

TM: By way of introducing our guest today I would just like to ask how many of you have used the Ambler Student Fitness Recreation Center? Several of you? Any of you know the story behind the name of that place?

Student: I bet you do.

[laughter]

TM: No, I have no idea. No, I think that's a great story actually. Students voted that in, and students voted to tax themselves to pay for that thing, and you're paying for some of it in your student fees, but it was student choice. Most buildings at KU are built as a result of donations from wealthy benefactors, who often get their names on the building. So that's why we have Anschutz Library and Lied Center and things like that, but this is a case of a student generated project and so logically the administration said that students can name it. So they got to pick out someone they admired and name it for that person. And that person was David Ambler who was vice chancellor dealing with student affairs for many years at KU and a great friend to a lot of students, so they honored him that way. So, I'm glad to say, in that rambling and roundabout way, that our guest today is David Ambler.

TM: [UNCLEAR] place to thank him.

DA: Thank you. And I'm still alive. [laughter] And I'm not wealthy either. [laughter]

TM: Anyway, Dave is a member of Plymouth Congregational Church in downtown Lawrence, the oldest church in Kansas, and has been active in historic activities here in Douglas County and in the history of Plymouth Church. So I've asked him to come in and talk about Congregational history in Kansas, the history of the church here in Lawrence, and also his own story because he didn't start out a Congregationalist. I wonder maybe you could start out and just say a little bit about your own story and...

DA: Sure.

TM: ...where you came from.

DA: But first could we get them to tell me who they are?

TM: Oh sure, of course.

DA: ...and what building's named after them.

[laughter]

Student: Douglas County Jail. I'm Jeff and I take a lot of classes here for fun. I like to travel and move around and talk to people and do what he's doing but I ... what else? I was a paramedic for a while and a nurse, and I'm trying to get into med school. I'm older than ... I'm about as old as Tim.

DA: Well, that's pretty old.

Student: I started college and he just taught so yeah I'm just ... I'm taking what I want.  
[UNCLEAR] Where I want. Life's good.

Student: I'm Sarah. I'm a history major. Most of my research for this class I'm doing is supposed to be something on western Kansas.

DA: And you're from where?

Student: I'm from Olathe.

Student: Hi. I'm Amanda.

DA: Hi, Amanda.

Student: My major is social welfare. Most of my research is in Kansas City. I've done stuff with the International House of Prayer, the Church of Sofia, and then stuff with Pope Michael I'm going to do.

Student: Jeffrey Caton. My majors are economics and religious studies and most of my research has been in central Kansas and south central Kansas.

Student: My name is Clint **Shriner**. I'm a religious studies major here at KU. That's essentially it.

[laughter]

DA: You're from where, Clint?

Student: I'm from Wichita.

DA: Wichita?

Student: Yeah.

Student: My name is Sarah Vestal. I'm from Kansas City. I'm a senior in religious studies and political science.

Student: My name is Rachel Gadd-Nelson and I'm a social work major, and I'm also from Kansas City, Kansas.

Student: Tim Adams. Religious studies major and I'm from the Kansas City area also.

Student: Ben Nelson. I'm a religious studies major. I'm from Topeka.

Student: Stefanie Meador, from Topeka too, and I am a geography grad student.

DA: Thank you. I was intrigued when Tim told me about this project and then when I read the news release from the University of Kansas I became more intrigued and more flattered that he invited me although he told me that our current pastor Peter Luckey had recommended me and that kind of frightened me because there are other people in Plymouth who are better historians than I am and probably have longer tenure than I do.

Student: Having a having a minister named Mr. Luckey is kind of scary.

