

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR KENNETH HACKETT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background	
Born in Boston, Massachusetts on January 27, 1947	
Childhood in Boston	
BA in Business, Boston College	1964–1968
Peace Corps, Ghana	1968–1971
Impact of the Peace Corps	
Freetown, Sierra Leone—Catholic Relief Services	1972–1975
Assistant to the Sierra Leone Director	
Corruption	
Public Health Work	
Violence in Sierra Leone	
Sierra Leone Leadership	
Other Religious Organizations	
US Embassy	
New York City, NY—Catholic Relief Services	1975–1978
Assistant to the Regional Director for Africa	
Travel in Sub-Saharan Africa	
Ethiopia Famine	
Migration and the Falasha Exodus	
New York City, New York—Catholic Relief Services	1978–1986
Regional Director for Africa	
Philippines—Catholic Relief Services	1986–1992
Kenya—Catholic Relief Services	1992–1993
New York City, New York—Catholic Relief Services	1993–2011
President	
Retirement	June 2011

Nomination as Ambassador to the Vatican
Appointment Hearing
Concerns about US-Vatican Relations
Syrian Conflict
Pope Francis

Entered the Foreign Service

2013

Vatican City, the Holy See—Ambassador

2013–2017

Relational Diplomacy

Wikileaks

Vatican’s International Diplomacy

China-Vatican Relations

Pope Francis Reforms

Affordable Care Act

Immigration

Women in the Church and Married Priests

Papal Visitors

Embassy Italy

Retired from Foreign Service

January 2017

INTERVIEW

Q: Okay, and just to get a bit about your background and history. On your father’s side, what do you know about your father’s side?

HACKETT: Well, he was one of 11 children.

Q: Good God!

HACKETT: His father was a plumber from Ireland. His mother also from Ireland, so they were first-generation, he was second-generation. And most of his brothers and sisters died early.

Q: Where did your family come from in Ireland on your father’s side?

HACKETT: Oh, I’m not sure. One of the places was Skibbereen. There were Hacketts, Griffins, the names of the grandparents. One is from Skibbereen, one is from Cork, and I don’t know where the others are from.

Q: On your mother’s side, what do you know about your mother’s side?

HACKETT: Very little. There were Walshes and the Dorseys. I never knew either grandfather; they passed away before I was born, and on my mother side I knew her mother (my

grandmother) who passed away when I was about six or seven. She was a housekeeper for rich Brahmin Yankees in Boston, she raised two kids, and so the story goes following the Irish saga.

Q: Okay, how long did you live in Boston?

HACKETT: I lived in Boston up until I was 21. And then I left Boston and joined the Peace Corps and went to West Africa.

Q: Okay, let's talk about Boston. I got my Masters at Boston University, by the way. So, where did you live in Boston?

HACKETT: West Roxbury.

Q: And what was it like growing up as a small kid there?

HACKETT: Oh, it was wonderful. I mean, you played hockey in the winter, baseball in the summer. You are out in the street all the time – coasting, sliding, skating; it was a real neighborhood kind of thing. That's the way we grew up. We never branched too far from West Roxbury except to go to Green Harbor which was down on the inside of the Cape, the Irish Riviera. We were lucky and spent the summer at the beach.

Q: Yeah, you remind me of the upbringing of most of us. It's quite different from the way kids are today where you were turned loose, you are told to be back at 6 o'clock or whenever dinner time was, but don't bother me until then.

HACKETT: That's right. Go down and get a pickup game of something, whether it's football, baseball, basketball, you just went, and you did it. There wasn't anyone to organize it, except yourselves.

Q: Were there gangs in those days?

HACKETT: Oh, there were gangs, but not where West Roxbury was located. It was the neighborhood for the teachers, the mailmen, the police – my father was a telephone worker – Edison workers, you know municipal kind of thing. It was lower middle class. You learned how to fight your way out of the situation if necessary, and it was just what Boston was in the fifties and sixties. It was pretty basic.

Q: Where did you go to school?

HACKETT: I went to Boston College High School, which is in Dorchester, right next to the Kennedy Museum now, and then I went on to Boston College.

Q: What was Boston College as a school like?

HACKETT: Boston College was a continuation of Boston College High School in my day. Now it's a completely different enterprise. But in my day, it was mostly kids from the Boston

environs, and about 60% of the students were commuters, brown-baggers as we called ourselves, and 40% were from somewhere that they had to stay on campus. It was mostly white; I think there was one Black kid in my whole class year from Kenya. The Jesuits still had a significant imprint on the University; the student body wasn't that large at that time. It had aspirations, and it has fulfilled those aspirations. These days it's a big, giant university with a lot of research and a lot of endowment, and it's a different thing from when I went there.

I started the lacrosse club, the first lacrosse club ever at Boston College, and that was one of the enjoyable adventures that I engaged in while I was there.

Q: And how was Boston College High School?

HACKETT: Boston College High School is in Dorchester. It's right next to the Kennedy Museum, across the street from the Boston Globe. I had to commute from West Roxbury to Dorchester where the high school was located. That was about an hour and a half bus and train ride.

Q: What were your main occupations in high school?

HACKETT: My main occupations in high school, well, it was trying to get a girl to come to the dance with me, that was one occupation.

Q: Ha, ha. I know the feeling.

HACKETT: A lot of attention. No, I wasn't really much of a sports man; I ran the track, and I wasn't that great of a student. There was nothing too memorable about my high school time. Never made the dean's list, never made the starting varsity in any sport, just carried on.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

HACKETT: I was.

Q: Going back to the very early days, can you think of what books particularly impressed you early on?

HACKETT: Oh. Brave New World by Aldous Huxley, what else? I was into science fiction for a while.

Q: Oh, magazines...

HACKETT: Frank Herbert, Ray Bradbury and all that kind of thing. Gosh, you're dredging; you're really scraping the barrel.

Q: Well, that's what we do. Don't worry about it. At Boston College, was it at all iffy about whether you would go on to college or not?

HACKETT: It was never even a thought. I wasn't a great student, as I said, but my older brother went on to B.C. My father must have called somebody and got me in to BC; that's the way it was done in those days. And the first year was tough, and then I started to blossom. I believe it was my sophomore or junior year that I started to blossom and made the dean's list. I also started the lacrosse club. I joined a fraternity. So, things started to happen by my sophomore year at BC.

Q: I would assume that the church was quite important in your family.

HACKETT: Where we lived in West Roxbury was about 12 houses away from the church and the church parking lot. So I played CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) basketball, CYO roller hockey. You had football games on the church grass. You served the mass; it was what you did as a boy in Boston. That was your culture. You weren't necessarily devout, just that was your culture. Everybody was either Italian or Irish; you identified yourself from the parish where you lived whether you were Catholic, Methodist, Jewish or Greek Orthodox, you said, "Oh, West Roxbury, St. Teresa's."

Q: Were you there during the time of troubles regarding Blacks in school?

HACKETT: Yes, I was there during the Louise D. Hicks era, the busing problems. When we were in high school and we ran track or went to the football games, there was always a fight breaking out. I mean it was just what it was, and it was racial, and things were rough in Boston in the fifties and sixties.

Q: Did this interfere with your education, would you say?

HACKETT: No, it didn't interfere with it at all; it was a Jesuit education. It was a time to learn about doing the right thing, being tolerant, understanding other people's points of view. That was embodied in four years of Latin, three years of Greek, math, and all the other subjects.

Q: I can imagine it would be, but who was passing this on to you and your fellow youths?

HACKETT: Hmmm, well my parents for one. My mother was involved in trying to find opportunities for Black people to settle in West Roxbury which was about as white as a sheet, and she was ostracized for that effort. My father was with the telephone company. He negotiated with Jimmy Hoffa a couple of times. He was very big into union rights; he was management but came up from the ranks, so he was seen as pro labor and always asked to negotiate. We knew about other people and you were told and learn to respect other people and differing viewpoints.

Q: Did you get involved early on in college and politics at all?

HACKETT: Not in the least. I was so apolitical; it was terrible, except of course, those were the Vietnam years. We learned around the edges about the Vietnam years but I was more interested in college in study, lacrosse, and getting a date from the prom.

Q: Well that sounds like a pretty good set of priorities; I know exactly how you feel. What about Vietnam? I imagine that the Irish Catholics wouldn't be protesting much.

HACKETT: Oh, I can't say that. But I just was, as I said, apolitical, just didn't get involved, didn't find the opportunity, the occasion. If somebody, one of my fraternity brothers had said, "Hey, let's go out and protest," I'm sure I would have gone; it just didn't fit into the culture of Boston College at that time. We didn't have that much social activism on campus. It wasn't BU; you well know the difference between BU and BC at that time.

Q: Yeah, now when did you graduate from Boston College?

HACKETT: '68.

Q: '68. What was your major?

HACKETT: Business.

Q: Were you pointed towards anything at that time?

HACKETT: Well, as I tell the story, a friend of mine and I were walking across campus one day going to lunch. He said, "Oh, look, there's the Peace Corps, want to sign up?" and I said, "Why not?" This was in our senior year. I had just had interviews with Esso which became Exxon, Ford Motor Company, General Electric, etc., etc., and it wasn't exciting for me to go through these interviews and I think probably there was a mutual lack of excitement on their part. So, I signed up for the Peace Corps. And then, the night of the fraternity dance at the end of the school year, we got there with our dates, and I said, "Carmen, did you get a letter from the Peace Corps today? He said, "Yeah, but I'm not going." I said, "Well, I'm going, and I went to Ghana.

Q: Ah, had you in high school or college paid much attention to developments overseas?

HACKETT: No, not at all. I had an uncle who was part of a missionary order of priests and he had friends from the Philippines. He used to bring them over to the house and they told fascinating stories. From that point of view, there was an element of vicarious, "Gee, that life must be cool way out there in the bush where your Jeep gets tipped over by the river, and all kind of things happen. Those stories interested and in a way captivated me for sure. But really, I didn't give a lot of premeditation to how my life was going to roll out and it was as spontaneous as walking across campus and seeing the Peace Corps and signing up that charted my international life.

Q: Well, what was your impression? Did the Peace Corps people when they looked at you kind of wonder what you are doing?

