

[Sarah]

Today is Monday, November 9, 2009, and I'm in Salina KS with Karen Cooksey.

The Department of Religious Studies at the University of Kansas is conducting a research project that seeks to preserve the history of various churches and other religious organizations in Kansas. We would like to record your memories of your experiences in religious organizations. We expect that each interview will take about one hour. We assure you that you are not obligated to participate and may discontinue your involvement at any time. Since we are trying to create a public record of Kansas religious history, we are only interviewing persons who agree to let their interviews be available to the general public through a website and to be identified by name as the person who was interviewed. Should you have questions about the project, please contact Professor Tim Miller at 785-864-7263. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Office at 785-864-7429. Do you agree to be interviewed?

[Karen Cooksey]

Yes I do.

[Sarah]

Well I guess, let's just start with where you grew up and what church you were involved with as a child.

[Karen Cooksey]

The first church that I remember being involved with was at that time it was a community church in Bogue, and it would have been in the early '50s. Might have been in the late '40s, probably '47, '48 when we started going to Sunday school and Bible school, and a lot of Bible school activities.

[Sarah]

It was just a community church? It wasn't affiliated?

[Karen Cooksey]

It wasn't. What I remember is that, it was just the Bogue Community Church. And as time went on, in order to be assured of a pastor at all times they needed to affiliate with a denomination, and that's when it became the Bogue United Methodist Church. Or the Bogue Methodist Church, I don't even remember with the United came into play, that's when I think the brethren churches, kind of, I don't know, but my religious experience has not been with any other church other than the Methodist church.

[Sarah]

Ok so it became part of the Methodist organization...

[Karen Cooksey]

Right.

[Sarah]

So it could stay open.

[Karen Cooksey]

Right. Well so that they would have a denomination to connect with. That's what I remember.

[Sarah]

Ok, and how long were you out there? How long were you a member of that church?

[Karen Cooksey]

Well we lived in Bogue all of our lives, and that's the only church I had gone to. We moved to Palco in 1970, and probably started going to church there, well, shortly after that. I don't remember when I changed my membership to Palco, but probably in the late '70s. To be quite honest I was a little bit reluctant to give up membership to my Bogue church, but we did and it was a good experience. And in 2002 we moved to Salina, and we transferred our membership down here to Church of the Cross.

[Sarah]

And across the three churches, have you seen, I mean have they pretty much been similar experiences, have there been...

[Karen Cooksey]

I think so. I mean it's the congregation that makes up the church. It's the people that make it up and all three of them have been wonderful experiences. We still, when we go home, we don't always go to church when we're out that way, but we still get to see our church friends so to speak.

[Sarah]

The church that you belong to now, do they have two different services? A contemporary and a traditional?

[Karen Cooksey]

We do have.

[Sarah]

Which one do you attend?

[Karen Cooksey]

We go to the traditional.

[Sarah]

And that's pretty similar to the churches, the other two?

[Karen Cooksey]

Right of course, that's what we grew up in was the traditional. The order of worship and the old hymns, and that kind of stuff.

[Sarah]

What would you say the main differences are between the traditional and the contemporary services?

[Karen Cooksey]

I think basically the music. They like the newer songs, like the chorus, the phrase chorus songs, as opposed to the old traditional hymns.

[Sarah]

So which service draws more of a crowd?

[Karen Cooksey]

Down here, it used to be that we had more at second service, which is the traditional service. But right at the present time I think that the contemporary service probably has the larger attendance.

[Sarah]

I would assume they draw more of the younger crowd?

[Karen Cooksey]

Right.

[Sarah]

So eventually do you see the traditional service disappearing completely, or do you think there will always be a need for it?

[Karen Cooksey]

I think there will always be a need for a traditional service. They like to call our second service a blended service, but I think there will always be a need for a traditional service. You don't want to lose the history of the, of these songs. And one of the things that kind of concerns me is, I don't think our kids are learning the Sunday school songs that we did. And I think that's something that should be revived because you know, everybody knows "Jesus Loves Me", but that could be about all of those old songs that we sang in Sunday school.

[Sarah]

So the children's programs in the church that you go to now, are they separate from the congregation and the regular service, or do the children have Sunday school and then also attend the...

[Karen Cooksey]

There's Sunday school, but I think, yeah, I think kids are very welcome to come to church and there's a time of children's, the children's sermon during our regular service.