DA: It served him well I think. Yeah. My own story? I'm a Hoosier by birth. I am also a little bit of a genealogist in my retirement. I'm trying to live up to a commitment or an assignment my grandfather gave me when I was a college student and that was to take over what he had been doing and researching our family, and I'm sorry to say I haven't solved all the mysteries that he hadn't solved, but I have probably gained some, but I mention that simply to say that before we were Hoosiers my family started in the United States in the early 1700s, typical migration from Virginia to Ohio to Indiana, which is why I'm a Hoosier. From a blue collar family in northwest Indiana up near Chicago and grew up in the Disciples of Christ Church commonly called Christian Church. My parents had been members of it for a long time. I went to Indiana University, and I went there primarily because open admissions, as it was called, was popular in almost all 50 states which meant if you graduated from an accredited high school you would be admitted to one of the state universities. The other reason I went to Indiana was low tuition, and that's been a theme of my career. I might tell you that Kansas was the last state in the Union to turn away from open admission and that happened during my time with the university, and I was pretty much the lone person opposing it because I strongly believe in public universities, and I believe they have a mission of providing access. Private schools can be as selective as they want and as expensive as they want, but I think there's a public good served when we make higher education possible to as wide a spectrum of our society as we can. But that comes out of that background and I wouldn't have enjoyed the great career I had, great in terms of satisfying career, or lived the quality of life that I was able to have had Indiana not had that open admission policy and low, low cost higher education because my parents couldn't have afforded it, and I wasn't brilliant enough to get a scholarship to a private school. But anyway, I did all three of my degrees at Indiana which was an accident, not anything planned, because I'm probably the best example of higher education working its magic on an individual because I had a lot to learn and didn't come from a family obviously that had had a lot of educational background. I went there wanting to be an industrialist or a business person because that would give me hopefully an income that would be better than my father was able to make and a better life than he struggled to have for his family. But the longer I was in higher education as an undergraduate the more I knew that there was something more important for me to do than just make a lot of money and because I was active on the campus I became familiar with people and the student affairs work, and they started working on me instead of going into business to go into to higher education which ultimately I made that decision and what a great decision it was because I've just simply, as I said, had a great career in terms of being involved in a profession where you really feel you're making a contribution and in student affairs work; at a university student affairs people are those who are responsible for the services outside of the formal curriculum like admissions

records, financial aid placement, housing, health services, student unions, student recreation centers those kind of activities, and our relationship is very different from those of a faculty member, and I think we get to really work with students as they develop. But in any event, I worked on the student affairs staff at Indiana University for five years and when I completed my doctorate decided I needed to make a change. I couldn't spend my whole life at Indiana although there were a lot of us who felt that Indiana was the cat's meow like a lot of Jayhawks feel KU is the cat's meow. I left Indiana in 1966. I was selected to be an Assistant Dean of Men at a university at that time that was very unknown across the country but yet it was one of the largest ones in the country, Kent State University in Ohio. And if you know anything about recent history but I always have to tell people because Americans are pretty myopic about history, Kent was center of the antiwar movement during the Vietnam War or became one of the centers of the protest and in spring of 1970 in an antiwar protest, in which the National Guard had been called on to our campus, four students were killed and nine were injured. Three months after that incident I became vice president for student affairs and stayed at Kent for the next seven years to help in the rebuilding of that university that was pretty well shattered, as you can imagine, by that incident. And student affairs people were pretty instrumental in trying to rebuild the confidence in the university among its students, its alumni, parents, whomever. But in 1977 I finally felt that it was at a point where I could begin to think about making a change in my career. A friend of mine, who was on the student affairs staff here at KU, called me and said she had put my name in for the Vice Chancellors position here and so in the summer of 1977 I came here as vice chancellor and I remained in that position until I retired seven years ago, 2002. That's more history than you probably need. From a religious standpoint I like a lot of things when you're a college student that you reject of your parents. I used to love to tell the story of freshman orientation here, that I went home when I was freshman at Thanksgiving time and told my parents that I was rejecting their politics and also their religion just to, I suspect, to see what kind of shock effect I'd get. Well, I remember my mother responded by saying, "Does that mean you've change your financial philosophy and your banker as well?"

[laughter]

DA: Her way of kind of putting me in my place. But anyway, I was having difficulty with the conservative nature of the church I had grown up in and kind of just wandered away from organized religion altogether, but I married a woman who was from West Virginia whose family were very strong in the Congregational Church and when we moved here we looked at the congregational church and I got intrigued by Plymouth's role in the founding of this state and the abolitionist movement. Plymouth, as I found out, had been part of the Underground Railroad and many of the abolitionists who came here from mostly Massachusetts were Congregationalists and indeed they formed Plymouth in 1854. We're still not sure, Tim, if we were the first church in Kansas. I think we were, but the safest thing we could say is we are certainly the first Congregational Church in the Kansas-Nebraska Territory. In any event, Plymouth somehow survived those pretty rough days in the beginning of Kansas and Quantrill's Raid took many of our members, many of the male members, and for reasons that still remain a little bit of a mystery the raid was in 1863. In 1870, just seven years later, they built the current sanctuary of Plymouth Church and if you've seen that beautiful structure it's a very large church. The sanctuary probably holds 900 people and a real question was what kind of active faith was it to build a church that big for that many people when Lawrence was still struggling to see if it