HACKETT: No, this was '68, so the Peace Corps was... Well, Kennedy started it and 63, so it was only five years old. Their systems and procedures were a bit unformed. I recall they packed us into a bus from Washington DC and drove us up to Philadelphia to get our teeth all fixed (whether we need it or not). From there they packed us off to New York by bus so that we could fly on Pan Am to Accra, Ghana. We began our Ghana adventure living in a hostel in Accra with

no screens on the windows and lots of mosquitoes flying around. And that was our first encounter with Africa.

Q: Where did you start?

HACKETT: I started in Ghana.

Q: Was that training for all of Africa, or was it Ghana?

HACKETT: We were the first group to be trained in country. All the previous groups had gone through an orientation and training in the United States, and then sent to the countries. We were sent to the country first. We had our language training and cultural orientation in Ghana.

Q: What was your initial impression of Ghana?

HACKETT: I think the initial impression as I recollect it was how warm and generous the local people were. Everyone we met when we were in the capital city of Accra, wanted to meet us, had a generous hello and tried out their English. We were in Accra for about two weeks or so, then we went up country to an agricultural school where we had our language classes. Again everybody was welcoming, warm and generous; they were a wonderful people. And that was a real positive experience for me.

Q: What did they do with you?

HACKETT: We were a group of 25 men who all had some business or background in management, and we were supposed to help reinvigorate the cooperative movement. Kwame Nkrumah, if you remember that name, devastated the cooperative movement by stealing all its money, and so the thought was that these young fresh American kids would come in and revive the agricultural cooperative movement. Well, that was easier said than done.

Q: Okay, where did they send you the first time?

HACKETT: After training, I was sent to a place called the Afram Plains, which is located about in the center of the country. It's kind of an island-like place between two rivers and the Volta Lake, so you had to take a ferry to get there. It was very isolated and very under-developed. On the Michelin Maps it used to be called the Kujani Game Reserve. It never really was, but there were large uninhabited part of the area. The roads were pot-holed. To give you an example, I went there on public transportation, just a low truck with 30 or 40 other people in the truck, and it took us 27 hours to go 100 miles. It was a very isolated area, and that's where I cut my teeth.

Q: What were your living conditions, and where did you work?

HACKETT: Well, my living conditions were pretty good because it turns out I was assigned to a Catholic mission and they had a little mud house on the side of the compound where I and another Peace Corps volunteer lived together. Simple cots. We had a kid from the village who

used to come in and clean up, but it was a very, very basic place; no electricity or running water in the house.

And the Czechoslovakian priest who was our host was very generous in explaining things to us and taking care of us. And particularly... that was 1968, the year of the Prague Spring, and we listened to the radio with Fr. Krajic. It was Czechoslovakian broadcast of what was going on in Prague and he would explain it in English to us. They talked about the Russian soldiers coming into town in tanks and people protesting. Young men painting bricks to look like a radio and hold it up to their ears until the Russian soldiers threatened them and then threw the brick at the Russian soldiers. It was a time of great turmoil. We also listened every day to VOA and BBC, about the Vietnam War, and the men going to the moon, and it was a special experience the first two years when I lived there.

Q: What were you doing regarding working on cooperatives?

HACKETT: We were trying to organize agriculture farmers, particularly corn farmers, so that they could jointly market their produce to the larger markets some distance away. But these guys were smart. They may not have been well-educated, but they were street smart, and they went along with us, but when the time came to put all their harvest together, they said, "We're not throwing all our chips in the thing you've set up here; we're going to do it our own way." They were successful in not cautious. And I learned a lot about the wisdom of just regular people who may not have gone to BU or BC or even to high school. They had a sense of what is right and wrong, moral and what values they were to sustain. They were all so street smart and that was an education for me.

Q: Do you think the Peace Corps made any difference?

HACKETT: To the volunteers who came from the United States, yes. Actually contributing to something sustainable in the community in another country, less so. But the intercultural exchange I think was a positive thing. I mean, there were a lot of young and old people in the town I lived in. Town? It was a village of maybe 40 homes, and I was most likely the only white foreigner they had ever met, other than the priest. It was an experience for them in that regard. But in terms of the cooperative movement or agricultural production... I also was involved in digging wells and putting in water cisterns, we made life for individual families better, but I would say we had only a marginal impact on the larger picture.

Q: You were there from when to when?

HACKETT: I was in my first posting from '68 to '70, and then I left that posting and went to work at Akosombo, which was a community at the bottom of the Volta River at the dam. And then I was doing agricultural land use and demographic surveys around the lake for another year and a half. So, I was there three and a half years.

Q: So you really took to the businesses they were doing.

HACKETT: Oh, I really did. I really enjoyed the people, the atmosphere, the sense of community; yeah, it was wonderful.

Q: Did you pick up any of the movements in the United States at that point? About Vietnam and all?

HACKETT: Not too much. I got a very high lottery number, so I was never called up. I'm not sure what I would have done had I been called up. No, I was really isolated and was basically on my own.

Q: Did this exposure to Africans do anything to your outlook toward African-Americans?

HACKETT: Well, I think I recognized very clearly that the opportunities are not always there, particularly not people of color. I realized that if I could help them gain some space, some opportunity, that was a great contribution. That's what I think I offered in terms of various things I did in the Peace Corps. And that set me in a direction for the rest of my life which was a direction of being somebody who could be a person for others.

Q: You mentioned a Czech priest. Was he an influential person in the village and in your life?

HACKETT: Well, he was certainly influential in that area because he started a lot of schools and community development/improvement projects. He was a selfless kind of guy, and he was a creative and also an intrepid guy because he would go where others wouldn't. This was pretty isolated territory. Some of his brothers in his community thought he was a little bit "out there" because he was living in this isolated area. But he was doing wonderful things for people and making a difference in those communities in the life of particularly many young people who would not have had an education had it not been for him establishing the schools. Gosh, he must have started a dozen primary schools in the area, and these weren't too sophisticated, but he would find the teachers and he would build the building out of mud bricks, put a tin roof on it, and he would get the families to send their kids to school rather than to the farm. He spoke two languages of the area fluently and he knew the culture. So yes, he had an impact on me. I saw somebody who could really make a contribution to others.

Q: Well then while you were in Ghana, were you thinking about what you were going to do?

HACKETT: One of the things I remember doing was applying to USAID for the CORDS program. Remember that?

Q: Oh yeah, I was in Vietnam.

HACKETT: Oh, so you remember the CORDS program? Actually, they turned me down and I'm glad they did because I think I would have left had I known what I learned after I applied. The CORDS "hearts and minds" program didn't do much for hearts and minds. So, yes, I mean I didn't have a lot of information, as I said earlier, about what was going on in Vietnam other than from VOA and BBC. I don't know; someone was watching over me. I didn't get sent. A lot of

high school and college classmates never came back from Vietnam but anyway, I finished three and a half years with the Peace Corps and came back to the United States looking for a job.

Q: So what happened?

HACKETT: Well, I was living at my family's place inside Cape Cod and it got too cold because we didn't have any heat. I applied to Catholic Relief Services. I got turned down by them. I still have the letter on my wall in my office here. And then a friend of mine said, "Oh, I know someone in Catholic Relief Services, so off I went in November 1971 to New York for interviews with the UN, Care, and Catholic Relief Services. And the first one was Catholic Relief Services; they offered me a job. They said, "Do you want to go back to Africa?" I said, "Sure," and they offered me a job and I took it; I never went to the other two interviews. And I spent 40 years of my life with Catholic Relief Services.

Q: All right, well let's talk about this. Where did you start and what were you doing?

HACKETT: I started in Sierra Leone, and I was maybe a 24-year old young buck who would do anything my boss would tell me to do. At the time Catholic Relief Services was running the national leprosy program, a very large maternal and child health program and supporting some other community development projects such as building wells and latrines. We acted as the financier and we would help finance partially the community to organize themselves and carry out these programs.

We had nurses, public health people and engineers, and I was one of two assistants there until the boss, an Italian priest, left the country for an extended leave. I was in the Capital, Freetown, and he told me that I could sit in his chair, but I wouldn't be the boss. The other assistant living up country had seniority. And as it turned out after six months, he decided not to come back from Italy, he got sick or something and I got appointed as director at age 25. I was managing 60 people, a fleet of three dozen vehicles, and programs all around the country at a very young age.

Q: Let's talk about Sierra Leone. What was it like when you were there?

HACKETT: Well, this is before the worst of times. On the negative side, it was corrupt; diamonds had already caused major problems. But that wasn't the only cause of problems. During colonial times the British elevated the people in the capital area and they suppress those tribes in the provinces. And that attitude lingered on even after independence. A lot of that tribal tension continued to permeate things.

As I said, corrupt it was. I often tell people I spent time in the Philippines and other places, where there was corruption. But in Sierra Leone, corruption crawled up your leg; it was so obvious, so blatant, and you really had to stay on your toes to avoid being consumed by it. There was that side of it, but the people were very nice, very friendly and accommodating; West African peoples are generally that way. It was an experience of learning to manage, learning to run things, learning to get things done by being smart, wise, deal with corruption- all that was a good orientation for me.

Q: I've had a little experience as most Americans have with Nigerians. You know, so much of that is basically almost con artists. Was there a problem with that there?

HACKETT: Nigerians are more professional at it; the Sierra Leoneans weren't. The funny thing about Sierra Leone was even when I was there which was in the seventies, there were more Masters' degreed and PhDs degreed Sierra Leoneans outside their country than inside their country. They were very well educated. Fourah Bay University was the very first major West African University, but it graduates didn't stay. They were in London, Chicago, or someplace far from Freetown. They too didn't want to participate in the corruption that had been rotten in that country.

Q: How did you deal with corruption in your work?

HACKETT: I tried to be as principled as I could, and that is not engage in it in any way, shape, or form. But sometimes, an offer of a cigarette, a friendly gesture, was as effective as a financial bribe which was what the cop, the trucker or someone else wanted. It was a challenge. You had to stay on top of it and if you wanted to get something done as Americans usually do, it was agonizing. But if you have principles and values that you adhere to, you've just got to adhere to them and hold tight to them, and that will mean you won't get everything done that you expect to get done.