[Sarah]

Was that the same way that it was set up when you went to the church in Bogue?

[Karen Cooksey]

I don't really remember a children's service as such in Bogue. I don't if it started that long ago. While we were in Palco we had a children's service. But I just don't remember, well when we lived in Bogue a lot of times my daughter and I went to Sunday school and we didn't go to church every Sunday, but we hardly ever missed Sunday school. I thought it was really important that she be in Sunday school and so we went to Sunday school and we didn't always go to church. I think they had, they had church at 9 o'clock and Sunday school at 10, and it was easier it was easier to go at 10 than it was at 9.

[Sarah]

Can you talk a little bit about the youth programs that they have? For, not the smaller children, but maybe teenagers.

[Karen Cooksey]

In Bogue, of course I was a member of, what did they call that?

[Sarah]

Just the youth group?

[Karen Cooksey]

Yeah, it was a youth group. Anyways we had a very active, and I think Bogue still does have a really active youth group. They still do a lot of things, according to what I hear anyways. And Palco's youth group was a little smaller. It was a little harder to get the kids involved. And down here at Church of the Cross, we have a really active youth group. They have their own little band, and they meet, I think the junior high kids meet on Wednesday night, and the others meet Sunday afternoon. And they have a really active group. They try to go on a mission trip every year, and do some things like that. And they have fundraisers, and we have really great youth leaders.

[Sarah]

Have you, in recent years, have you seen your current congregation...do you feel like it's growing, do you feel like it's declining?

[Karen Cooksey]

I don't see a lot of growth in our church down here. I know we've talked about it at different times. The membership stays about the same and the Sunday morning group doesn't seem to be getting any larger.

[Sarah]

Do you see the church taking and active steps to grow the congregation? Do they advertise?

[Karen Cooksey]

Oh we try to reach out. We have a block, we call it a block party, the first of September I think it is. Anyways and you've gotta reach out. This year they had a kind of like a carnival type thing set up. There was a candy bar walk, and there was a bouncing house for the kids, and cotton candy. And we had a classic car show, and they had a really big turnout for that. So hopefully from reaching out in that way, we would get some more people interested. We also have a

preschool in our church, and so there's a lot of families that we can there, and we try to reach the families of those kids.

[Sarah]

So you don't have to be a member of the church to use the preschool?

[Karen Cooksey]

No. In fact many of them are not. But if they don't have a church affiliation, then we would encourage them to come to use, and we kind of reach out to those little kids.

[Sarah]

Is the preschool staffed by members of the church?

[Karen Cooksey]

Not necessarily. They have teachers.

[Sarah]

Along the same lines of reaching out to try and bring members in from the community, do you have activities outside of just the regular worship? Like fellowship among the congregation, well I think you had mentioned you just got back from a knitting group?

[Karen Cooksey]

Yes, yes. We have, we try to have, there's a fellowship committee, and they try to have an activity sponsored by a different Sunday school class, or a different group at least once a month. And on Wednesday night we have a meal. And we have the children's activities then. We, I help with the meal planning and the meal group. There's a group of eight of us, we call ourselves, "The Kitchen Crew," and we fix the meal on Wednesday night. Last week we had 95, that were served, so normally 70-90 people on Wednesday night that we serve. And the kids break off into their little groups, and go do their activities and stuff. And on Thursday morning we have, we call it "TLC", it's a coffee group that lifts up people in the church that need prayers. We meet for coffee, about an hour, and go through the list of prayer concerns. Then on Monday afternoons we have Prayer Shawl Ministry. And there's probably 18-25 of us that meet, and we knit and crochet and talk and discuss, and do that.

[Sarah]

Are there men's groups?

[Karen Cooksey]

The United Methodist Men, have just banded together, probably within the last year. They meet early morning for breakfast at one of the local buffets so that's going pretty well. We have the United Methodist Women that meet once a month.

[Sarah]

So there's quite a lot of fellowship outside of just the normal Sunday service.

[Karen Cooksey]

There is. There's something going on at the church all the time. There's AA groups that meet in the church. There's a TOPS group that meets in the church. The Boy Scouts meet, I mean there's an activity going on almost every night at the church. And with the past year they've started a prayer vigil, a 24 hour prayer vigil, once a month. So once a month there's someone in the church praying for 24 hours. You sign up for your hour, half hour slot, whatever.

