador: He had a lot to do with that, yeah.

Dr. Rivera: With the bishop being in San Diego, it was easy for a little church like San Salvador to short-circuit the process. And before they knew it, and found out that Father Luque built a new church, it was already completed. And what did Father Luque say? I won't do it again.

(Laughter)

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Deacon Amador: There were a lot of people who put a lot of work and effort into that. I mean, we're talking about professionals... So they did a good job... You go in there and you see the parishioners did it themselves.

Dr. Rivera: And again, getting back to the corner stone that Father Valencia laid, where he got everybody in the parish to be interested, to participate, and contribute to the church. I think the outcome of that was building the new church in South Colton... And you're absolutely right, that priest did a heck of a lot of things for the community in Colton.

And then you had Father Rosales, who was also a Colton boy, he was there for 1 year, I think you said, Deacon.

What about Michael Raya? He was also a Colton boy.

Deacon Amador: I didn't get to know him [at that time], but I know him now. I don't think he served any time at San Salvador Church... He got a late start as a priest...

Dr. Rivera: The church, by definition, doesn't get involved in things outside the church. But you mentioned that Father Valencia was at all the sports activities in Colton. So I would imagine he encouraged people to continue their education, complete their high school education.

[Did] Father Luque, Father Rosales, or Father Raya do the same thing? Like, kind of support some of our kids getting a good education, a solid education – do you know anything about that?

[I might be straying away] from the purpose of the church...

Deacon Amador: I think Father Luque and [Father Valencia] inspired their students/parishioners to continue their education... they really pushed it for them to get their education...

I think San Salvador Church has always been a community of love and compassion. As soon as you step in [the Church], you feel the love there – I personally feel the love

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there that the prior priests have left there. [It's a] close community that works together as one body of Christ. Different people will tell you the same thing, as soon as you walk in there you feel the [love] that they give you.

Dr. Rivera: A welcoming feeling...

Deacon Amador: Welcoming... That you're welcome there shows that Father Valencia brought the community together...

Dr. Rivera: What about social issues, Deacon? Issues like: voting, you-know, getting out there to vote, and making sure that we have good representation in our community, and from our community. Were they actively involved in motivating and getting people involved to run for office? Or to make sure that they voted when the election times came around?

Deacon Amador: Right. I think Monsignor Luque did that – he did a lot of pushing the issues about voting...

But as personal clergy, we cannot, [for example], be supporting Tom Rivera who's running for this or Mr. Acosta who's running for that – we [cannot be involved in politics or political campaigns, we have to be neutral]. We've got to follow the rules and regulations -- that's one of the responsibilities.

Dr. Rivera: But you can say: be sure and vote?

Deacon Amador: Oh-yes! You gotta vote and that's one thing the bishop pushes a lot now.

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). It was your duty. I'm not going to tell you who to vote for, but you need to go vote for someone.

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But I think right now, Father Raya, is quite involved in social issues – that involve people who are downtrodden, the people who don't have a voice. Now, he's one of the people who is involved...

Deacon Amador: He's involved in immigration, and everything...

Dr. Rivera: What about during the time Colton was a segregated community; we had North Colton, which was the gringo side, and we had South Colton, which was the Mexican town. Did the church have an issue with that? Or was it just agreed that that's the way it was, and left it that way? I think what I'm asking is, was there a concern by the church that we were segregated?

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera) I don't think there was a concern by the church, at that time. It was just like you said, that was just the way it was: all the Mexicans were at San Salvador in South Colton, and all the Anglos were at Immaculate in North Colton. That's just the way it was.

Dr. Rivera: But there was no kind of alarm, or any...?

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera) Not at that time, no. It was just something that was readily accepted.

Dr. Rivera: That's the way it was – and that's the way it is.

Deacon Amador: Everyday business...

Dr. Rivera: Deacon Bob, how did you become interested in becoming a deacon?

Deacon Amador: Well, I went to Stralin Institute for 3 years... I learned about the church and everything else. When I was involved in the church, I was doing a lot of catechism. I was gradually more involved in the church, and the rest of the people

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helping were all the women. I was the only man who got involved... [As I got] more involved in the church and catechism, I started getting involved with Father Ray Rosales and Pat Jessops. So I started working at different ministries; and I went to SLI back in 1990-91, I think. (Inaudible) I said, no, I don't think so. They said I'd make a good deacon, I said, no, no, I don't want to go.