Q: Did you have any other people you could consult on all the problems that you had there?

HACKETT: I had a very good staff, and I treasured them, Sierra Leonean staff who when it got dicey, we would close the door and say, "What are we going to do about this?" And some of these people put themselves on the line many, many times, and I respected that. And there were some who cross the edge, and I fired them. That's just what you have to do.

Q: What about things like diamonds? One hears in the later years about blood diamonds. Was there the equivalent to that?

HACKETT: There was a population of Lebanese business people who basically controlled the diamond trade. They had been there I would say probably for 10 to 20 years by the time I got there. They set up their hardware stores, their car dealerships, and they had linkages into the diamond fields. They would be the buyers from the Sierra Leone dealers, and they moved the diamonds out of the country for politicians and other people. That was a pretty corrupt culture, that whole Lebanese-Sierra Leonean politician culture. And then after a time, after I left actually, many of the Lebanese either left or were kicked out. They went to Liberia and continued in the same process, only the diamonds were moving across the border to Liberia.

Q: What about some project you were working on? Do you feel like they were pretty successful?

HACKETT: The politics?

Q: No, the projects.

HACKETT: Oh, the projects. Yes, now I learned humility in the Peace Corps, that you can't solve all the problems, but at least now at Catholic Relief Services, I had a little bit of money and flexibility. And the type of projects we dealt with, mostly public health and the leprosy program which basically save people's lives and helped people who were disfigured start a new life because it was not just the medical treatment, but it was also about helping them to start small businesses.

And the maternal and child health programs, that was a lifesaver. The level of child mortality in that country among children who were not participating in a maternal and child health program was disgraceful. It was so high. I mean you have malaria, you have water-borne diseases, all kinds of things in that country, the program that we were in had about 100,000 kids enrolled. I believe it was quite successful, lives were saved. And we also had a program of school feeding for children which again was most successful in that during certain periods of the year, that was the only meal that these children got.

They would get home and there would be nothing in the larder at the end of the planting season after they had used up all their reserves. These families had nothing, and so the school lunch program made a big difference in their life. And there were other programs that were less successful in terms of organizing a community to build a well or build latrines; some of them worked and some of them didn't. Sometimes somebody stole the money, it all went on.

Q: What could be done during your time for leprosy?

HACKETT: They had just come out with some new drugs. We had a couple of German doctors who join the program and they were applying these drugs, I actually forget what they were, but I know they were having an impact. They were trying to catch the disease early and start the drug regime as early as they could so as to help cut the diseases ravaging those infected. People would come from miles, walk for miles to come to the hospital, and other people would bring patients from 40, 50, 60 miles away to come for treatment.

Q: But things were happening.

HACKETT: Oh yes, and it was interesting that this program which was a national program for leprosy run by the Ministry of Health was managed by Catholic Relief Services.

Q: Did you have many outside doctors come in?

HACKETT: Yes, we had quite a few. As I said, the Germans were in. There were a couple of Americans specialists on leprosy and filariasis, as well as other diseases. For them, this was heaven because they couldn't find patients where they came from. They may have studied about all these diseases back in Germany, but how many patients in Germany have leprosy?

Q: Today is the 13th of March, 2018 with Ambassador Ken Hackett. You said after you got out of the Peace Corps, you moved to Catholic Relief Services. What was your first position there?

HACKETT: I moved to Catholic Relief Services in 1971; they sent me back to West Africa, Sierra Leone.

Q: Ah, yes. What were you doing in Sierra Leone?

HACKETT: Well, I was a beginner. I think I was 25 years old. And I would do anything my boss told me to do, and I think I told you last time that the CRS program ran the national leprosy campaign. It was also managing a large maternal and child health program and a school feeding program covering schools in half the country. And there were other little things too but those were the three main programs, and basically it was a management task to make sure those were run efficiently and effectively.

Q: Were you the only American there or were there other Americans?

HACKETT: The Director of the program was an Italian Xaverian priest from Reggio Calabria. He knew how to get things done and I was his assistant. There was one other American who was posted upcountry in a place called Kenema which was a provincial capital. He was senior to me, but I don't think he had the breadth that they wanted so they left him upcountry even when the boss went on sabbatical back to Rome, I was designated to sit in his seat, and kind of watch over things.

Q: Well, how did you find it? Catholic Relief Services has been around for a long time. It must have been quite professional, wasn't it?

HACKETT: It's been around since 1943. It was started to bring the Marshall plan into Europe, but how I found it was an uncle of my sister-in-law was a priest in Connecticut who was responsible for Catholic Relief Services fundraising in Connecticut. And when I told him I was turned down by Catholic Relief Services he said, "Oh, I know someone down there, and I'll get you an interview." I went to New York City and, as I think I told you last time, I had interviews scheduled with CARE, with the United Nations, CRS was the first one. CRS offered me a job, and I never went to the other interviews. And that started my long-term, 40-year career with Catholic Relief Services.

Q: Did you find the Vatican was a major presence in your work or not?

HACKETT: When I was with Catholic Relief Services, only towards the end of my career did I have any dealings with the Vatican. In running a country program for CRS you dealt with the local church and the local government, but you had very limited engagement with the Vatican. Now later in my career when I became CEO of the organization, that's when I had to deal with the higher-level issues and politics of humanitarian assistance, the Catholic Church, inter-faith and ecumenical collaboration, and that's where I was dealing with the Vatican .

Q: Let's talk a little about Sierra Leone. When you were there working for Catholic Relief Services, what was going on there?

HACKETT: Well this was in the mid-seventies, early-seventies, '72-'75. Now, the politics were tribal, so the political parties were basically either the Temne ethnic group, or Mende, another tribal group, and that was as simple as it shook out. Of course, the diamonds have been found, and the diamonds were basically a very destructive element in the situation.

Q: I imagine they would be.

HACKETT: It was a small country; you knew everybody, and they knew you. I remember having government ministers asking me for little favors for their hometown and things like that, which you basically turn down. And it was just a simple kind of place, but the elements of corruption existed and permeated so many aspects of society. It was a virus of sorts, very debilitating, and over time we now know that it just ate away at the fabric of the society until you had the bad days in the mid-nineties and the RUF fighters were cutting people's hands and heads off, and it was just a brutal time. But in some ways, you could see its beginnings in the early seventies. There was a decay in society, in traditional mores, that was leading to something that was not good.

I was there only a short time, so I can't say more. From there I was transferred back to the headquarters in New York as an assistant to the regional director for Africa, so I never lost my watch on what was happening in Sierra Leone. Eventually in 1996, as chief executive officer, I remember talking to my man in Freetown, Sierra Leone who said when I asked how he was doing, "Well, there are 12 dead bodies on the street outside my front door, but I'm going to get out of here." And those type painful episodes were so frequent in Sierra Leone over the years; there were riots, coups, shootings, and massacres; it was a tortured place.

Q: Did you find the Sierra Leoneans brutal people?

HACKETT: No, not necessarily. In many ways they were benign people, but, and I haven't thought a lot about this, but in some ways, they could be led into brutal things by miscreants and other scoundrels who wanted power. In the worst of times, those few people who basically moved in, gathered young people up, drugged them, and gave them a gun, and told him what to do, and were savage. It was Lord of the Flies revisited. Those were really bad times, really bad times. You may recollect that the British had to send military in to control the situation in parts of the country. But the savagery was unleashed, and there were many, many thousands of people who were maimed and killed, and abused and raped; it was a terrible time.

Q: Yeah, the reports that we would pick up in the papers were pretty darn awful.

HACKETT: Yeah, it was; it really was. And most people didn't even know how god-awful it was unless you had some inside information. It was just tragic. But in my day, I remember taking a trip with the vice president S.I. Nkrumah. I don't recall what he wanted me to do. There I was at aged 25 or 26 driving up country with him in his car and we had a big feast. I recall it was fun and maybe we had a school feeding program in his mother's village or something like that, I don't know, but it was really a small country where you got to know everybody. And honestly, the average person was gentle, benign, welcoming, accommodating, but circumstances led it to spiral down.

Q: Did countries bordering Sierra Leone cause problems?

HACKETT: Well, on one side was Liberia which was even more corrupt. There is something about Liberia and Sierra Leone that is similar. In both cases as I think I mentioned previously, the colonial power in the Liberia case being the Americans, in the Sierra Leone case being the British, controlled the area around the capital, and treated those people as special who lived in that area. Whereas the people in the provinces are upcountry folks, so to speak, were treated in the most demeaning ways. And over generations in both countries, it built up antipathy. The people upcountry saw the people in the capital cities were getting special favors which they never enjoyed – schooling, jobs, and all kinds of things. That was a similarity there.

Now in the case of Guinea, Guinea-Conakry, which was to the west of Sierra Leone and to the north of Sierra Leone, they had a kind of autocratic ruler in Sekou Touré. And Sekou Touré was president for a good number of years and he basically ruined and raped the country. But it wasn't necessarily as tribal or as bifurcated as Sierra Leone between the capital and the provinces or Liberia between the capital and upcountry.

Q: This represented the French rule?

HACKETT: The French rule, exactly, yes. But Sekou Touré threw the French out, I think a little bit earlier than Sierra Leone through the Brits out. The British independence would've been, gosh my memory is slipping, early sixties in Sierra Leone. I think Sekou Touré may have done it before that because Sekou Touré was one of those early liberation leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, and Ben Bella in Algeria. That whole movement in the late fifties, early sixties for independence was an extremely important movement, but there was no model for it actually.

Q: How did you find the leadership of Sierra Leone when you were there? Could you deal with them?

HACKETT: In the three plus years that I was there, there must've been three or four attempted coup d'état's. I remember the guy who cooked for me was arrested one time because he was from the wrong tribe. He was a simple man thrown into prison for a couple of days; I couldn't get him out. There was a lot of corruption. The All People's Congress party of which Siaka Stevens was in charge was from the north and the Temnes. The Mende tribal group felt abandoned and marginalized, and they rose up. It was in constant political tension that existed in the country.

Q: Did they leave you and your work pretty much alone?