would survive after it had been pretty much burned to the ground. We did survive and that church has flourished. One interesting story to me was, being interested in genealogy, I was sure I was one of the first Amblers to have crossed the Mississippi, but Butch Henderson, who was the pastor of Plymouth when I came here, showed me a pew chart of this current sanctuary from about 1880s and lo and behold right where my wife and I usually sit every Sunday was an Ambler assigned to a pew. Something really spooky about that. But evidently I do know that some of my family preceded me in the movement west and some came here to Kansas to liberate their slaves, or emancipate their slaves in this new territory. I said my wife was the original Congregationalist so I was kind of a tag-along when we joined Plymouth and I had to do a lot of study about Congregationalism I guess just to make myself comfortable there. But I slowly told my wife and some time some occasions I have probably become a better Congregationalist than she is because the Congregational Church merged in 1957 with the Evangelical and Reformed Church which was a merger of the Evangelical Church and the Reformed Church in America both of them having German and some Swiss background. Congregationalists had earlier merged with a Christian church group not to be confused with the current Disciples of Christ but they were called the Congregational Christians when they merged and then the Evangelical and Reformed merged to be the E&R Church and in 1957 the two joined to form what is now called the United Church of Christ. It was a very contentious union. A lot of in spite of the Congregationalists' liberal history and its very rich history going back to the Puritans and the Pilgrims many of its members were more conservative I think than the church's theology or the church's practice and that has continued to be a problem plaguing the United Church of Christ because we're part of what is called the free church movement which is, the local congregation is autonomous. Rather there is no hierarchy that can dictate to the local congregation so each local congregation had to decide if it would join the United Church of Christ. Some Congregational churches did, some did not. There are several for instance in Kansas, including Plymouth Congregational Church in Wichita is an independent Congregational church. It did not join the UCC. Some churches go as we do by the original name Plymouth Congregational. Other churches are you'll go in a community you'd find them called the United Church of Christ. They're probably newer congregations or one that decided to change its name to the new denominational name. I suspect we're probably one of the most liberal Congregational or Protestant churches in America. We have been I think because of that E&R background which the Evangelical and Reformed church had a lot of peace movement related to it and that has become a strong theme in the in the United Church of Christ. We were one of the first churches, for instance, to ordain gay and lesbian people as pastors. In the 1980s we adopted a program called Open and Affirming which simply says our congregation is open to anyone regardless of where you are in your spiritual journey and regardless of race, creed, da da da and sexual orientation. I chaired the committee at Plymouth when we adopted that policy because each individual congregation has to adopt that policy separately, and I was particularly pleased that Reverend Phelps came and picketed our church the Sunday we took that vote.

[laughter]

Student: What was that called again?

DA: Open and Affirming. Other churches have similar programs going under different names but it simply says, you know, you're welcome here. We have been a very strong antiwar church

for many years, opposition to the Vietnam War, very strong against the war in Iraq and I don't know that we've taken any stance on the current conflict but it is that kind of liberal church in terms of social and economic justice. The other part that has always been very attractive to me is not only is it a free church in terms of its governance being at the local congregation but its theology is pretty simple and is not dogmatic. We call ourselves a covenant church. We have a covenant, but there is no prescription of a theology that you have to subscribe to in order to belong to the United Church of Christ. And in fact we say, you know, your relationship to God is something you have to develop. That is not something imposed upon you by the church or by the local congregation and quite frankly I don't think I could belong to a church if I had that kind of imposition on my own ability to think. We've had a program going for the last decade called God is Still Speaking, and it's simply to say that we reject the notion that the Bible is complete and in concrete. That God is still being revealed in our environment and in our world. We've had some people respond to that by saying, "No. God has spoken. Period." We use a phrase from Gracie Allen who once said, "Never place a period where God meant a comma." And so the comma has become kind of an icon for the United Church of Christ, but I think it's symbolic of the kind of open theology and individual responsibility that the UCC places on its members. It's for you to develop that relationship and decide what you think about this, that or the other aspect. I'm going to stop there because that's probably more than you wanted, but that's my story and ...

Student: [UNCLEAR]

DA: Pardon?

Student: And you're sticking with it?

DA: Yeah. Yeah. So far.

Student: Do you ask these people that take Bibles in concrete and this is it and [UNCLEAR] then why we have more just pick Baptists and French have cheese varieties let alone all the stuff you rattled off and all the derivatives and it's just dizzying. I mean you couldn't come up with compounds from the table of elements more in numbers and the religions we have made up based on this one book that's that's it. There you go. I just I guess I just don't understand sometimes, you know?