[Sarah]

How did you, when you moved to Salina, how did you end up at this particular Methodist church, because I know, is there four or five...?

[Karen Cooksey]

I think there's six.

[Sarah]

Six, okay.

[Karen Cooksey]

Well when we first moved down here, Reverend Graves, Reverend Jim Graves, had been in the Bogue/Hill City Parish, after we moved to Palco, but not too long after that. So we sort of knew him, and he happened to be at Church of the Cross at the time that we moved down here. So we didn't visit other churches or anything. We just said, okay Reverend Graves is here, that's where God wants us to be. And it worked out really well for us. Otherwise we probably would have gone with Jim and Marilyn. You know, because we knew that they went to University and we probably would have done that but we just found a home at Church of the Cross.

[Sarah]

Well, kind of along those lines, the Methodist church I know rotates their pastors in and out, has that ever, have you ever seen that become an issue for a congregation, with maybe them not wanting a certain pastor to leave, or maybe not wanting a certain pastor that had just come?

[Karen Cooksey]

Right, I think it happens probably with about every Pastor change, that some people will leave because they didn't like that you had to give your Pastor up. And then when the new one comes in, there's always some people that aren't happy with the way he's doing services, so they all go someplace else. We didn't notice at home, well because in Palco, it was the only church in Palco. The Methodist church was the only church in Palco. There were several other churches, but we were the only one in town, and people didn't, they didn't leave because of the minister. You might gain a person or two, a family or two, but they didn't leave. Down here we've noticed that they do. There's so many options out there so if you don't like what's going on in your church, you're gonna find a place, you know, you're gonna find a place to go.

[Sarah]

Have you seen people voice their concerns?

[Karen Cooksey]

Yes. Yeah they have. Some, a lot of, talk around the table...more than going to the source.

[Sarah]

But you've never seen like a campaign form to try and remove?

[Karen Cooksey]

No. We haven't, no. Just kind of go along with, with what the conference thinks is better for you. And some ministers, I remember when they were changing like about every two years, which you didn't really get attached to a minister, but I remember one time at Bogue there was a minister there for probably, oh I don't remember how long he was there, and when he left, cuz everybody liked him, I mean he was good, and fit into the community and all that. And I think it took at least two pastoral changes before the community settled down and said, you know, we're the church, we have to go ahead and do it. And so, yeah.

[Sarah]

I know we talked about how, you know, they're kind of moving towards the more contemporary services, are there any other changes that you've seen just as you've watched the church progress? Just maybe in the form of the way people dress. You know, are people still wearing their Sunday best to church?

[Karen Cooksey]

It depends a lot on the people. I think it's a lot more casual dress now then it was, say, well 20 or 30 years ago. About everybody dressed up to go to church, and I don't think most, I don't a lot of people do now, and it's very widely accepted, to go, to come as you are.

[Sarah]

Do you think maybe that helps to draw crowds? The come as you are philosophy.

[Karen Cooksey]

I would think maybe. I think people feel more comfortable dressed casually, you know. Personally, I like to wear a dress to church, but I don't have a problem with anyone that doesn't want to wear, and I think probably the majority of people do not, you know, wear dresses to church. But I just, my own self, I feel better about dressing to go to church.

[Sarah]

As far as things, taking care of things around the church, the upkeep of the building, the upkeep of the lawn; is that something that the congregation helps with? Is that, do you contract out? Do you hire custodial people?

[Karen Cooksey]

I think our lawn care is probably volunteer. There is a hired church custodian, and I think that about has to be in any church. At Bogue, different families used to do it. I mean at that time it worked out pretty well, cuz we're talking like 40 years ago. And then at Palco we tried that for a while, but it didn't, it was just better to hire a janitor, or a maintenance person. And Church of the Cross has a wonderful maintenance person now. I mean he just does a really good job.

[Sarah]

Do you know how old your building is that you're in currently?

[Karen Cooksey]

I think it was, I think it's 40-ish. I think they said it was built in the '60s maybe, the early '60s. It's just now starting to need a lot of repair.

[Sarah]

And how are you guys addressing that? Is that something they're asking for donations?