HACKETT: Pretty much alone because they knew that what we had to offer was of special benefit to the people, and that they could not offer the same. School lunch programs supported by Public Law 480 US government title II food and a maternal and child health program which provided vaccines and care for mothers and their newborns as well as a leprosy control program that was, bar none, right up there with the best of the best in the world.

Q: Did you get priests or nuns come from the Western world to help?

HACKETT: Yes and no. There were three dioceses. The northern diocese was the Italian order of priests and nuns. The southern diocese was an Irish order of priests and nuns. And the Freetown diocese was also Irish. And those Irish priests and some of the nuns were evacuated out of Biafra during the war, in fact they were thrown out of Nigeria during the war. They came over to Sierra Leone and resumed what they were doing in Biafra, that is starting schools, hospitals, health clinics and things like that and good social service programs. We supported them as well as the Ministry of Health and that was the best of the best. We also supported some Seventh-day Adventists hospitals and Presbyterian hospitals and other venues as well, but the main client was these Catholic hospitals and schools that were run by the Irish or Italians. And over time some Sierra Leone priests and nuns took over.

Q: Did you find there was pretty good cooperation with the Protestant sects?

HACKETT: Generally, yes, and also with the Muslims. It really depended on the issue, but basically, I thought there was a lot of collaboration between some Catholic hospitals, some Seventh-day Adventist hospitals. I know that I had a lot of collaboration with the Methodist Church while I was there as well as the Presbyterians. It varied on the issue, but people were open to collaborating, even as I say, the Muslims. In west Africa at that time, Islam was not a radical Islam. Qaddafi had not reached his big hand down to try to build mosques and madrassas it hadn't happened yet. It didn't happen until the 80s and the 90s, so you had the Ahmadiyya sects and some, Sunni Muslims groups and the imams generally got along with the other religious leaders of Christian faiths.

Q: Was this a local initiative or did this come from the top in your organization?

HACKETT: At Catholic Relief Services we were definitely a Catholic organization and there were no bones about what we believed. That was important to make sure that everybody knew what you represented and what you valued. And when your values, your beliefs are clear, other faiths and other groups find it easier to work with you. If your wishy washy about your values and beliefs, people don't know who you are. We tried to be very clear. This is who we are; we are a Catholic organization. We are owned by the Catholic bishops in the United States which is directly associated with the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. We don't have any problems as long as you value the dignity of the individual and you want to support the kind of things that we want to support. And we made that as clear as we could in all cases. Now there were some people that held animus towards us, but they were a minority.

Q: How did you find our embassy in Sierra Leone? Was it a help?

HACKETT: Well, I forget the name of the ambassador, but I do know the name of the DCM; it was Bob Houdek. Does that name ring a bell? Bob and I play tennis together and our wives were close and while we didn't hang around all the time because he had a different agenda than I did, we were very friendly, and I remain friendly with Bob throughout his career. He spent a lot of time in Africa and we would bump into each other in Ethiopia and Uganda, etc. etc. So, yes, I would say in general our embassy was most helpful and left a very good impression on the country. It was located right in the exact center of town. In Freetown there is a giant cotton tree,

and it's kind of symbolic, or iconic, and is used to represent Sierra Leone on their coins and things like that. On one side of it is Parliament and on the other side of it is the American Embassy, and my office was about four streets down from that. Freetown at the time was not a big place.

Q: You say you had these coup attempts. Were they disruptive or were they sort of quiet coup attempts?

HACKETT: Well, I lived up on the hill above the city. Freetown, the capital, is surrounded by hills and the British always lived up on the hill because it was cooler. I found a house right next to the head of the military, General Momoh, and I can remember one night being awakened at three in the morning where we ducked down because there were mortar shells being shot over our house at General Momoh's house. These were disruptive. At another time we were in the office and the police started coming up the street and they threw some gas grenades behind them. It was kind of a farce because they threw the teargas behind them, but the wind started blowing towards them and, of course, they were all hit by the teargas as were we who were the spectators on the side of the street watching. Those are some memories, but that was a failed attempt as well.

And then of course, with these kind of attempted coups in West Africa, well in many places in the world, you round up all the suspects as they said in the movie Casablanca, round up the regular suspects, and they would do it with brutality. They would all be thrown into the Pademba Road jail, and some of the people I knew with would try to get into the jail and find out if they could get people released. The leadership in West Africa in those days, you wouldn't call it enlightened; it was definitely autocratic and brutal.

Q: These were the George Washington's of Africa at that time.

HACKETT: That's right, good analogy.

Q: And they didn't get where they were by being benign.

HACKETT: That's right, that's right, that's so true.

Q: You left Sierra Leone when?

HACKETT: 1975, January, '75.

Q: And then where did you go?

HACKETT: Then I was moved back to the headquarters of Catholic Relief Services in New York, as an assistant to the African regional director. I spent an enormous amount of my time traveling around sub-Saharan Africa. I think CRS had about 20 programs in sub-Saharan Africa and my job was to get out there, be as supportive as I could to the staff and backstop them at headquarters. Some of the major events were the Sahel famine which stretched from Senegal

across to Chad; it was a pretty bad drought and famine. Thousands of people died and not many people knew about it.

And at that same time, in the mid-seventies, South Africa was in turmoil. Those people who were fostering apartheid, trying to resist the local opposition. Rhodesia had not become independent yet. Kenya was somewhat in turmoil under Kenyatta. In 1974, Ethiopia overthrew Haile Selassie and brought in the communist Derg, so there was a lot going on in the continent when I moved in as an assistant in the regional office of the Africa section.

Q: In Africa in this particular time, what place gave you the most problems?

HACKETT: Hmmm, let's see. You know there were different levels of problems. You had your people problems; if you had people you had problems. And then you had political problems, and then you had crises. The Sahel famine was a big issue. The situation in Nigeria following the Biafra crisis had basically just dissipated. General Ojukwu lost the war in Biafra and General Gowon took full control of Nigeria. Because we supported the Biafra relief effort, we were considered Persona Non Grata and forced to leave the country.

Q: Actually, that was something people forget now, but that was a civil war that was resolved fairly well by good leadership on the winning side.

HACKETT: Yes, it was done right, and people do forget it. I would say in the mid-seventies, Ethiopia was the most serious crisis on the African continent. It was a crisis from two angles: one, this was the Reagan administration and (Stalinists) communists had taken over in the country. It was a military junta that call themselves the Derg, I don't remember what that exactly meant, but it was a military takeover and they overthrew the Emperor Haile Selassie. They put into place a purge of the opposition and what was called the Red Terror. It was bloody and vile. And by November, 1974, there was massive starvation in that country, very widespread and Catholic Relief Services was one of the only foreign organizations able to operate in the country. Although enormous constraints were placed on us.

Q: Well, where did you get your food?

HACKETT: Basically, the Reagan administration, bitterly opposed to the Marxist-Leninist government in Ethiopia decided to strike humanitarian assistance out of the budget for fiscal year 1975. And I remember as a young assistant testifying in Congress on this matter. It was a House African sub-committee headed by a congressman from Brooklyn.

Q: Solarz. Steven Solarz.

HACKETT: Yes, and he was very receptive to hearing what we were trying to do. We dealt in nations with communist governments around the world at the time and you found a modus operandi.

The Reagan administration wanted to punish the communist government by cutting off humanitarian assistance to the people. I was zealous, and I just thought that our government's

action to cut humanitarian assistance in the midst of a famine was wrong. I kind of put my job on the line to go down to Washington to testify without the approval of most of the higher-ups in my organization.

But happily, things began to turn around and by November, 1974, the BBC broadcast some footage of starvation that was taking place there and all of a sudden I was on CBS new morning news and ABC morning news, etc. etc. etc., but more importantly we had to bring our operations in such a way that allowed us to bring food into the northern parts of the country. In some areas where the starvation was taking place there were literally dead bodies on the street. That was a rough time.

Q: Oh boy.

HACKETT: The ambassador or Charges D'Affaires there at that time was David Korn.

Q: Did the United States have a solid response to this thing, I mean with food and delivery?

HACKETT: At first, they did not, and it became part of the Reagan administration effort against the "evil empire". I never liked the communist approach, the fascist approach, obviously, but when the everyday person ends up suffering, I protested. And then we turned it around; the United States finally made a statement. Peter McPherson, who was the head of USAID, basically came out and said, "The hungry child knows no politics," and all of a sudden, we started to receive the food and money necessary to feed the starving people.

Q: How about delivery? Was that a major problem?

HACKETT: Oh, it was a horrendous problem because, I don't know whether you know Ethiopia, but the port, it was the port of Assab which was basically in the territory of Eritrea. Eritrea wasn't independent in that time, and alternatively there was the port of Djibouti, a different country which had a rail line from the port into Ethiopia. All the ports were getting stacked up with ships and over stuffed warehouses; it was so hard to move food supplies, trucks were in short supply, petrol was short, the rails were limited. And then, there was also a war going on between Ethiopia and Eritrea, so as you moved North, you had the continual problem of people attacking shipments.

The government of Ethiopia was not the most cooperative with the Americans, so there were problems at every turn.

Q: Did you see the feeding we were doing? Was this just putting a Band-Aid on the problem?

HACKETT: It was a big Band-Aid, but I looked at Band-Aids on starvation as the fact that you are keeping people alive. And those people may be going to be teachers and doctors and professors, and in fact, they did. So, this was the worst of the worst. This was somewhat equivalent to what is happening with the Rohingya people in Burma. It was villages being bombed and blasted, women being raped, children being massacred. That was a bad time. I saw bodies in one place stacked like wood, and it was the most horrific thing I had ever seen. But there was so much death, so much dying in a place called Wollo. You are bringing back sad

memories to me, but we went there, and that's where I determined we were going to do something; we were not going to let people just die because they had no food and no water.

Q: God. Were you able to get press attention?