DA: Yeah. You know, the church I grew up in, the Disciples, when they were founded, they are an American creation, they had the notion that that they were going to be a nondenominational church and that they were going to leave the Movement for quote Christian Unity. Certainly among all the Protestant churches but I suspect they thought of the entire Christian world. The United Church of Christ has a theme that they may all be one but I have come to believe that trying to unite all of the Christian churches would be a useless exercise and a waste of a lot of energy simply because people are going to think differently. And I come from a perspective that the more people think differently the more we know they're thinking. So, it's just not something that I spend a lot of time worrying about now because I think even if we suddenly voted to have just one Christian Church the very next day we'd be splitting apart and so I'm more interested in interfaith cooperation and interfaith mission work and let's forget our the fact that some of us

baptize by sprinkling and some of us do immersion, you know? That's not important. I grew up in a church that did immersion so I was immersed when I was baptized. My daughters were sprinkled. The big thing that is important to me was I was not going to baptize them for them. My daughters had to decide at some point that that was something they wanted to do because in the big scheme of things that's not important. I guess the only thing that I worry about is Desmond Tutu once said that religion is like a knife. It can kill or it can slice bread, and I worry about people doing what I consider to be dastardly things in the name of religion or in the name of the Christian religion, and Fred Phelps would be one who I, you know, would be really worried about. But I don't know I think the more important thing is for people to be able to have their own individual spiritual religious experience and to find a community, a church that satisfies that. For some people having you know a theological structure like the Roman Catholic Church does is very comfortable and very easy quite frankly and if that satisfies them fine.

TM: What is ritual life like at Plymouth? What's worship like?

DA: There're only two sacraments in the United Church of Christ and that's baptism and...

TM: And communion I would guess.

DA: Communion but I was trying to think of marriage.

TM: Oh.

DA: Is one. But anyway whatever they are, they're very few. Interesting thing about the United Church of Christ is that you could go to Plymouth and next Sunday go to another United Church of Christ and think, "Is this the same denomination?" Let me illustrate the difference. Barack Obama belonged to Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago which is predominantly African American church. It's our largest congregation. I haven't been there but I know people who have and I know that their worship service very, very different from what you'd find at Plymouth. We have two worship services, what people would call a traditional one and then a very contemporary service. It would at Plymouth follow a typical Protestant worship service not different from what you'd find First Methodist or First Presbyterian. We do communion just once a month. There's a lot of emphasis on music at Plymouth, always has been primarily because of the proximity of the university, but the traditional one, which is the one I attend, is a very traditional kind of worship service.

Student: So you differ a lot from the Unitarian Universalist in that aspect of ritual where your liberal whatever, you know, your social outlook's very much the same but you go through...

DA: Well that's interesting that you choose the Unitarians because some people say UCC stands for Unitarians Considering Christ.

[laughter]

DA: You know, I haven't attended enough Unitarian services to really respond to that. I have been to the Unitarian Church here and I would compare that more to our fellowship hour than

our worship service because, you know, they do a lot of cultural and academic kind of programming that becomes their worship service and it's ...

Student: Well, yeah, that's kind of my point. I don't think anybody knows what happened or with Jesus what's going to happen and where we're going but if you want to get together and help people why don't we just get together and help people? And I think the Unitarians are doing that a little certainly more and I have been and there really isn't any program because there's too many people that you could worship.

DA: I have a daughter in Atlanta who attends frequently attends the Unitarian church there and an she says the church looks like, acts like, behaves like a UCC that she grew up in. That it's a much more traditional church program than what the Unitarians here in Lawrence ever had.

Student: [unknown] Oh, I'm sorry.

DA: Go ahead.

Student: Oh, I was just going to ask what kind of programming does your church have? Does Plymouth have. Like out I mean within the church and maybe and out in the community.

DA: Yeah, extremely comprehensive and diverse programming. One of the things that was in that church when I came, and I've been a member 30 years, was the Head Start program for Lawrence and Plymouth started that and even when we did a recent remodeling in the last 10 years we rebuilt one whole wing. We had to rebuild that so that it would accommodate the Head Start program because that's we feel that's a very strong part of our mission program. More recently we've got a program where Haskell, some people from Haskell, use our chapel for their service. We now have a Hispanic group that holds their service in our church. We have a member of our congregation who has started a English as a Second Language program and is teaching that weekly. We participate in LINK. We've had a lot of different people do different kind of missionary programs either on an individual basis or as a group doing a, you know, a particular project. We have had a strong youth program and we kind of do our own alternative spring break programs with our high school kids taking them somewhere every spring for a work project. We have a lot of people who are active in the UCC nationally and get involved in a lot of the mission programs that way. So, we've got a lot of things social programs, cultural, programs, you know, pretty much satisfy everybody's need.