So anyway, after [attending] school and everything else, I prayed and prayed, and I told my Mom: I said, Mom, you think you'll see me if I go up for deacon? She said, *ah, mijo, es mucho trabajo...* (Inaudible) My kid is all grown up to go out for a deaconate. I said, you know what, the reason I don't want to go is because I don't know nothing about the Bible, I don't know nothing about theology, I don't know nothing about the Vatican, I don't know nothing about this stuff. But I'm going to go ahead and give it a try. *Mira.* [Out of] 150 applicants, I'm one of the 7 who got elected to be a deacon.

Dr. Rivera: So the competition was a 150 applicants, and you were one of the 7 that was selected. What year was that Deacon Bob?

Deacon Amador: 1991. After (inaudible) I got accepted and I got ordained in 1999. Today, June 12th was 15 years.

Dr. Rivera: 15 years – June 12th was 15 years, congratulations!

Deacon Amador: Thank you.

Dr. Rivera: Wow!

Deacon Amador: It's been a long [time] – it went by so fast I didn't even know. But people remember everywhere I go. Like, [I was] talking to Mr. Acosta about the same thing. Everybody would say: You did my grandpa's wedding; or you did my grandpa's funeral...

I was so involved in sports at the same time, so I don't know; either I was a coach, or I was baptizing them, or I was marrying them.

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Dr. Rivera: So you got involved from one thing to another – one ministry led to another ministry, and another ministry. And they finally asked you, you're a good candidate to be a deacon?

Deacon Amador: Yeah. And just because you want to be one doesn't mean you're going to be selected...

Dr. Rivera: So it's a tough road that you have to go through?

Deacon Amador: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: What kind of training did you get?

Deacon Amador: I got 7 years of training for the different ministries and the different sacraments. You have to learn exactly about marriage, baptisms, Holy Orders, all the different applicants you have to know about and what's going on with everything else. I'm still learning—even though [I've been] doing this for 15 years, there's still a lot of questions from people that I can't answer for them. There's the Canon Law – you get involved in the Canon Law, the marriage and everything else, and you really got to do a lot of studies and everything else. But the more you do every day that's how we get involved.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah. Currently, what are your responsibilities in the parish?

Deacon Amador: Right now, I take care of all the staff. I make sure that all the staff is fingerprinted, they've got to [go through] the new Virtus program, which is called a safe environment and the protection of all God's children.

There's the running of the parish's everyday maintenance part of it and everything else... [I handle] what needs to be repaired and everything else, and that's what I do in both churches – make sure everything is going okay.

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It's a lot of responsibility. Priests do this [too, but] they're still my boss and I've got to answer to them. But I make sure everybody's happy. The customer is always right, no matter where it is.

Dr. Rivera: No, but you have 2 churches.

Deacon Amador: I know. With both churches I have to go back and forth.

Dr. Rivera: You have Immaculate and you have San Salvador?

Deacon Amador: Um-hmm... Like Tony was saying, I was a little leery at the other one: at Immaculate because I wasn't accepted right away.

Dr. Rivera: What do you mean you weren't accepted right away?

Deacon Amador: Well, [they] had the Anglo and the Hispanic sides. [A deacon at Immaculate had to know how to speak English]. It took me a long time to say: Hello deacon, good morning, how are you? Now, it's a different ballgame. Right now we've got more Hispanics at Immaculate.

Dr. Rivera: So when you started it was a little tough?

Deacon Amador: Yes. When I told Father Gomez [about the situation] (inaudible) – [he said:] okay, well, just do your own thing.

Dr. Rivera: Uh-huh. Who is Father Gomez?

Deacon Amador: Father Gomez was the pastor at Immaculate, at that time.

Dr. Rivera: What was his first name?

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Deacon Amador: Edmond.

Dr. Rivera: Edmond Gomez. When was he there?

Deacon Amador: He was there for about 5 or 6 years, I think, at Immaculate.

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera) Early 2000, wasn't it?

Deacon Amador: Early 2000 something...

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera) Until about 2005, 2006.

Deacon Amador: But we had our share of priests – we had so many priests come and go. One time we had 7 priests in 1 year. It's not that San Salvador was a bad church, it was just that they kept moving them back and forth...

Dr. Rivera: So your deaconship is important because it really is a cornerstone to the community?

Deacon Amador: Right.