HACKETT: Oh, there is a great story you can look up. My director in Ethiopia was a Catholic priest, Monsignor Bob Coll. Bob was a tough guy to manage at times. He was very creative. He liked to do his own thing and we told him that Dan Rather of "60 Minutes" wanted to come in and do an interview and see the situation. We were a little bit nervous about having "60 Minutes" come in, but it worked. Dan Rather interviewed Monsignor Coll on "60 Minutes" and he asked the question, "Monsignor, how can you assist these people? They are communists." Bob Coll picked up a little baby and handed it to Dan Rather and said, "Dan, is this a communist?" and Dan Rather teared up. It was a very moving moment which I think you can still find on "60 Minutes" archives.

Q: Oh yeah. How about headquarter and the Vatican? Did they see this in terms of the Cold War or were they really responding on a humanitarian basis?

HACKETT: In Ethiopia I dealt frequently with the Vatican's representative, the apostolic nuncio, and they were very, very helpful, extremely helpful. In fact, the nuncio held a meeting with about a dozen ambassadors after a major meeting when Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner of Ethiopia who lambasted the U.S. The meeting was so contentious and so full of vitriol that the American Chargé d'Affaires ended up walking out of the meeting. Within two hours, the Vatican embassy held a meeting of the German, British, Dutch, the American chargé d'affaires, as well as a number of others and ourselves (my deputy, Michael Wiest and I). There were some charges made that some PL480 Title II American food seen in the Addis Ababa being sold.

The Vatican meeting was called to talk about the famine and how are we going to get assistance up to the northern part of the country. What can the Vatican do? What can the Americans do? What can the Germans do? Etc. etc. etc. The meeting started to take a side turn to talk about cans of American vegetable oil turning up in the market.

My deputy couldn't constraint himself. He burst out, "How can you be talking about a few cans of oil when thousands are dying." The meeting immediately took a different tone. The American Chargé was so, so helpful. He actually helped us write the proposal to USAID that night and then delivered it, and within a couple of weeks we were able to get some assistance up to Mekelle which is up in Tigre province, an area where people were dying in the streets. The Vatican was involved; the embassy was involved; other embassies were involved. It was really a heroic effort from many, many different sources.

Q: Was there much movement of people going to different countries because there wasn't food?

HACKETT: There was a lot of people movement up North, movement toward the major cities in the country because there was just no food the countryside. There was famine. There were restrictions on movement but the people started to move anyway. And they moved with their

camels, their cows, their donkeys, but soon they ate the camels, cows and donkeys, and then they came with nothing to the capital. There were hundreds of thousands of people on the move. You remember, I'm sure, that was the time that the Falasha, the Ethiopian Jews were getting out. The Israelis launched Operation Moses to take the Falasha to Israel through Sudan.

Q: Oh yes, from Ethiopia, and we had sort of an underground movement, exodus to Sudan.

HACKETT: It all that happened.

Q: Did you get involved in the Falasha thing?

HACKETT: Not directly.

Q: Did Catholic Relief Services get involved in any element of the Falasha exodus?

HACKETT: This is a side story. Over in Sudan, the International Catholic Migration Commission, which is an initial offshoot of Catholic Relief Services, spun off some time in the fifties, was operating in Kassala, an eastern town in Sudan. And they became aware of what the Israelis were doing to bring the Falasha out, when it was known that ICMC were aware of the secret plan and they didn't last very long in the country.

They were thrown out of the country because they knew too much. The Israelis pressured the Sudanese government. This was all before Osama bin Laden had arrived there; this was in the late seventies, but they didn't want any outsiders knowing about the stuff.

I had a wonderful dinner with Tim Carney one night many years later. Tim was the ambassador in Sudan and in Haiti and he has written a couple of books. He had the station chief in Sudan at the time of Operation Moses at the dinner and somehow the station chief said to me, "Were you in Sudan at that time?" and I told him the story about ICMC and oh my God, he said, "Oh yes, we know all about that."

Q: Well, we are sort of moving on, how long were you doing this work?

HACKETT: I was an assistant Regional Director for Africa from 1975 to 1978, and in 1978, I was made Africa regional director. I served from 1978 to 1986 as Africa regional director, and then I was moved to a position which was about fundraising and relations with the Catholic Church in the United States and public relations, media, which I did for a couple of years. And then I asked to be moved back to the field and was sent to the Philippines. I spent from '86 to '92 in the Philippines, and I was moved back to Kenya in '92, that was Somalia and pre-genocide Rwanda and a few other issues. And then in '93, I was made CEO of the organization.

Q: I think you can see, Ken, why I'd like to find out what you were doing other than being ambassador because all of this stuff... We're trying to build up a collection of what people were doing in various countries at various times, and your involvement certainly was major. I mean, you were there at a time of great turmoil and accomplishment.

HACKETT: It was not a surprise to me when I was asked to be ambassador to the Vatican, only because I knew many of the actors. I knew the situations they acted in and I had history, so I was pleased that I was asked to take up that post, but as most people who knew my background said, "Yes, you are right for this position." Who knows the archbishop in Eritrea? Who knows the person in Mindanao who deals with the peace negotiations? That's what I did for 40 years.

Q: You're atypical. It's the prominent Catholic layman who typically gets the job. Well, before we get to that, let's go back to your time in Africa.

HACKETT: I've got five to seven minutes and then we can come back to it at another time.

Q: Did this famine relief pretty well determine what you were doing?

HACKETT: It was certainly preoccupying. But what we were trying to do in the normal times is supporting local initiatives of starting small businesses, starting credit unions, savings groups, supporting women's efforts, doing some human rights stuff, anti-trafficking things, but when a major calamity such as a famine creeps onto your stage, it preoccupies you. Now in Africa, it was mostly famine, whereas in other parts of the world, it was earthquakes, volcanoes, etc. and we as an organization just committed ourselves to respond. We will do the long-term; we will stay after the emergency and be there before the emergency, but we will respond to the emergency robustly as we can so that people are not set back in their lives by some of these calamities.

Q: While you were doing it, did you see any solution to the famine problem? What is this going to depend on rain?

HACKETT: Most of the famine issues that we encountered, both in Africa and other parts of the world, were man-made. It was poor governance, like in North Korea in '96. That was straight-out caused by the government. It was feeding its soldiers; it wasn't feeding its people when there was a drought. But had the government the ability or the inkling to share the resources that it could obtain with the broader population, you would have averted famine. Andrew Natsios wrote about this very eloquently in a book 10 or 15 years ago. Most famines are really man-made, as was probably the Irish famine. It's governments that restrict access to food and to resources that the people need to grow food.

Q: I would have thought that the Sahels' encroachment on the various areas would have been the major...

HACKETT: That was a big contributing factor, but my contention is that had the governments been capable or willing to bring assistance, and the assistance was there to bring, you could have averted starvation. But rather, the government took care of its own little needs and not its people. But certainly, the encroaching desert was causing problems. The water table had dropped; the animals were dying, but you could have brought resources. Resources were available in the seventies and eighties to avert starvation.

Q: I'm concerned about our time. Maybe this would be a good place to stop.

HACKETT: Yes, this will be the place to stop. Let we look at my calendar.

Q: Yeah, and then we can move on to the Philippines, I guess.

Q: Okay, today is the third of April 2018 with Ken Hackett. And Ken, do you remember where we left off?

HACKETT: No, I forget.

Q: Well, we were, I don't have the thing right here, I could go get it, but...

HACKETT: Were we...?

Q: We're getting close to the time, you're finished with your time, with the Catholic Relief Services aren't you?

HACKETT: Well, yeah, probably we finished there. So, then it would be, yes, I retired in 2012.

Q: 2012. And then what did you do?

HACKETT: Uh...

Q: Well, I guess you're up to the ambassadorial thing.

HACKETT: No, that didn't quite come up yet. I mean, it did indirectly. Somebody from the White House came to my retirement party and suggested, or asked, if I would be interested in taking an ambassadorial position in the Vatican. And of course, I said yes, I'd be most interested. And then it went dark for virtually a year. Didn't hear a thing. And we thought, "Well, so it goes." However, in January of 2013, I went into the hospital and had an aortic valve replacement and I got out of the hospital somewhere around the end of January, started my recovery, and lo and behold, around February 5th or 6th, my wife took a call; said it was the White House, and the individual said, "Remember that conversation we had some time back? Are you still interested?" Thus, my recovery went pretty quickly.

Q: Well, had you taken any...a part in politics?

HACKETT: Not at all. Well, I shouldn't say that. I think I contributed \$250 to the Obama campaign.

Q: Well, talk about how money really counts in the business.

HACKETT: Yeah, I wasn't a bundler, or I didn't have the money to be a major donor. But no, I was very, I won't say apolitical, but unengaged in the political scene.

Q: Well, what is the... what do you think attracted the political appointee people to you?

HACKETT: Oh, I think it was pretty simple. The Obama administration was having some problems with the American Catholic bishops over the healthcare legislation. So, things had deteriorated there. There were charges being made that Obama had basic problems with the Catholic Church, which was quite farcical when you knew who some of the people around him were. But anyway, that's the scuttlebutt that was circulating. And when they looked for somebody who might be available to take the post as ambassador in the Vatican, they were looking for somebody who had some sway or knowledge of the Catholic Church hierarchy, knew what was going on, and could engage the Vatican on the host of worldwide global issues that the administration hoped they could find common ground. And there are not a lot of folks in that category. So, I had worked for the Catholic bishops successfully as their CEO of their single largest institution. I did that for 18 years, and knew something about what goes on over in Rome at the Vatican, and I was retired. So, it fit.

Q: Well...well then, what did you have to do in order to bring yourself up to speed for the hearings and clearances and all that?

HACKETT: Well, the post was open for an extended period of time and that was grit for the detractors of the Obama administration to say, "See, he's not filling the post, therefore, he must not care." But he couldn't fill the post before he was elected and sworn in on January 20th, so basically, I had to just go through the normal, albeit intense, FBI scrutiny. You go through the normal paperwork that you expose everything you invest in or own, and then I think it was around May or June, the official announcement came out from the White House that I was to be the nominee. And then you go through the ambassadorial school at FSI.