[Karen Cooksey]

Yeah, we have a, well, of course the Board of Trustees, which is, that's one of the committees of the Methodist church. I mean every church has a Board of Trustees that kind of oversees this. And that committee does that, and kind of tries to, I mean the funds are budgeted so, you know, to take care of things like that. You kind of have to work within your budget, and anticipate what you're gonna need, and you submit a budget and it's approved by another committee. You kind of have to work with the funds that you have coming in, but yeah.

[Sarah]

Do you know how people, find themselves on the Board of Trustees? How somebody gets into that position?

[Karen Cooksey]

There's a, what we call, a lay-leadership committee, that tries to find people that are willing to serve as the Board of Trustees, to serve on any committees actually. And I don't know how many committees there are in the Methodist church. Quite a few. And it's kind of the job of that committee to ask people if they're willing to serve. Usually they try to get them to serve for a two or three year period. You know, and so the Board of Trustees, and the Finance Committee, the Worship Committee, some of those are, you know, the harder ones to fill because you have to have people that are interested and willing to work to keep, to keep your church going actually. We don't very often have people come and say, "Now I'd really like to be on the board of trustees."

[Sarah]

As far as the, I know we talked about, like as musical expressions, the more traditional service is more hymnal related, is there, you said there's a band in the contemporary service?

[Karen Cooksey]

I think they do have a band. We go to the second service which is the traditional service, and they don't have a band, we don't have a band play for that. There's a piano, and organ music for that.

[Sarah]

And as far as other artistic or symbolic statements inside the church. Do you have the typical stained glass?

[Karen Cooksey]

There is in the front of the church, there's some stained glass. I'm not sure there is any in the sanctuary part of it. You would think I wasn't there yesterday, but I was. And that we have a committee for a couple of girls actually, that usually, well like right now there's Fall decorations on the altar, and they kind of rotate according to the season.

[Sarah]

Now when you, I know you said, that you seem to be involved in a lot of the groups in your church besides Sundays, but when you were growing up, was the church still something that had a pretty big affect on your daily life, or was it more of just something that people did on Sundays?

[Karen Cooksey]

I think when I was younger, I mean when I was, probably until I got involved with the youth group in church, probably it was just basically a Sunday, or even the first that I remember, was basically just Bible school. We lived eight miles out in the country, and I'm not sure we came in even on Sundays too often for that. It was mainly just Bible school. After I was married and got involved with United Methodist women and Sunday school, while I was in high school I helped teach the nursery kids in Sunday school so I was involved that way. We didn't get real involved with a lot of the everyday activities in the church until after our daughter was away from home. We, I guess, we didn't have her school activities that we used to go to and stuff like that, and we needed a little something, so we became more involved with the church at that time.

[Sarah]

Do you just have one daughter?

[Karen Cooksey]

Right.

[Sarah]

And was she raised in the church?

[Karen Cooksey]

She was.

[Sarah]

And is she still a member of the Methodist church?

[Karen Cooksey]

No she isn't. She married a Catholic and became Catholic and wasn't real happy in the Catholic religion. And when she divorced she went to more of a, the church here in town was Crossroads, and it's one of the, I suppose more of a contemporary church of some kind. And that's what she seems to like better.

[Sarah]

Could you talk about maybe, is there some kind of process, or class, or requirement, for people that want to come into the church that weren't raised Methodist, but would like to join the Methodist church?

[Karen Cooksey]

They do have membership classes, and I don't remember if we took, of course my membership class, because I was probably, well I think I was ten when we took the membership class, and joined the church.

[Sarah]

So you can take that as a child too? Or was it just your family?

[Karen Cooksey]

Yeah, it was a confirmation class. You took a confirmation class and then you became a member when you finished the confirmation class. And I don't remember if my parents were members of the church or not. I don't think they were. I don't think that my parents were actually members of the church at that time.

[Sarah]

But they do have a process that adults can go through?

[Karen Cooksey]

Sure, yeah. You would take a membership class and then express a desire to affiliate, and to be a part of the church.

[Sarah]

Could you explain a little bit about what you meant when you moved and you had to transfer your membership? What that process is?