Dr. Rivera: Because from there, you can build from there. But if you have people coming in and out, it's hard for them to get established. So you are the cornerstone for both churches.

But I'm delighted that you were able to weather the acceptance or non-acceptance of the church in North Colton. But that must have been tough?

Deacon Amador: Oh-yes, it was – sometimes... Because at first it was just 1 church, then they said, okay now your title is going to be (inaudible) associate, and now you've

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got to go to both churches. So I've got an office at Immaculate and I've got an office at San Salvador Church – back and forth...

But it takes time when you're walking with the Lord and everything; and that's what a deacon is, a servant of the Lord, or the servant.

Dr. Rivera: Yes. [So as the] deacon for both churches, everybody says: Deacon Bob is our deacon.

Deacon Amador: They got us going to both churches [in] one Sunday... Immaculate wants me to stay there now—they don't want me to go back to San Salvador, and vice versa...

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: See what happens when you're good?

Deacon Amador: Yeah, I try to for the people... The people are number one in my life.

Dr. Rivera: Let me ask you about your Mom and Dad or your Grandparents. Did your Grandparents come to Colton? Or was it your parents who came to Colton?

Deacon Amador: My Grandpa on my Mom's side were from Mexico.

Dr. Rivera: What part of Mexico?

Deacon Amador: I forgot. *No recuerdo*. I don't know.

Dr. Rivera: When did they come to Colton?

Deacon Amador: Oh *chihuahua!* Back in the 20's or 30's. My Dad's father, my Grandpa, he came from Spain, but I forgot what part of Spain he came from... My Grandma, my Dad's mom, she came from Mexico back in the 1920's.

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My mother and my mother-in-law are from here, from the United States.

Dr. Rivera: Okay

Deacon Amador: Our Dads (him and his wife) are the ones from Mexico.

Dr. Rivera: Okay. Now, when/why did your Dad come to Colton?

Deacon Amador: Uh, I guess it was the same old story -- the money.

Dr. Rivera: The work.

Deacon Amador: Yeah, the work... He worked for the Southern Pacific for 33 [years] —he retired from the Southern Pacific after 33 years here in the Colton area.

Dr. Rivera: So he was a railroad worker for a long, long time?

Deacon Amador: 30 some years.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah.

Deacon Amador: We used to live in the section houses, and everything else...

Dr. Rivera: What are section houses?

Deacon Amador: *La sección...*

Dr. Rivera: *Que son esos?*

Deacon Amador: The railroad furnished housing for the railroad people.

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Dr. Rivera: Ah, railroad housing for the workers?

Deacon Amador: Right, that's what they called it. It was right there on Mt. Vernon where they have the tracks at the bottom there – our houses used to be there. I was born and raised in Colton on 'L' Street, and my house is still there.

Dr. Rivera: So the housing for railroad workers was where Mt. Vernon goes over the railroad bridge?

Deacon Amador: Right.

Dr. Rivera: Okay, I got it... You lived there and then you moved to 'L' Street, you said?

Deacon Amador: No, from 'L' Street we went to the section housing, and from there we went to Canary Street.

Dr. Rivera: Okay. How long did you live on 'L' Street?

Deacon Amador: Oh, must have been 10 years. I was born and raised there in '41... Then in the 50's we went to the section housing and I went to high school.

Dr. Rivera: Uh-huh. And talking about school, where'd you go to school?

Deacon Amador: Colton High School.

Dr. Rivera: And the elementary school?

Deacon Amador: Wilson / Garfield.

Dr. Rivera: You went to Garfield School all through kindergarten up to?

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Deacon Amador: Up until the 5th grade; and after the 5th I went to Lincoln; then from Lincoln I went to Colton Junior High--and then to high school.

Dr. Rivera: You started at Garfield, and [after] 5th grade you went to Lincoln, how did that happen?

Deacon Amador: We moved closer to the other side...

Dr. Rivera: Oh, you moved to North Colton?

Deacon Amador: Yeah... Mr. Andan was our teacher at that time.

Dr. Rivera: At Lincoln School? And then you went to Colton Junior High School?

Deacon Amador: Right.

Dr. Rivera: Where Frank taught?

Deacon Amador: Um-hmm.

Dr. Rivera: Was Frank your teacher?

Deacon Amador: No, I don't think so.

Mr. Acosta: (Off camera) What years did you go to...?