And then it came to getting a hearing. And the legislative folks, H Bureau, said, "Well, you're not going to get in this before the Congress breaks on August 2nd, so don't expect to get through, get a hearing." I wasn't prepared to put up with that. So, I asked, "Who is it that has to schedule my hearing?" And they gave me the names of the Senators. I called up the bishops in the Senators' states, and asked specifically if they would make a call on my behalf to get me a confirmation hearing. They did and there it was, sometime July 30th or so, I was scheduled for a confirmation hearing. And, this is the interesting part now. So, there we waited, in the hearing room. It was John Phillips, the ambassador-designate to Italy, and I forget what her first name was Wesner, the ambassador designated for Austria, and myself.

The senators were delayed in coming in, so the clock ticked on, and finally it got to around 6:30, and in comes Senator Markey and Senator Kaine. Senator Markey sat down and said, "How wonderful it is to be here" -- his first chairmanship of this foreign relations committee. He had just replaced Senator Kerry who had come over to the State Department, "And how wonderful it is to be here this evening with my college classmate, Ken Hackett." Indeed, we both graduated from Boston College, class of 1968. So, then he turns to Senator Kaine, and said, "Senator, would you like to open the questioning?"

And Senator Kaine said how pleased he was to be there as well, and particularly pleased to engage with the ambassador-designate for the Vatican. So, I didn't even look to either side of me where John Phillips was and Ambassador Wesner because it was getting a little bit embarrassing

that the hearing was kind of focused on me. And he said he was, Kaine said, he was pleased because, with this Jesuit Pope, he felt an affinity having spent six months working with the Jesuits in Honduras or Guatemala while he was up at Harvard Law School. He threw a couple of softball questions at me and then Senator Kerry threw a couple of softer ball questions at me, and I knew my side was going to fly through pretty easy. And, then they went at John Phillips for Italy, and they threw him some tough ones on, something about nuclear issues, and ambassador-designate to Austria didn't have any tough questions at all. So that hearing went fine, and sure enough, the Senate confirmed a slate before they adjourned for the summer holiday, and we were off and running.

Q: Well, what were you doing in this sort of a year while this thing had been up in the air but nothing was happening?

HACKETT: Well, when I finished with Catholic Relief Services, my wife and I took the obligatory trip to the Grand Canyon, first ever, and I had college commencement out in San Francisco. That was followed by another college commencement at Notre Dame, and we visited friends along the way. We were very relaxed, and I finally realized I was literally retired. So it went for about a year, before we heard from the White House again.

Q: How did you... you know, sort of feel that relations with the Vatican would be with Obama? Your judgment.

HACKETT: Well, I wasn't sure about that. I went around in the period after my confirmation hearing, in August, and the early part of September, meeting with many people, many of the Catholic bishops whom I knew, and asked their advice, and I found a pretty warm and welcoming response from them. I met with Cardinal Wuerl, Washington, and Cardinal McCarrick in Washington, Cardinal O'Malley up in Boston, Cardinal Dolan in New York, and a few other bishops. I asked what their issues were and those individuals knew that the Vatican has a broader, more global perspective, then merely the issue of healthcare in the United States. So, their advice was, "Look broadly." Then, I met with, Senator Mikulski because she was my Senator from Maryland. I recall meeting with Senator Murphy from Connecticut (Senate Foreign Relations Committee), and a few others who had an interest in things that go on at the Vatican. Virtually all of August I was updating myself on different perspectives on where the Catholic Church was on a range of issues, from relations with China to nuclear nonproliferation, to human trafficking, human rights, there was a myriad of things.

Interestingly, in the Department, there were three, four, maybe five different offices that wanted to schedule meetings with me. Religious freedom office, the Disabilities office, the Holocaust office, and Conflict and Regional Stabilization? What's interesting to me is the bureaus themselves, other than one person, Julieta Noyes, not many had apparently an interest in talking to me, and little knowledge about all things Vatican. That surprised me. But, nonetheless, they were looking at all things Vatican through the previous two popes who focused primarily on internal church issues and not global issues, whereas this new Argentinian pope had a broader perspective. So, there I was, getting briefs where I could.

Q: Well, what was the healthcare issue that...

HACKETT: The Affordable Health Care Bill?

Q: Yeah, I mean why were the Catholic...how did they feel?

HACKETT: Oh, it's complicated Stu, but basically there was a feeling among most of the Catholic bishops that it was constraining in terms of religious freedom relative to contraception mandate.

Q: Oh, yeah.

HACKETT: They did not want to be forced to provide contraceptive services and didn't even want to sign a waiver, but they didn't even want to do that. So, it got very messy, and it became the cause celebré for a group of conservative Republicans as well.

Q: Was it... did you feel that the issue was more trumped up, to use that term right now, but anyway, brought up... further an anti-Obama cause then it was...

HACKETT: Oh, yes.

Q: really a church issue?

HACKETT: It definitely was. It was elevated in a political way, which it shouldn't have been but, it is what it is.

Q: Well...

HACKETT: As you may recall in 2012, I think it was in the summer of 2012, President Obama talked about a red line in Syria relative to chemical weapons...

Q: Yes.

HACKETT: If they were used again, that would be crossing the red line. And then come August 2013, there were valid reports that indeed, Assad was using chemical weapons on his own people. So, this was getting quite dangerous now, and the Obama administration was saddled with, "What are we going to do now? Do we bomb them?" And there was an article in the *New York Times* written by Vladimir Putin saying, "Oh, restrain yourself on Syria." And then, Pope Francis comes out, this is even before I got there, and calls for a day of worldwide prayer and fasting for peace in Syria. This was directly focused on the Obama administration. And that day of fasting was to be September 7th. Well, I hadn't gotten there yet, but I knew at that time I was in for some interesting doings once I arrived in Rome and took up the position as ambassador.

Q: Well...so, what did you... did you see that you were going to be in the position of pushing for war or...?

HACKETT: Well, I saw that I was in a position of explaining what the administration's policies were, and in fact, the administration's policy in last August of 2013, were unclear. And, when the Pope brings 100,000 people to St. Peter's square on September 7th, that's noticed by the rest of the world. And his voice, and his positions were gaining considerable attention. In July, of that same year, he had brought three million people to the streets of Copacabana in Brazil for a prayer service. Three million people. Not a lot of heads of state can convene three million people.

Q: Oh, boy.

HACKETT: He was, as they say, his voice, his positions, were gaining considerable strength... even in the... he had only been in office for what a few months. He came in in March of 2013. His stature had just grown considerably over those few months because his actions reflected the positions and the attitudes that he wanted to convey. For instance, in early July, he flew down to Lampedusa, the island off Sicily, where most the refugees from North Africa, or those who had got to North Africa, were coming across and trying to get into Italy. The conditions were miserable. The Pope was trying to focus the world's attention on those refugees and their conditions, so he went himself down there. And then two weeks later, he flies to Brazil, and on the last day of his trip in Brazil he convenes three million people on Copacabana beach. So, it was obvious that this head of state has some gravitas. So, aware of that gravitas, when I see him calling the world to a day of prayer and fasting against...for peace in Syria, I said, "Oh, this is going to be a big item on my agenda."

Q: Now, you had lots of contacts obviously at the Vatican when you got there.

HACKETT: I did. More than a normal new ambassador coming in. I had been on a couple of committees at the Holy See over the years and I knew, personally, quite a number of people and coming out of forty years with Catholic Relief Services, 19 of which I served as CEO, they knew me, even if I didn't know them.

That made it a little bit easier because one of the elements of how you work when you're an ambassador to the Vatican was explained to me very early by the British ambassador. He said to me, when I asked, "Well, how do you go about relating to the different people here in the Vatican?" As a very experienced diplomat, he said to me, "Ken, it's not transactional. It's all relational. We don't have any oil to trade, missiles to sell, guns to sell, crops to sell. It's all about who you know and how you know them. So, spend your energy listening and develop the relationships and then you'll be successful." And that proved true.

Q: First place, I think it'd be interesting... you were, you kind of knew the territory and they had a new pope in, which of course is... all this means... a big bureaucracy which of course the Holy See is, has to... it must have been quite a bit of everybody running around trying to figure out who is this guy and what does it mean for my particular interests and all that.

HACKETT: Yes, well, first of all, the actual bureaucracy of the Holy See is not very large. Total staff in what is called the Curia, the offices of the Holy See, is under 4,000 people. I mean, I had 5,000 people working for me at Catholic Relief Services. So, that side of it is not that big.

However, it is the church which has over two billion adherents around the world. That's big. And their voice is amplified in many ways in different corners of the world. Secondly, while the systems and procedures in the Vatican are... how shall I describe them? They have been in place for a long time. They do things the same way in the Vatican as they did two or three hundred years ago in certain instances. So, to understand and glean the processes and how you go about getting information it takes a while because there's no handbook. Nobody kind of tells you, "Well this is the way you do it," and it's all about relationships; that's for certain.

One of the things I found when I got there very early, one of the assistant secretaries had served there as a political officer four or five years previously, and she mentioned to me that there was something called WikiLeaks, which you are well familiar with. And some of her cables about the Vatican were leaked. She didn't describe it in a deleterious way, but when I got to Rome, my DCM said, "We have some problems. There are many people inside, in the Vatican who won't talk to us because there were cables about them which came out in WikiLeaks and they were not favorable. And indeed, that's what I found initially, that there were certain people who would attend the meeting with you, but wouldn't say a thing, and that's a hard position to sustain, so I really had to work on that full-bore right off the bat.

Q: Yeah, well the WikiLeaks business was affecting our diplomacy all over the world.

HACKETT: Yes, exactly. Exactly.

Q: This is one of the things that it's not that people are discussing great state secrets, but they're talking frankly, and that talk is fine if it's not made public. And this so-called freedom of information that everybody can know everything that was being said worked to the disadvantage of so many of us in the diplomatic field.

HACKETT: That's right because you're trying to be candid in your assessment of individuals of some import to you and then when you find that candor show up publicly, boy, that really messes up the whole business. That was one of the initial issues that I had to deal with as other ambassadors did as well.

Q: How did you manage this? In the first place, develop a style of writing, of reporting, that would sort of cover your bases and still get the information out?