TM: Well partly I suppose that would be as function of size. I would guess Plymouth might be the largest church in Lawrence as well as the oldest. Close to it anyway.

DA: I don't know if we're the largest. We are the largest UCC church in Kansas, and I think we're in the top 25 nationally. UCC is about 1.2 million members nationally. Strong, strong congregations on the east and in the New England area, and then to my amazement very strong in Hawaii, but that was a congregational missionary program and the same thing in southwest United States. There's an awful lot of Congregational UCC churches in New Mexico in particularly in Arizona and that again were missionary programs with Native Americans in those areas. Can't think...

Student: And what were you--Kevin Willmott is a film guy here. You know the film he just made?

DA: Mmhmm.

Student: OK. So I'm going to ask you what you are doing there and you know was it do you think you weren't there I know that but you know the congregation do think that they were feeling competing wanting to compete with the Catholic or other religions and to be in on that or...

DA: I don't know. I suspect that...

Student: Because I think you we're going to say something when you said we were going to something like teach them or train them or you know. Maybe not that I don't mean it in a harsh way but make life easier for them perhaps.

DA: I'm sure there's mission programs that were motivated by competition with other Christian groups. I suspect that in our past there's where we could be accused of that or proselytizing. My sense was, when I visited Hawaii, we might have been very much a part of the well I don't know what you want to call it, the raping of that island in terms of the native Hawaiian people.

Student: Yeah, there you were.

DA: Replacing their Queen and making them a protectorate of the United States. I suspect that we were complicit in some of that.

Student: That was our first major one.

DA: Yeah. There, you know, as I say church has history of doing a lot of good. It has a history of some sorry, sorry times. I certainly hope that's something of our past in the UCC.

TM: Let me ask a question about money. What what's the budget like? How is it raised? How's it spent?

DA: Yeah. Well we're just in our annual campaign now so I know that the annual budget is probably going to be about \$765,000 this next year if we make it. Like everybody, the economy's creating a lot of stress. I wouldn't want you to quote me on these, but I would guess that 85 or 90% of that budget is from individual member pledges. We have an endowment that's relatively small, maybe a million, a million and a half. A lot of that is designated for like things like building upkeep, so forth, but it does feed into the into the budget but it's mostly member contributions.

TM: I would think building upkeep would be an issue actually. That building's what, over a century old?

DA: Yeah. You know 1870s so it's what, 139 years old?

Student: If it's a national registry, historical is it?

DA: Yeah. We are now.

Student: Because if it is don't they do a certain amount from the state or the federal government?

TM: Well, you can apply for grants but that...

DA: Yeah. You can apply for grants and the fact that you are on historical registry, well, I mean there's some places where that's a prerequisite, but it doesn't necessarily guarantee that you're going to get a grant.

Student: Being a being a major part of the Underground Railroad sure wouldn't hurt.

DA: Yeah. For a while we were ineligible for the National Historic Registry because of the way the additions had been added onto that church. If you do something that alters the exterior structure too much, and I can't tell you how much is too much, but whenever it is we did and so it wasn't until we did this recent remodeling that we did it so that we qualified for that. We have, in the last 15 years, had three campaigns to remodel, rebuild and protect that building. And we're still trying to raise money to protect it. A building that old, you know, has got a leaky roof or something and I must tell you it's always a fight at our annual meeting about how much money we spend on ourselves versus how much is in our budget for mission. And so the people that say, you know, I'm not going to give a dollar until we're giving as much for our mission budget as we give for the maintenance of our building or whatever. I can't think but...

Student: Well now that the Salvation Army is completely closed and the drop-in center is more than half closed you don't have to go so far to do mission work. I don't know where you were going before but I can tell you now I've seen a lot of people really in hell. I mean serious.

DA: Yeah. We do work with, you know, we're just adjacent to the shelter, the community shelter, and kind of it's wedged in there between the Christian Church, the Episcopalians, and the Methodists and us.

Student: And they're closing it down too.

DA: Well, they're hoping to move it. I don't know if it's still got a long road to go.

Student: But how do you shut down a Salvation Army? I mean, you know, in a town like this...

TM: Yeah, but let's look at Plymouth. That's what we're on here.