Deacon Amador: '52

Mr. Acosta: (Off camera) Colton Junior High opened in '54.

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Deacon Amador: Yeah, I went to Colton High School in '56, so it must have been '54-55 at that junior high – that's when I went in.

Mr. Acosta: (Off camera) (Inaudible)

Dr. Rivera: So he was still too young to be your teacher...
(Laughter)

Mr. Acosta: (Off camera) Oh-yeah, I was in elementary school, then.

Dr. Rivera: Deacon Bob, do you have any brothers or sisters?

Deacon Amador: I have a sister 4 years older than I am, and a younger brother 4 years younger than I am

Dr. Rivera: So 3 all together?

Deacon Amador: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: Did your Mom stay home to take care of you?

Deacon Amador: My Mom stayed home, yeah, she worked with the *Nopales* for a while, and after that she didn't work, my Dad did all the working.

Dr. Rivera: Tell us about *Los Nopales*, what was that?

Deacon Amador: My Mom used to go up there on North 'E' Street, there was a little branch there [owned by the] Vega family, I think...

Dr. Rivera: North 'E'?

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Deacon Amador: Yeah, you-know where the Holiday Inn [is]?

Dr. Rivera: Oh, yes, yes, yes...

Deacon Amador: There was a little branch there, and I think Vega was the name of the family. My Mom used to work with the Castros... They gave me a picture the other day of my Mom...

Dr. Rivera: You should have brought it with you, we could have made copies of it. But anyway, what was the *Nopales*?

Deacon Amador: You would cut them and everything else, and then take the skin off and everything – and the people would ship them out wherever they need to be shipped to.

Dr. Rivera: How long did she do that?

Deacon Amador: For about a year and a half...

During the Summer we used to work with my Dad, we used to go to (inaudible). My Dad was what you called “the checker” – we would get the big poles and shake the trees down, my brother and I, and my Mom would pick up all the walnuts.

Dr. Rivera: So you did that during the Summer?

Deacon Amador: Yeah. Or [we’d go] pick apricots.

Dr. Rivera: Oh, did you go to Hemet also?

Deacon Amador: My grandma used to take us there when we were kids. That was a lot of stories to be told.

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Dr. Rivera: So you went to Hemet and you picked apricots. Where did you go for the walnut harvest?

Deacon Amador: Grand Terrace had a lot of walnuts.

Dr. Rivera: I had no idea.

Deacon Amador: Yeah, a lot of them... [Also] in Rancho Cucamonga.

Dr. Rivera: Well, besides working in the Summers after high school, where did you work, Deacon Bob?

Deacon Amador: After high school, I went to work [at a] car wash, after the car wash I went to work for the Ford dealers; I worked for Ford dealers for 16 years.

Dr. Rivera: What did you do with the Ford dealers?

Deacon Amador: I was washing cars; then surely, I went up to work in the parts department and the service department. I became a dispatcher, a shop foreman – you name it, I did it. We opened at the Central City Mall, the Ford dealer right there: Fairview Ford – we opened that up...

Twice I got laid off from Ford; so I called my friend at the school district and he gave me a job at the school district, and I worked there for 5 years. I got transferred and I got a job at San Bernardino Valley College – I retired from San Bernardino Valley College.

Dr. Rivera: So you worked for Colton Unified School District?

Deacon Amador: Um-hmm, 5 years.

Dr. Rivera: For 5 years?

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Deacon Amador: Um-hmm.

Dr. Rivera: After that Valley College – and how long were you at Valley College?

Deacon Amador: 20 years. I retired from there 2001 – from the maintenance department.

Dr. Rivera: So you started there in 1980?

Deacon Amador: 1981, to be exact. Then I decided to go to the deaconate, and that's been my story since now.

Dr. Rivera: What about your family, do you have children?

Deacon Amador: Yeah, I've got 5 children: 4 girls and 1 boy; 10 grandkids; and 4 great-grandkids.

Dr. Rivera: Congratulations! 10 grandkids and 4 great-grandkids. Anymore great-grandkids on the way?

Deacon Amador: No, not yet, that I know of. Unless somebody didn't tell me.
(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: That's wonderful – that's good.

Deacon Amador: I've been married to the same wife going on 52 years.

Dr. Rivera: What is your wife's name?

Deacon Amador: Lorensa.

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Dr. Rivera: Her last name?

Deacon Amador: Rodriguez.