HACKETT: We downplayed unnecessary characterizations of individuals because we weren't sure where our cables were headed. If we didn't need to add a name to a discussion, but rather just talked about a Vatican interlocutor without naming the person, we wouldn't. Now, if we had to put a name to it, we did, and that would usually go on the high side. But we were intentionally cautious, at least until I was better known in the Vatican and trusted a little bit more.

Q: Did you find natural allies or maybe just the reverse in the American section of the Vatican?

HACKETT: As I said, it's a small bureaucracy. The secretary of state in the Vatican is, for all intents and purposes, the prime minister. I didn't know him before. He knew of me and he was brought in by Francis in November of 2013. So, he was a new player. His deputy, who was the

foreign minister, was brought in in January-February 2014 and when I met him for the first time, I said, “Oh, Archbishop, we know each other from Burundi. You replaced the Nuncio who was assassinated.” And he said to me in reply, “No, Ken, we knew each other before that, in the Philippines when I was at the Nuncio at the Nunciature in Manila and you were heading up Catholic Relief Services in Manila. So, here’s the foreign minister with whom our relations go back 20-25 years and that particular relationship proved to be very warm and useful. We had a bimonthly, small dinner with him, with five other ambassadors where it was all off the record. We could ask him anything and he would answer us as forthrightly and honestly as you could, and those were productive meetings.

And there were a few other people like that whom I got to know. I played golf with an American individual who is now in charge of all communication for the Vatican. I had all kinds of relationships that I worked on, on the golf course, on the tennis courts, at dinners, at receptions. One of the issues that I found proved most valuable is when I knew they were concerned about something, and the something could be climate change, they were going to put out a new document on climate change, on nuclear non-proliferation, or Syria, or Libya, or Christians and other minorities in the Middle East, I would endeavor to find the person in the Department who was expert on those issues and invite them to come to the Vatican and brief at the appropriate level. That proved to be, I would say, one of the more effective strategies that we adopted.

So, for instance, I invited Rose Gottemoeller... Do you know who she is?

Q: It did ring a bell.

HACKETT: She’s now number two at NATO, but before that she headed the Office of Arms Control and International Security – she was the nuke person. I invited her to come and brief at the Vatican and she came twice, three times actually, once with another person from some arms control agency that explained in great detail the dismantling of a nuclear warhead. I invited the U.S. ambassador from Kiev to come down and brief them on Ukraine. I invited General Allen, the general in charge of forces in Syria and Iraq, and those level of diplomat who offered a high level perspective to the Vatican. The Vatican knew about the issues, but maybe didn’t have the detailed perspective that these experts offered. So that was a trade that opened up a lot of doors for me.

Q: The Vatican of course has had traditionally a world-wide reach. Did you find that you were probing the people at the Holy See about items say in Estonia or Cambodia or something like that on request from the State Department or not?

HACKETT: Yes. There were times. Let’s start with Cuba. The Cuba deal was hatched while I was there and we wanted to know their perspective on various things relative to the Cuba deal. And sometimes they were forthcoming and sometimes they weren’t, just as we were taking the same posture. Sometimes we were forthcoming and sometimes we weren’t. The Department had an office that was attempting to close Guantanamo. We were informed by the Department that there were opportunities to move some of the prisoners to various Latin American and European countries. And in more than one case, it was felt that if the Vatican put a positive signal out to the Catholic bishops in those countries, the Catholic bishops then would make a positive

recommendation to their government leadership on these prisoners. That was not a hard sell. We found common cause with the Vatican in the desire to close Guantanamo and if the prisoners could be moved to Albania, to Chile, to some other country, that was seen as a good step. So that's an example of where the Department asked us to do something.

Certainly, we had to report regularly on the development of the relationship between the Vatican and China on religious freedom and on any other issue. The same way on Vietnam, what's the posture? In terms of European countries, I know that there was a great interest in a couple of offices at the Department but particularly at the embassy in Moscow of anything and everything that was happening relative to relations between the Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill in Moscow. Ambassador John Tefft himself came up to me at a meeting in Washington and said, "We devour your reports because we just don't get anything like them."

We went in a lot of different directions on any one day. One any one day we could be having meetings with various departments in the Vatican on peace efforts in Congo and Burundi, and next going to issues of human trafficking. And then in the early evening, going back to an issue on China or something. That was indeed the fun part of the job, and I can only imagine it must have been difficult for my predecessors because most of them, barring Ambassador Melady, had limited international exposure. And since at CRS I had people and offices in a hundred countries around the world, I kind of knew the landscape and could discuss it easily with many different people at the Vatican.

Q: How did you view developments with the Catholic Church in China?

HACKETT: That continues to be an interesting issue. In fact, there's an article in the *Washington Post* this morning where China has somebody in the religious bureau who has come out and said, "We are still interested in improving relations with the Vatican in spite of the fact that we haven't been able to make specific progress." There was an official effort launched many, many years ago by the Vatican to improve the relations relative to the appointment of bishops, relative to the freedoms of the Catholic Church, and specifically under Xi, this current president, there seemed to be specific progress.

What we kept telling the Department was, "Don't hold your breath," because what we were hearing is that these negotiations have been going on for 40 years, so they're not just going to be concluded in a month or so. But every time we saw a little opening such as somebody from a high-level scientific office in China attend a conference that was being held in the Vatican, those were seen as signals and our role was to watch all the signals and report them back.

Q: Did you see Francis' shaking up the Vatican... was it palpable?

HACKETT: Oh, it was palpable. In his December 2014 discussion with all of the members of the Curia, he has a yearly meeting, in that particular meeting he laid them out straight. He listed 12 diseases, I think he called them, of the bureaucracy, those people who were trying to climb the ladder to get up and those people who were loose-lipped, and I forget what the whole 12 were, but he really ate them alive. And the reaction to that was mixed. There were many who were at those meetings and said, "Yeah, we needed that" and others were upset by it.

He took on the financial situation in the Vatican head-on and that still is causing controversy. We signed an agreement on Tax avoidance, money laundering and trafficking of money with the Vatican; it was the first-ever agreement between the United States... It was not a treaty; it was something below a treaty between the United States government and the Holy See. It was part of the attempt that Pope Francis was making to clean up its finances, improve accountability and transparency as well as change the systems that were needed to affect that transparency and accountability. He also saw the need to change people.

And what was interesting, and it's not unique in the Vatican, it exists in other countries, is that your grandfather used to work in the Vatican Bank. Your father worked in the Vatican Bank, and now you're working in the Vatican Bank. There's many of those type of situations that historical precedence and presence of different families, I think is a real negative element in trying to clean things up. But Francis is trying to do it. He also wanted to streamline the operations among Vatican offices so he combined a number of offices. But then he told the people who were affecting the restructuring, "Well, don't lay anybody off." Well, that's almost an impossibility, you know, wait for the attrition of retirement or something like that, but nobody wants to retire in the Vatican. They don't make a lot of money but they have a lot of good perks so they hang on for a long time. So those are just some of the issues that he was up against in trying to improve things.

But what was good to see is that he himself was a humble man who lives simply. He lived in the guest house, not the apostolic palace. He drove around in a Fiat, not a Mercedes or a limo. He carried his own bag. He showed up one day downtown in Rome at an optician getting his new pair of eyeglasses and traffic had to stop in the street there was so many people wanting to get a view of him in the optician's place. He is a very simple, humble leader and that's why in December or late November 2013, *Time* magazine made him "Man of the Year" and subsequently many European publications did the same kind of thing.

Q: You were there for how long?

HACKETT: Almost four years.

Q: Did you see a change in the Obama administration towards the Catholic Church or was it just not on the agenda really?

HACKETT: Well, let me say this, Obama's chief of staff, Dennis McDonough, is a very active practicing Catholic. Lisa Monaco, who is in charge of counter-terrorism, very active practicing Catholic, and the list goes on in the Obama administration. It was populated by... Even President Obama at the beginning of his career after he came out of Harvard Law School, worked for an organization associated with Catholic Charities in Chicago. There wasn't any animosity in the Obama administration with the Catholic Church and most of what it believed. But it came down to the politics of the Health Care Act; that became a really hot topic and there were many in the administration who said that the administration blew it. There was another way to negotiate that Affordable Health Care bill and get the same results.

Q: Of course, that health care thing, it's still with us as far as being used as a ploy essentially on the Republican side.

HACKETT: You're right Stu.

Q: I hate to say it's not a real issue but to a certain extent, it's not. It represents all sorts of other things.

HACKETT: You're very true, and it's my belief that that's why when the issue was raised by various individuals in the Vatican with Secretary Kerry and others, it wasn't raised with great passion because the issue of state-sponsored health care in Europe, as you well know, is old hat. It's not an issue any longer. It was maybe 30 years ago, but not any longer. So, it was seen by many in the Vatican it was seen for what it has been characterized here, as kind of a... it's a ploy almost, but anyway there were many other issues where there was absolute unanimity and convergence on policy on migration, on human trafficking, on, as I said, closing the camp in Guantanamo, and various other specific country issues, there was unanimity and supportive position between the Vatican and the administration.

Q: The immigration issue in Italy was right on your doorstep, wasn't it?

HACKETT: It certainly was and the Vatican was pushing a rock up the hill. The whole immigration issue in Italy and in Europe is front and center and Francis did not hesitate to call people in countries, particularly in Europe, to do more, to be more accepting. And we saw what happened in Germany as Merkel opened the door, she lost a lot of political support in various quarters in Germany. And the same is true in Hungary and Austria and Italy more recently there has been a rise in two political parties that are basically anti-immigrant, so this is a hot issue, and the Vatican was paddling upstream on it in Italy.

In the United States, when the Pope was coming to the United States, we suggested to many in the Vatican that he go somewhere in the United States other than Washington where he could see migrants contributing to our country in one way or the other. We just couldn't schedule it. But indeed, when he visited Mexico the following year, he came to the border and addressed the issue from the Mexican side. He raised the issue when President Trump went to visit him; migration was top on the agenda.

Q: Well still, reading today's paper, but it's popped up again as a major, major subject. I was a consular officer in my foreign Services career and I could see the tremendous contribution that the people we were giving visas to were contributing and it's been so poorly depicted by the present administration. The problem is not there; the problem is... Well, I don't know.

