

Student: I am sitting here with Dr. Michael Gardner of First Methodist Church.

Michael Gardner: First United Methodist Church. Thank you.

Student: First United Methodist Church, in Wichita, Kansas. So you are the pastor, here at First United Methodist Church?

MG: My role here is senior pastor; I'm not the only pastor here. We have other pastors on our staff, but my role would be lead pastor or senior pastor.

Student: OK. Where were you born and raised and what were your early childhood influences.

MG: OK. I was born in 1952 in Grass Valley, California. I was baptized as an infant in grass valley at the Emanuel Episcopal Church. One of the things I discovered during my mother's death last summer was my baptismal certificate, which was fun to have in my possession. Father Karl Margraff was the person who baptized me. I was baptized as an infant. We lived in Grass Valley until I was about four years old. Grew up on a quarter horse ranch there.

I moved about the time I was a year before entering kindergarten to Denver, Colorado. My father was from Colorado. We lived there for the next couple of years in the Denver area. I don't know if we were a churchgoing family at that time, I don't have any conscious memories, but my mother was a churchgoing person. My father was not. She carried the religious heritage for the family.

Student: I'm sorry, that was Baptist, as you were baptized?

MG: No, I was baptized in the Episcopal Church. At the Emanuel Episcopal Church in Grass Valley, California. But I really don't have a conscious memory of where we attended church when we were living in Colorado rather than knowing my mother who rarely missed a Sunday service.

We moved from Colorado to the Kansas City area where my mother was from for two reasons. First, my father had the first of a long series of heart surgeries. Then, my grandfather was in ill health in Kansas City, Missouri. So we moved to Kansas City, Missouri when I was in first grade. We attended briefly a Methodist congregation which had been the tradition of my mother's youth, then became very active members at the Central Presbyterian Church on Armor Blvd. in Kansas City, Missouri. So I grew up my entire childhood until my high school years at the Central Presbyterian Church. I was active in the church, Sunday school, choir, I was confirmed there, and we were every Sunday attenders.

At the age of my confirmation, which was thirteen, my father unbeknownst to me, had made arrangements to join the church that day. He had an interesting religious history I only learned later at the time of his death. When he was thirteen years old, his father

committed suicide. They were Baptist. The minister's sermon at my grandfather's funeral was, in the words of my father in a journal, was a message that consigned the soul of his father to hell. He left the church, would not attend church. I have no idea the process he went through that reconciled his differences with the church, but when I was thirteen, it may have been that I was thirteen when his father's death occurred, he joined the church and was baptized on my confirmation day.

And so at that point, from the age of thirteen on, my entire family attended church at Central Presbyterian until I was a freshman in high school and we moved from Kansas City to a tiny town in northeast Kansas called Troy, Kansas. My father took a transfer with his company, we moved to this little town, and I tell people now after all my ministerial history has been in the Methodist Church, that we moved to a town where there was no Presbyterian church so I became a Methodist at that time by default. So my parents selected what became the United Methodist Church in 1968 but at the time we moved there, in the early 60s, was the Troy Methodist Church, and my mother was a member there for many many many years, and her funeral was conducted there.

So that was the church I attended throughout my high school years. I was really away from the church during my college years for about four years or so, returned to the church, I had married in the church at the age of 19 – actually I guess I was 20. Married, and divorced five years later and returned to the church during the divorce, to my home church there in Troy, and worked through the process of recovering from a divorce.

At that time, in 1977, I returned to a felt sense of call to ministry I had first experienced in my high school years – in 1968 or 69, when I was a sophomore and junior in high school. I became a candidate for ministry, attended school for license as a local pastor, got married, actually got married then attended school for license as a local pastor in 1978, because candidate for ministry, and received my first appointment to the church in 1978. With no experience. I was a college student, had gone to school for license as what the United Methodists call a local pastor, and was appointed to a part time position as a local pastor as I finished my undergraduate work in a different field from religion where I first studied which was engineering.

So I finished a degree in religion from Baker University in Bolton City, Kansas, then went to seminary at St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri, all the time during both finishing my undergraduate work and my seminary work, I served the church. I've been serving United Methodist Churches since 1978. The locations have been – I served nine years the church I first served as a college student. I stayed a long time. Nine years there. I moved from there, which was in the Kansas City area, to Johnson County, a little rural church that became a suburban church. I moved from there to Coffeerville, Kansas to be senior pastor at First United Methodist Church in Coffeerville, Kansas where I was for five years. I moved from there back to Kansas City to serve the Alder's Gate United Methodist Church as senior pastor, really only pastor, but there were some other pastors on part time staff. For five years. Moved to Dodge City, Kansas where I served for seven years as the senior pastor. Then I moved here to Wichita to become the senior pastor here at First United Methodist Church in 2004.