Dr. Rivera: Rodriguez. Is she a Colton girl?

Deacon Amador: Oh-yes.

Dr. Rivera: Did you meet her in school?

Deacon Amador: [We met] later when I was a drum major in Colton High School.

Dr. Rivera: Oh, you were a drum major at Colton High School...

Deacon Amador: And she was on the drill team, I was Tony's drum major.

Mr. Vilches: (Off camera). Bob graduated a year before me, but we were in the Colton High School band together. I remember in 1960, I still had one more year to go, Bob was my drum major.

Deacon Amador: I know music, a little bit of music.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Deacon Bob, what do drum majors do? I don't know what they do.

Deacon Amador: Well, they're the leaders of the band. They're the ones in the front with the big sombrero / hat and a big baton...

Dr. Rivera: What year was that?

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Deacon Amador: 1960.

Dr. Rivera: [Were you in] local parades, or did you go to...?

Deacon Amador: We used to march in Independence Day Parades, at that time. Arcadia, Huntington Beach... huh?

Mr. Acosta: (Off camera). Did you do the parades for the fiestas?

Deacon Amador: Yeah, *tambien*, all of them.

Dr. Rivera: Parades for the Fiestas Patrias?

Deacon Amador: Um-hmm. That was a big fiesta, they don't have it anymore like we used to... But that was long time ago.
I was in the National Guard for 9 years.

Dr. Rivera: Stationed locally in Colton?

Deacon Amador: Uh-huh, 140th Infantry Division...

Dr. Rivera: Well-you-know, I'm kind of intrigued about the Fiestas Patrias: that you were in the parade for the Fiestas Patrias, and you said they were big deals there in Colton. What made them big deals in Colton?

Deacon Amador: (Inaudible) To us in Colton – that was a special parade for many of us. We never went to many functions, and it's lovable to be performing for the city of Colton. The City of Colton has always been supporting their people, and everything else, no matter what it was. So we always looked forward to that fiesta because you would get new cars coming in from (inaudible), and you've got different celebrities like

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the mayor, or [whoever] was involved in the Mexican Independence Day. Pete Luque, Sr. was very involved... *Trabajadores Unidos, Progresistas*, and everything else, all the different organizations, yeah.

Dr. Rivera: So it was a big community project?

Deacon Amador: Yes, yes.

Dr. Rivera: Everybody participated in those activities?

Deacon Amador: Right.

Dr. Rivera: You used to belong to a club, a boys club called Los Solteros? Tell me about Los Solteros?

Deacon Amador: Well, we were a young club – at that time, if I remember correctly, there were about 4 or 5 clubs. Los Solteros was one that we started, and it was about 20-25 members. We all worked together and did a lot of community services; we had fundraisers, and everything. (Inaudible) Pasqual Oliva and Angel Oliva were our counselors. All the people from the church, from the different cities and organizations helped us a lot. But mostly we were just to help other people that needed help, and everything else. We had our club jacket, and everything else; but, at that time we never fought like they do now. Everybody was north-south Colton, east Colton, we were all one. These days South Colton, North Colton... there were about 4 organizations...

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, we had 4 organizations, and your membership was about 20. You had jackets, and you had advisors: Pasqual Oliva was your advisor. Who else was your advisor?

Deacon Amador: Angie.

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Dr. Rivera: Angie Oliva?

Deacon Amador: (He nods his head to acknowledge)

Dr. Rivera: And they were good people. They were excellent people.

Deacon Amador: Dave Beltran was one of them.

We used to have the community service right there across from the Sombrero.
Remember the little hall?

Dr. Rivera: The pink building?

Deacon Amador: Across the street from the Sombrero.

Dr. Rivera: A two-story building...

Deacon Amador: They had the tortillas there and all the different places in there.

Dr. Rivera: Basically, it was a community service club, and all the kids got involved with it.

Deacon Amador: Right.

Dr. Rivera: And like you mentioned, we didn't have the competition with the different parts of Colton, they were all kind of mingled together.

Deacon Amador: We had different sport activities against each other: football, basketball... And then we'd all get together and party afterwards.

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Dr. Rivera: Deacon Bob, now that you've been a deacon for 15 years, how has the community of Colton changed? Or has there been any change in the community of Colton?