HACKETT: There are some bad apples who happen to be immigrants but there are some bad apples who are born here, but that's the minority; that's not the majority.

Q: Tell me, I'm not Catholic, but it strikes me that two of the problems that are really affecting the church's effectiveness are one, it's unwillingness to have married priests because it seems to

be cutting down on the recruitment of good leaders and the other is, of course, the denying of women a leading role. How did this strike you?

HACKETT: Well, first of all, what you say may be true or may be your opinion, I didn't have to actually deal with those issues. They came up just by the fact that we were in the Vatican and I'm a Catholic. In terms of the day-to-day work, that was not on my brief. Those are internal church matters.

Now having said that, we did a number of different meetings to highlight the position of women doing good things in the church. I remember we had a significant conference on women in conflict and highlighted the work of various Catholic religious groups in Syria, Sudan, Lebanon, Central Africa Republic and the wonderful work that was being done by women in times of war and conflict.

We had multiple meetings that we sponsored on human trafficking. We made sure to identify and give space and voice to the noble work women in taking care of these trafficked people. For example, when there was a meeting that we participated in of governors and mayors from around the world to talk about trafficking and we arranged is for a certain number of women that we knew from some countries around the world to come to the Vatican and speak to these politicians about what the reality of trafficking was and it was an eye-opener for them.

We had Governor Jerry Brown, Mayor de Blasio, the mayor of Seattle, and about five others from the United States came over and they really appreciated contribution. We were taking the women's issue and women in their special role in the church from a different angle, not the women's issue on becoming priests. That we just didn't engage in in any direct way at all.

Q: Yeah.

HACKETT: The married priests, you know, I have my own opinions about it, in fact, there are married priests now, particularly, a few years ago when there was a rapprochement between a portion of the Anglican church and the Catholic church. A number of Anglican priests joined the Catholic Church, and they joined with their wife and their family. So, there are elements within the Catholic church and why...

Q: I think also, going back in history with _____ church in Poland.

HACKETT: Well, yes, you're right.

Q: Married priests there too.

HACKETT: It just seems to me on a personal basis that could solve a lot of problems in various parts of the world. But, the problem of getting priests, getting men to become priests in the United States and in Western Europe is indeed a problem. It is not a problem in Africa or in Latin America or in India where the number of new priests is just overwhelming.

Q: What about, I mean, I'm talking to you as an observer at the Vatican as opposed to being a... you know, pushing American interests, but what were you seeing of the Catholic reaction to, essentially the rise of Protestantism, particularly in Latin America?

HACKETT: I have to think for a minute because I know the issue quite well, but I don't recall any instance where that became something that my embassy engaged.

Q: Well, I mean, that's the thing of it, I mean the Catholic issue has its issues and we have our issues.

HACKETT: Yeah.

Q: Well, what about, how about visitors, you must have been deluged with visitors wanting their time with the pope and all that...

HACKETT: We had to work systems and procedures in the embassy to deal with the deluge of visitors. There were those we wanted, and invited, there was those who wanted to come, and you know, personages who felt that they deserved the opportunity to meet with the Pope, and it just never stopped. I got calls from people like Al Gore, Steven Spielberg, and Harvey Weinstein, and what's his name? Tim Cook of Apple. So, business leaders, movie people, politicians who felt their stature warranted a meeting with the Pope. But there were easy visitors as well. I had a visit from two chairmen of the Joint Chiefs on different occasions. One actually went to my high school about fifteen years after me, Joe Dunford, who is the current Chairman, and his predecessors came at one point, and those were productive opportunities to dialogue with various people in the Vatican. We had, Senator Markey, to put his two cents into the Vatican about climate change. Let's see, in terms of cabinet ministers, Jay Johnson came, John Brennan came, Gina McCarthy of EPA, and then lots of politicians. Nancy Pelosi came every year, leading various delegations from Congress.

And then on the other side of the aisle in late August every year, there was a meeting of Catholic parliamentarians in Rome. From the States, maybe a half dozen Catholic legislators came over and all of them wanted special treatment. It never stopped. But some of it was very productive, other it was just a burden. On the other hand, even the ones that were a little bit burdensome, like the Catholic legislators, offered us an opportunity to get our positions across to Congress in a different venue. When we could introduce them to somebody in the Vatican who was saying the same thing as State Department was saying up on Capitol Hill, it helped make a case.

Q: In a way, in a certain sense, you were kind of a traffic cop.

HACKETT: (Laughter) That's what I felt like! More like a travel agency!

Q: (Laughter) Did you?

HACKETT: No, we worked out a procedure with the couple of different offices in the Vatican. They wanted complete discretion in deciding who got to meet with the pope or people under the pope. But, the deal we worked out with them, we would submit to them every request and then

offline, we would say to them, “Yeah, that’s a really important one” or “No, don’t bother yourself with that particular individual”. But you had to do it offline.

Q: You mentioned Harvey Weinstein, I can’t help...he’s been in the headlines recently about sexual harassment....

HACKETT: We did not get him the visit he wanted.

Q: They wanted to keep him away from the nuns too.

HACKETT: (Laughter)

Q: God! But anyway...

HACKETT: And I didn’t even know who he was!

Q: Oh, well I...

HACKETT: I did not know who he was but it just seemed to me that, why should the pope, or anybody in senior leadership in the Vatican, meet with a guy like this? And then later it comes out, what six months ago, what a... lecher he was.

Q: Oh, God. Well, one thing I can’t think of any job in the government where you would see more of a cross section of American celebrities than right there.

HACKETT: It’s true, it’s true! Then I had of course, every Catholic university president shows up with his or her board of directors, and they expect to have an event at the ambassador’s residence... And some it was most enjoyable, and other parts, it was onerous, you know. And, the other thing of course, and this is true in every country, everybody wanted the American ambassador at their national day reception. So that kept my wife and I busy.

Q: Oh, God.

HACKETT: We could do two or three a night sometimes, and that was a bit difficult, and were you not to show, it was noted. So, you better have a good excuse. So, the French ambassador taught me about “Touch-and-go”. He said, “You know, when you’re learning to fly a plane. You touch down, and then you lift off again immediately, and you do that over and over again, that’s what you’ve got to do at these cocktail parties. You’ve got to do your business, get your information needs out there, head for the person who is throwing the party, and then head for the ambassador you want to talk to, and then go.”

Q: Well, how were your relations with our embassy in Rome?

HACKETT: Very good. John Phillips, as I mentioned earlier, is a wonderful person. We had two embassies and a Mission there. We had the ambassador to the Food and Agricultural

Organization, and then Italy, and ourselves, and halfway through my tenure there, we located our chancery office in the same compound, or campus, as the other two embassies.

There was some concern by some of my predecessor ambassadors, it was voiced by Ambassador Flynn, that when he was there, a concern arose about Embassy Italy kind of taking over the role of Embassy Vatican. And, so there was a palpable fear that such a situation might happen, using grounds such as budget constraints, “Why should we have a special embassy to the Vatican, which is only the size of a college campus.”

Now the Holy See would not accept that situation. They don’t accept any dual embassy representation. So, if you are the Embassy of Israel to Italy, there is a separate ambassador for Israel to the Holy See, and that’s the case in every country. But, some of my predecessors felt, “Oh, it’s a threat” and “Don’t go into the same compound.” And, there was a big hoopla about moving the office because one of my predecessors, Jim Nicholson, made a big case that Obama was moving the embassy and downgrading it by making a smaller building.

In fact, during the campaign, Jeb Bush came out with a criticism that Obama was downgrading the embassy because he was anti-Catholic. Well, the chancery building was anything but a downgrade. It was, I would say, one of the most beautiful chanceries around. It was set in a building built by the Italian National Insurance Company in the 1920...26, when the Italian economy was booming. Inside of this building was all marble and mahogany, oh, it’s just gorgeous. We restored it to the tune of... I think we put around ten million into it. It’s just a beautiful structure, and very functional.

Getting back to the relationship between the embassies. We had shared back office services so there was only one finance department between the three missions. This was the case with other agencies. We shared services and briefings as necessary, we didn’t duplicate them. I had my political section, I had my public affairs section, my DCM, and then a number of locally employed staff. So, we were seventeen in all. And that was nice, whereas Embassy Italy was about three hundred.

Q: Yeah, well, the embassy... I can recall... I’m ninety years old now, when their relations with the Vatican, I mean, it was considered sort of a terrible thing...

HACKETT: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Q: I mean, this is...

HACKETT: There were constraints. Legislative constraints against relations.

Q: Oh, yeah.

HACKETT: It was President Reagan who just rolled over them and decided that John Paul II was an important player on the world scene against communism, and so, “we’re going to have relations”, and in 1984, he opened it up.

Q: Now, when you think about it...

HACKETT: The Kennedy...during the campaign, there was criticism that Kennedy would become a dupe of the Vatican...

Q: Oh yes (laughter).

HACKETT: Still, we got about four minutes.

Q: Well, I think this probably pretty well ends this up. Do you have any, anything you'd like to say about your impressions about our relations with the Holy See advantages?

HACKETT: Well, I believe when I left the Post relations were quite good. I mean, we disagreed on a number of things, particularly the nuclear issue, but they appreciated our positions on many things and supported it where they could. I don't know whether the same can be said of the Trump Administration. And, so hopefully, well, one good thing about my successor is that her husband has access in the White House. And that will be seen by the Vatican as important, but...

Q: But this is sort of a peculiar appointment, I mean the third...

HACKETT: A very peculiar appointment (laughter). Yeah.

Q: Oh, well. Well, Ken, I really appreciate this.

HACKETT: Thank you, Stu.

Q: And when you get the transcript, it may be a little while, but when you get the transcript, please fill in...and early on in your career and your Vatican career, more is better than less in this business.

HACKETT: Okay. And if you, I should've let you know about this in advance, but on Sunday night, at nine o'clock, on MSNBC, there was a special on the pope. And I figured quite prominently in it.

Q: Oh, well, maybe I can get a hold of it.

HACKETT: I think you can. MSNBC, I forget the name of...but it something about Pope Francis.

Q: Okay, well, very good.

HACKETT: All right, Stu, all the best!

Q: All right, thank you!

End of interview