Student: So, you mentioned being initially drawn to the ministry as a sophomore in high school about '68 or '69. What was it initially drew you toward the ministry?

MG: I think there were two events that were probably transformative. At the age of thirteen when I was confirmed, and became an adult member of the congregation at Central Presbyterian, I was pretty intentional about that process. I talk about that by saying, at my confirmation day I gave as much of life as I knew how to give to Christ at the age of thirteen. But, a thirteen year old is immature and unformed. So, I made a commitment to Christ, and I think a very serious one, at my confirmation.

When I was a sophomore in high school - it may have been the fall of my junior year, I'm really not sure which. The Fellowship of Christian Athletes, in which I was active during high school, invited a guest speaker to come. He spoke at my home church. His name was Ray Hildebrand; he was a guest speaker for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He gave an invitation at an evening service, many students were in attendance, and his invitation was very simple. I recall it was about as gentle an invitation as could have been given. What he said as I recall it, "I am going to kneel here at the front of the church and do something I try to do every day which is give my life to Christ. If you would like to come and kneel with me either for the first time or if you have made a previous commitment and would like to renew that, I would be happy for you to come as I pray." That's really all he said. I responded to that invitation and I remember after his prayer was over, almost every student who was at attendance was there. It was a very powerful moment for me. I think my beginnings of a sense of being called to ministry have their roots in that experience.

I was very active in singing and drama in high school, and that whole next year I began to explore an inner feeling that God was calling me to ministry. I went to talk to my high school guidance counselor and I also talked to my best friend. Jim Edwards was my best friend and Keith Ellison was my counselor. Jim said, "Well, Mike it's impossible for you to be a minister because first of all, you like to drive fast, you like to drink beer, and you like to chase women. That disqualifies you." My high school guidance counselor said to me, "Well, you can do that if you want but I don't have any idea on earth why you'd want to do that." I said, "Well, I'm good at drama and speech, music, I love to do those things." He said, "You may be good at those things, but your scores are off the charts in math and physics and those kinds of things. And so if you're smart, you'll be an engineer because you'll make a lot more money." At the age of seventeen, I was pretty impressionable, and despite my felt sense of call, I took seriously what my friend said. I knew he was right; I liked to drive fast, drink beer, and chase women.

Student: Who doesn't?

MG: Yeah. That's exactly right. I said to myself, my high school guidance counselor was probably right, too. I'd make a lot more money in a different profession. At that point, I just said, "I must've misheard God, I wasn't all that certain, must've just been a felt sense of call."

I pursued other things. I got married, my father died right after I was out of high school, and I began to establish a family and pursue an engineering curriculum. When I went through divorce in 1977, I did what I think is very common for persons who experience disruption in life. I began to look at all of life and say what do I want to do? I'm not going to be a married person, what does that mean? I've been in a curriculum for engineering, and I discovered I don't really like it much. What am I supposed to do?

I entered into a counseling relationship with the pastor at my home church, his name was Dr. Charles Merrill Smith, and I say to people now he's deceased, but he became my counselor, my pastor, my friend, and my mentor in about that order. He was a colleague and confidant until he died. So, in 1977 I returned to that felt sense of call and I had some bridges to cross. I said, "Is it true I won't make a lot of money?" He said, "I wish I could tell you different, but that's true. You'll make a living at ministry. You have to decide what you want. Do you want material resources or do you want this sense of call?" The second thing I said was, "I'm not holy enough to be a pastor." I told him about my conversation with my best friend. It was the most unusual response I think a person could have made. He said, "Excuse me a minute." He reached into a side pocket of his chair, pulled out a package of Player's cigarettes, took a cigarette out of the pack, lit it, took a long drag, and said, "Mike, let me tell you something. Being a pastor is not about being a professional Christian. It's about being a pastor and living out a calling. As far as the sins of life, you have to slug it out in the ditches along with everyone else." It sounds unusual to say that even as I say it. However, it was a very free conversion; it let me see, even at a young age, a person could be a human being with human frailty and also a pastor at the same time. That was what unlocked door. I said, "I believe I am called to do this work." Then he asked a question of me which I believe is very helpful. He said, "First, do you have genuine faith?" I said I do. The second thing he did was he took a copy Archbishop Temple's Gifford lectures on natural religion down from his library shelf and said, "OK, go home and read this and if you're still interested in ministry, come back and see me."

I read it, I was still interested, and it put into place in my life a love of scholarship which I think I have maintained throughout my ministry. I found the lectures very powerful. There was a section that captured my mind in there. One of the things Archbishop Temple said was that Christianity was the only cooperative society in the world solely for the benefit of its non-members. That has stuck in my mind and in my heart. That has been in some sense determinative of how I've approached ministry. I understood ministry is not just about caring for those already in the church. It is about reaching toward those who are not members. And again, I began as a candidate, moved to Baldwin City, Kansas, got a call there was a church open, and started my journey in 1978.