DA: Yeah. That's an issue that we frequently deal with because at times there have been talk about, you know, starting a starting a second program like the Methodists have way out west or

should we be buying some land for when the, heavens help us, the day comes that our current building can't be repaired or something and we need to move to the suburbs or to the west part of Lawrence and inevitably there's strong, strong commitment in the members of Plymouth. We want to stay downtown, that we feel we serve a mission down there, and we have a pastor's emergency fund which is always generously supported by members of the congregation and that's money that the pastor has for the people who walk over from the shelter and are absolutely desperate. We're involved in what's called the Family Promise Program that is a cooperation program of about 11 churches in Lawrence that takes homeless families and jobless families and puts them through a program to help them get ready to re-enter the market and it tries to find them permanent housing. And we literally--each church takes this family for a week, and we literally house them in our building. We had little fight with the city about codes and having people sleep all night in our building, but we got by that. So they stay at Plymouth for a week and members bring food in. Members come down and then just kind of be social friends with them, and a member of our church is the primary staff member of that program so we have a strong commitment to staying downtown and part of that commitment is, you know, we have a lot of people in need who congregate downtown, and I think that will be one of the problems if the shelter does move out. It will be away from a lot of the churches that have helped support that shelter or support LINK, which is right across the street from it, in providing food for those people.

TM: What about youth activities and youth programs? What would you do for young people all the way from birth to college say?

DA: Oh, we do controversial things and neat things and sometimes they're neat and controversial. I think it's really hard with high school youth because of the diversions and all the different activities that they get involved but we've been pretty lucky in maintaining a pretty viable high school educational program and as I mentioned earlier we try to get them involved in some kind of work trip away from Lawrence. They've gone to New Orleans to help in the rebuilding after Katrina. They've been to places down in New Mexico-Arizona area with some of the Native American reservations. We had a pretty controversial sex education program.

Student: You telling the truth?

DA: Pardon? Yeah. Yeah. But you know we had it so that parents could opt out if they didn't want their kids in that. The confirmation program, which I've always had a little bit of problems with confirmation programs because I always used to say kids are forced to go through confirmation and then the day after they're confirmed they leave the church and they don't come back until they're parents themselves, but I've been pretty pleased with the program we do. There is not a lot of emphasis on theology but there is a lot on developing your own spiritual self and that includes some introduction to what the UCC is about as a religious organization. But there's a big emphasis. . . . Hank Booth from KLWN radio has been one of the coordinators of that program for many years, which I have to admire him for, but he will have people like myself come in. He has like somebody come in and talk about my experiences at Kent State and how that affected me, how I viewed that as a university administrator versus a person who belongs to a church kind of thing. So he has people come in and talk about their own spiritual religious development kind of stuff, and I think it's a lot better than what it was when my daughters went

through because I thought my daughters will leave and they'll never they'll be like [UNCLEAR] a lot of them. I can't think of them, but I think I think our emphasis on youth programs is pretty strong, but I think you fight a lot in this day and age where there are so many other activities to occupy their time.

TM: I want to go back to something you said a minute ago, a few minutes ago, that the church is non-creedal and doesn't have a formal belief structure, that people are free to join in their own journeys. How far does that go? Could you be an atheist and be a member? Is in there some kind of minimum standard or something?

DA: Yeah. I'm forgetting the questions that we ask. There is, I think, there's no we do have an orientation program that people go through before they join. There's no requirement that you go through that orientation program. I think you could just say to the pastor, "I'd like to join this church," and you have probably a conversation with Peter Luckey and while you're up before the congregation becoming a member I think there is something that where you indicate your subscription to Christ and Christian beliefs, but it's a very nebulous kind of statement. I said we don't have a creed. We have a covenant and those are developed by local congregations and people revere the covenant at Plymouth because it says things like in the love of truth and in the spirit of Jesus we unite for the worship of God and the service of all. We seek to know the will of God made known or to be known to us. To love one another, to work and pray for the progress of knowledge, the promotion of justice, the reign of peace and the realization of our shared humanity. That sounds a lot of Unitarian stuff in there but we had a debate about 15 years ago about inclusive language because it used to use traditional male terms and boy I tell you it was a fight royal because people were so committed to the language of that covenant. I happened to be one that believes that the inclusive language that we did adopt is much more beautiful statement than it was before but that's a matter of preference.

TM: When looking back over the 150 year history, who are some notable people that have been involved? I think of that partly because you have the book by Richard Cordley there who was an early pastor and a Lawrence historian and pretty notable guy in town in early days.