Deacon Amador: I think, right now, both communities (North & South) are more aware of what's going on, [like] for voting... People are more involved in what's going on. More people are participating to help out the church, especially San Salvador Church with anything we need like fundraisers... I think the communities are getting more united. Which, right now, we're trying to get both communities from Immaculate to San Salvador Church more united, so we can do more things together, and everything else. In the future, who knows? Maybe we can make one church only, instead of 2 churches.

Dr. Rivera: What about demographics? You-know, in the old days we used to have service in English only; and maybe one [in] Spanish, and that was early in the morning. What are the differences in demographics now? Do we have more people that come from Mexico, for example?

Deacon Amador: Every parish that I can think of right now is more in need of Spanish masses...

Our capacity at San Salvador Church is about 300-350, and sometimes [we'll] get over 400. At Immaculate, it's the same thing, [their maximum is] 250 [and they] get way over 400 in the Spanish masses.

And one day the Fire Marshal came and said: lock it down. You can't have this many people.

My advantage at San Salvador Church is we have 8 doors. If something ever happened, we've got 8 doors to get out. At Immaculate they've only got 1 door...

Dr. Rivera: So the demographics has changed tremendously since you've been a deacon?

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Deacon Amador: Yes. First, I used to tell people [and] the Father, when you get another preacher make sure they speak Spanish. Now I tell them [they need to] speak English because we're getting a lot of African-Americans – they come from Nigeria and from different parts. And sometimes they [speak English] but you can't understand them...

Dr. Rivera: So things are not only changing in the church but also in the community?

Deacon Amador: Oh-yes. People are trying to get used to it but they can't. Tony can vouch for the same thing... What are they saying? I don't know... But it's not just in Colton it's all the churches that are really changing a lot. But there's more need for Spanish, we've got to get more Spanish masses so we can get more people.

Dr. Rivera: So one of your biggest responsibilities is to make sure that you provide services for everybody. And that everybody gets a chance to participate in the church activities. That's tough.

Deacon Amador: We need to get more property. Right now, we can build a church in Colton, at San Salvador Church. I've got all the property to build a church, but there's not parking. At Immaculate, I can't do nothing more because there's no place to go. So now, we have to be looking for big property so we can combine both churches together. Right now, we've got to build a church with the maximum of 1,700 in one mass only. So it's hard to get any place to build church [that big] because there's no property in Colton.

Dr. Rivera: You have a tremendous challenge in the future, then?

Deacon Amador: Yes, we do... But with God's help and our help, we will continue to persevere and go forward.

Dr. Rivera: Deacon Bob, thank you so much for being with us this morning. I've been looking forward to us getting together for many weeks now, possibly months. You

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always have some responsibilities to do with your parish. I know that today you have a funeral and I have to let you go. But I want to thank you so much for being with us this morning.

Now, Deacon Bob, is there anything that I didn't cover, or that we didn't cover in our discussion this morning?

Deacon Amador: No, I think we did everything. I think we covered a lot of stuff, and everything else, so we continue to have an oral history about ourselves and everybody else because it's very difficult. That way when you get older you can share this with your grandkids.

Dr. Rivera: Well, you-know I'm delighted because before I got interested in this project, I had no idea that San Salvador was the oldest Church in this entire Island Empire. And I'm delighted because I've been a Colton boy, myself, and I'm very proud of that fact.

Deacon Amador: I'm always proud – and I tell Tony, well, Tony knows it. The thing is that in the book you'll find that Saint Bernardines is listed as the oldest parish because (inaudible) [it's listed as a church instead of a mission] – it wasn't a church it was just a mission, so some of that time ends up derailed. We would have probably been number one, but we're number two to Saint Bernardines right now. We're 160 almost 170 years old now.

Dr. Rivera: Easily I counted 164...
You have a book here, would you mind moving it up to the camera? What is this book?

Deacon Amador: (He holds up the book). This is a book that was issued to us from all the different churches in the diocese. We had the 25th anniversary for the diocese. We had a big gathering here at Cal State many years ago; and this is one of the books we were selling for them to have all the history of all the churches, and everything else. So this is something we could look at...

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Dr. Rivera: Can we borrow that and give it to you afterwards?

Deacon Amador: Sure.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, okay. Well thank you so much, and again, I truly appreciate you being with us this morning. I'll let you get back to your responsibilities...

Deacon Amador: Thank you, Tom, thank you very much.

Transcribed by Pat Ricé-Daniels, Library Services Specialist, Special Collections.