[Karen Cooksey]

The process as far as I know is, we just went to the minister and said you know, it's time for us to transfer our membership, you know, down here. It used to be, the Methodist church, you paid, apportionments to the conference, to kind of help keep the overall church going. It was based on membership so it was important that if you left the church and quit supporting it, you know that you transfer your membership, because they were still paying apportionments on your membership in that church. So anymore, it's not based strictly on membership, and it's maybe, it might not be as important, but you feel like you're more a part of a church if you're a member, and you know.

[Sarah]

So is that why maybe you were reluctant at first to transfer?

[Karen Cooksey]

Right. At Palco I never even thought about transferring membership until we got a letter from the committee in Bogue, and they said, you know, if you're going someplace else, and you aren't really supporting out church or whatever, you know, do you still want to be a member? So at

that time we did just transfer. I transferred my membership, and my husband joined. He hadn't been a member at Bogue. So, and then when we moved down here, we just knew that, you know, we were gonna support this church and that was gonna be our church, and that's where our membership belonged. So we actually requested that membership change.

[Sarah]

Are there any, you've been with the Methodist church a long time, are there any maybe, memorable characters or pastors, or even members of the congregation that for some reason really stuck out in your mind?

[Karen Cooksey]

I don't think you ever forget your Sunday school teachers from when you were little. And of course every Pastor makes an impression on you, I mean, yeah I remember good things about most of the pastors and the Sunday school teachers. People that you work with in committees. Yeah, that's all part of the process of just living in a Christian community.

[Sarah]

Were there, did you have any pastors that maybe were just, more dynamic than others, that stood out than others, that you know, maybe you were very upset to see them leave, and what was it about them that made them so memorable?

[Karen Cooksey]

I feel very fortunate that we've remained friends with so many of the Pastors. We have two or three that we still visit with, that were pastors, oh 20 or more years ago. And you know, you still consider them good friends. I had one pastor's wife tell us one time, she said, "We were your pastors," and then when they went someplace else she said, "Now we can be your friends." So I think that's a good, a good philosophy too. And to say what makes them more memorable, I think it's kind of the way you relate to them. You know, some you just become more friendly with. Maybe because you've worked closer with them in the church, or really enjoyed the, well of course, all of them, I don't know that there's been a Pastor that didn't give good sermons, didn't you know, have a good Sunday morning service. And I think a lot of it is how you interact with them the rest of the week.

[Sarah]

As far as maybe the church's view on current things that are happening in the world, or even, do they seem to be, have a more liberal view, have a more conservative view? Do they, do the things that are going on around the world, like the war in Iraq, do those affect things that are said in the sermons?

[Karen Cooksey]

I'm sure it does. I mean we all know that the economic times are not the best, and there's prayer requests along those lines. And it depends a lot on the people, you know, I mean whether it's a liberal or conservative view because there's quite an age group, you know, too. So I don't know how that effects, I think it would be really hard on the ministers to have to, to have to kinda take a middle of the line view on things like that. We do support I know a few years ago we sent boxes of whatever it was requested, I think toiletries and supplies to Iraq. If someone has a

family member that's in the armed services and requests anything, yeah we're there to do that. To support that, and to do what we can do.

[Sarah]

Do you have, are there people from your congregation that have been overseas? Do you have members of the service?

[Karen Cooksey]

We have several that have family members in the service.

[Sarah]

I think we've about covered everything I have, unless is there anything else that you'd like to share?

[Karen Cooksey]

My experiences in the church have been positive, I mean, I've not ever had, what I would call, a bad experience with any of the church, churches.

[Sarah]

And you feel like it's had a pretty, well it's influenced your everyday life, and the way you view things and make your decisions.

[Karen Cooksey]

Oh sure, yeah I think, I think God had been a very real part of our lives. And I think he'll guide ya, and direct ya in the way you should go, if you'll just listen.

[Sarah]

I did want to ask you about one other thing. Do you, I don't know, a group, or somebody who assists in like bereavement processes or grief counseling, or anything like that? Do you have something within your church that is set up for that?

[Karen Cooksey]

Not that I'm aware of, not directly. I'm sure the minister meets with the families we're involved with, like a funeral dinner when that's necessary, but that's a good point. I don't know that there is a bereavement committee, or process, or people that help in circumstances like that. And there should be shouldn't there? That's part of, part of the process. I know our church is very supportive of a family that's lost a member, but after that initial week, or month, or whatever you know, I'm not sure.

[Sarah]

Well thank you very much. I really appreciate you sharing.