DA: Right. Yeah. This is he's referring to a book called Lawrence, History of Lawrence, Kansas written by Richard Cordley who was pastor at Plymouth for 32 years. He had 2 tenures. He was here for so many years, went away, came and then they called him back again. Haskell, the architect, designed that church and was a member. I was looking at some of the write-ups on our history recently and Weaver who started the Weaver's department store has been a member. The Williams family from the Williams fund that supports KU athletics are still there; there are still members of the Williams family who belong that church. The Bowersocks, which is the Bowersock Mill and Electrical Power. The dam is owned by the Bowersock Company and the Hill family both of them have been members of Plymouth. Trying to think on, Raymond Nichols, who was a chancellor here, I was trying to think if there was any other chancellors. There might have been but not more recently. Can't think. When we first came here there was a very popular pastor at Plymouth, Butch Henderson; he was well known all over town and when my family was looking at churches someone in the community said to me, "Oh you're looking at Plymouth. That's *the* church to belong to." And I said to Mary Kate, "Well that may kill it for me because I don't necessarily want to belong to *the* church." Sounds like a social club kind of

thing. Our membership has gone up and down. We have royal fights. I've always said Plymouth is very much like Lawrence. It's a community that thinks otherwise and nothing we do comes easy like nothing we do in Lawrence comes easy. I remember when we were doing the remodeling of the original sanctuary. We had these old push button light switches, you know? And somebody was really upset because they no longer meet code. We had to take them out and replace them with typical ones. But they wanted the original stuff, you know? I said, well, that means we'll have to get the old potbelly stove used to heat the sanctuary.

Student: Did you see what [UNCLEAR] the film maker right quick did you see what they did to the conception the [UNCLEAR] before and after? It was like push button lights and rough floors and big wooden things and they remodeled it and it looks like Wal-Mart had gone in and...

DA: Well, I think my lowest point is I'm a person who, I belong to an organization not because of the people but because of a personal commitment I have to that organization. If I don't have a personal commitment to it, I don't really need to belong to it. And so when an organization gets in trouble I'm not one of these people who's the first out of the door. If I believe in the organization it's worth staying with and trying to help improve it. That was really tested when we had a pastor before Peter Luckey, a couple before Peter Luckey actually, who I was on the search committee that selected him and I have to say that I even I was disappointed in his performance after he came here but there were some people who were really disappointed with him and so the next thing we knew we had a petition to remove him and some of us tried to work with him to reach some of agreement where he could leave at the end of a year, a church year, and hopefully leave with some dignity and his integrity intact and the same for the church. And that still wasn't good enough for the people who were opposing him and so there was a called congregational meeting, which is where we make major decisions, to consider a motion to removing him and I sat in that congregational meeting, number one, upset because I thought the plan that we had worked out ought to be acceptable to everybody where he would leave within the next six months kind of thing, but these people wanted him gone and they wanted him gone now. And it was like a lynch mob, almost, and it really tested my mettle in terms of is this enough of a violation of what I believe in that I can't continue to be a member, but I somehow worked through that and stayed on but when Butch Henderson was here our membership was bigger than it is today. And when after Butch left there were a lot of people who belonged to that church only because of him. I call them Hendersonites. And you know their commitment was not to the UCC or to Plymouth Congregational Church as they liked it because he satisfied some need in them and when he left they left and that kind of bothered me about people but, you know, again, people are going to make their own decisions. So, our membership went down and we really kind of struggled to build it back up.

TM: Well, Butch was really dynamic.

DA: He was. I still communicate with him and enjoy him, but he and I differed on a lot of things. But they were good intellectual differences. It didn't become personal or vicious.

Student: Well his people that were going to be persuaded and swayed and want to emulate and follow it's always people. I mean were not born with the ability to look at a building and like it so if someone comes in and they say stuff that you know what I see is important is what you're

doing for other people. Regardless of what you think or say or decide and that's here and now we know we know what you're doing and that's you really got your work cut out for you.

DA: Yeah, I understand that, but we've had some people leave Plymouth after we adopted this open and affirming policy. We've had probably more join because of that policy than we had leave but those who left, you know, made a big splash is as they left. Then we had some others who left because of Peter Lucky and our former associate pastor, their attitude and some of their sermons regarding the invasion of Iraq. It really caused problems for me because I don't know how you could belong to a church and say you can't come. You can't be a part of this because we don't like your sexual behavior. Even more difficult for me because I can understand where people have different attitudes not about people who are homosexuals but how we ought to treat homosexuality in our society. I understand why people have some problems with that. The ones that really bothered me were the ones that left because of the antiwar stand. I thought, what in the hell do they think a church is about. You know? Are we supposed to be pro-war? And I didn't, you know, I don't want to hear a sermon that I agree with or that I could've written myself. I'm always beating up on Peter Luckey because I want his sermons to be more disturbing to me than they are. I want him to challenge my thinking because I believe God is still thinking and that I believe I'm still thinking about what is God and what's my relationship to God, that kind of thing. And for people to say well, you know, that was anti-American and [UNCLEAR] and it wasn't anti-American at all. I mean I think people who have stood up and said, wait a minute, America. We need to talk about what we're doing so forth. Our true patriots kind of thing, but in a church for people to say you know I can stand that antiwar attitude or only people like me should belong to this church, that really bothers me. And we don't have very many African Americans. We don't have very many Hispanics but we do have some and there were people who had been longtime members of that church that were really kind of disturbed that there were African Americans in our congregation.

