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Integration meant an Atlanta black Catholic could 'come home'

by Gretchen Keiser by The Georgia Bulletin

Atlanta — Charles Reginald Moore was the first African-American to graduate from St. Joseph's High School in Atlanta. Entering in the fall of 1962, when the first black students desegregated Catholic schools in the Atlanta archdiocese, Moore came in as a junior.

In a telephone interview with *The Georgia Bulletin*, Moore, who is now retired from the insurance field and living in Florida, said he was the only black person in the class of 1964. Growing up in Atlanta's West End, his family sent him to live in Detroit with an uncle when it was time for high school, he said, because there was no Catholic high school in Atlanta that accepted black students. Then his mother let him know that the archdiocese intended to integrate St. Joseph's High School.

"I told her I would rather come home and go to school," Moore said.

In September 1962, a total of 17 black students integrated various Catholic elementary and high schools across the archdiocese. At St. Joseph's High School, Moore said he and the other black students, who were younger, were accompanied to school at first by an armed detective.

"We rode in his car initially," Moore said, and then, as the integration took place without incident, "I would just catch a bus."

Moore played basketball his junior and senior years at St. Joseph's and said his and other black players' involvement in sports drew racial demonstrations at times. The Catholic team didn't play the Atlanta public high schools, he said, but would play small-town teams.

"There would be some people demonstrating because I was playing at the games. I might have a threat not

to come to the basketball game," he said, but "nothing really happened to me."

"There might be some people milling around, yelling, but no fights or anything like that," he said.

He had played football at the Catholic high school in Detroit, as a linebacker and fullback, but Moore said he was not permitted to play football in Atlanta.

"At St. Joseph's, they didn't want me to play. They thought someone might intentionally hurt me," he said.

His memory is that he "was treated OK" at the high school. "I had some school friends. I never really went to their houses. We might study together."

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"I was glad to be at a Catholic school. Also mostly I wanted a good education. I thought St. Joseph was a good school. I got a good education," he said.

He went on to graduate from Michigan State University.

Looking back on his experience of 50 years ago, Moore said, "I thought those times were going to change things, which they have. It was like you were part of a revolution -- that feeling."

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