TM: Really? Huh.

DA: And I thought gah, you know? They're missing the point about religion in Christianity in my mind but again, you know, that something that people have to work out for themselves from my viewpoint. I'm not going to impose myself on them. That's why I am a member of the UCC and a proud member of it. I don't know if the UCC disappeared tomorrow whether or not there would be a church that would make me comfortable, but I don't think I'm going to have to face that issue.

[laughter]

Student: Could you talk a little bit about fellowship and like social gatherings in your congregation?

DA: Yeah. Well of course we do a lot of social things together. One of the I think the difficult problems any church has is making that intergenerational and making it diverse. You go into our coffee hour following our worship service, you'll see the same people who cluster together every Sunday still clustering together and reaching out to new members, somebody who's different from you, is I think always a challenge for any organization and unfortunately the church is no

different, so we do things like we have supper groups and you sign up for it but you can't say I want to be with these kinds of people, and they try to structure the groups so there are some young people, some older people, there are some people of different persuasions what have you in those groups. This weekend, for instance, Friday and Saturday night we're having an Italian dinner that some people are preparing gratis. We're all paying \$15.00 apiece, I think it is, to attend and so the total proceeds will go for retiring part of our debt but again these whole notions are to have some activities where you can intermix your membership because when you're over 1,000 members it's very easy to have some people you never get to know kind of thing. We wear name tags which we [UNCLEAR] to introduce people to each other. We have we have sponsors for new members where you're kind of responsible for making sure they get around, get involved because I think it's very easy for someone to come to a Protestant church, maybe, probably, a Catholic church, attend the service and nobody speak to them. Kind of a contradiction of what a church ought to be. So we work, I think we work pretty hard, at those kind of social activities with the whole notion that this is a way you integrate your congregation.

Student: You have a lot of aspects of these super churches now, it seems to me, except you don't have the tough shed or the tin you know the makeshift that they start out with before they end up to be like saddlebacks. But you have a popular reputation and you think it seems to me any group of people whether its business or social and we used to say this in one place 10% of your customers or patrons are going to give you 50 plus percent of your work. And you think that maybe there's just always going to be some people that are going to stir things up?

DA: Sure, sure. Yeah, well and there's always going to be a certain percentage of your members who are the worker bees, you know? My wife cannot say no. And I love her for it. There are times when she should say no because she's got too many other things on her schedule but, you know, if they need another casserole for our day to serve at Link, she'll make two casseroles instead of one. And there's just a number of people who you know kind of carry the load for others.

TM: Yep.

DA: But I think that's kind of typical, social stuff in any organization.

TM: Sure. Well we've had you on the grill here for a while and I want to let you go but I wonder before we do, do you have any final observation? Anything we haven't covered? Anything?

DA: No. I hope I've said what is helpful to the research you're doing. I'm as I say I am an amateur historian and so recording the history of churches in Kansas is a real noble activity and I hope it will be preserved well...

Student: Did you, real quickly, did you think of any other people--did any of the beats or did William Burroughs or that guy who wrote the book the gunslinger, the poet--help me out here.

TM: [UNCLEAR]

Student: Any of those people ever any contact or with anyone else?

DA: May have.

TM: I doubt it.

DA: Well, I say we're very proud of our history at Plymouth and I've gotten involved with UCC at the national level. I just finished a term on the National Executive Council which has been a wonderful experience because seeing your church work at a different level than your local congregation is really kind of rewarding because we have some national and international programs that I maybe knew about in name but did not know the impact of them and some of the missionary work that the United Church of Christ is trying to do around the world has been just a really eye opening experience and gave me a whole different perspective on the church that I belong to, and it makes me very proud.

TM: OK, well thank you. That's a great place to quit I think.

DA: OK.

TM: I appreciate your coming in. Let me just say for the record here this is a public record we're trying to build and want to make this available to people at Kansas so whenever we get to that point we hope to have this on our web site and let people share this history which I think is something that's going to be very popular in Kansas. I hope so.

DA: Thank you.

TM: Thank you, Dave.