I also have another interesting experience. I had no training other than a brief license to teach for two weeks at which I spent my honeymoon with my wife. In the United Methodist tradition, the district superintendent brings a pastor in to meet representatives of the church. It's called an introductory conference. First one I was ever in was in this

small church on the outskirts of Johnson County called Monticello United Methodist Church. I went to that conference, he introduced me and said, "This is a person who is called to ministry and is prepared." I had a house, a very low salary, and he thought it would work. He knew about me from my mentor, Dr. Smith. He introduced me, and at the end of that conversation, he said, "Mike, do you have anything you want to say?" I was pretty bold at that point, and I said yes, I do. I said, "There are some things you need to know. First, I haven't always been a pastor. In fact, I've never been a pastor before. So, you'll have to help educate me about what this role is about. Second, if we work on a project together, it will become very evident I haven't always been a pastor because if I hit my thumb with a hammer, you'll hear some words that are not typical of a pastor and you'll need to remember I haven't always been a pastor. Third, if you invite me to your home, and you offer me a glass of wine, I will take one, and maybe two. Now, I won't drink around young people. I won't be a bad example, and I'm not an alcoholic, but I will drink a glass of wine if you offer me one. Fourth, you need to know, occasionally, I smoke a pipe. I've done that for a long time, I don't smoke a lot, but I like to aroma, and I don't want any rumors flying so don't be surprised."

The superintendent who introduced me probably thought, well, maybe you shouldn't have told them everything. There was a woman who is still living, Grace Reynolds, who was from the South, who after this dead silence for a few minutes says, "Well, we're gonna like him!" It worked out. I was there nine years through the growth of the church. It was a sort of continuation of my experience with Dr. Smith when he convinced me pastors could be human and yet people with a divine calling at the same time.

Student: Now that you're with First United Methodist Church in Wichita, what's the size of your congregation?

MG: The congregation has about 1,450 members. Average attendance Sunday morning is between five and six hundred. It is a congregation that at one time was larger. It has been here as long as the city of Wichita has been here.

Student: I noticed the bell outside said the building had been here since 1870 something?

MG: Well, probably the congregation dates to then. This is really about four buildings put together. The most recent was built about twenty years ago. The oldest was built about seventy or eighty years ago. But the congregation has been here in downtown Wichita since 1870, a long, long time ago.

So, it's a congregation with a lot of heritage, a lot of history. Some more recent, some more ancient. It is what I would call an established church. It has been here longer than any other United Methodist church in Wichita.

Student: What's the day to day life like for a pastor here?

MG: I can just tell you about my job. There's a wonderful story people tell. A person asked a pastor, "What time do you generally go to work in the morning?" The pastor

answered, "I get up and I'm in it." There's a lot of truth in that. There are lots of varying responsibilities. I say to young person considering a call to ministry that I find ministry a very stimulating way to serve God because there are a variety of things to do. You're not chained to a desk all day long.

My typical work week begins about 6 o'clock Monday morning with my laptop and coffee. I organize my week, look at the calendar, and write a weekly column or something for our webpage. Begin to organize my thoughts for my sermon on Sunday. I have a civic club I participate in at noon; I'm a member of the Rotary Club. Monday afternoon, I work with my assistant on correspondence for the week. Usually have a meeting in the evening. Usually there's an appointment or two with someone in the evening with counseling or church business. And I continue, as the day progresses, to work on writing tasks, administrative tasks, those things. Usually there's a meeting Monday evening and my journey home begins around 8:30. On a good day, there's time for a meal.

Tuesday is a day devoted primarily to staff development. Every Tuesday morning, I have a 10am staff meeting with our other persons who carry programmatic responsibility within in the church. Often a luncheon with someone, often staff, at noon. In the afternoon Tuesday, we review the prior Sunday's service. We try to improve our process and content. It's a televised service, so we review it both in terms of the individual acts of worship, the music, preaching, the way worship unfolds; and also how it was televised.

Student: What channel? Is it a public access channel?

MG: No, we're actually on network television throughout the majority of the state, about 75%, on ABC. It's on at 11 o'clock, every Sunday morning. That's been true for about 34 years. We're having the 35th anniversary next year. So on any given Sunday, thousands of people, let's say ten or fourteen thousand people, in addition to those who attend. So two audiences so to speak: those on television and those who attend on our campus.

So, Tuesday we review and plan for worship. We assign roles for the coming service on Tuesday afternoon. Then I have a meeting with our senior leadership staff. That's four persons including myself. That usually runs until about 5, 5:30. Usually there's another evening meeting with a group of laity that carry responsibility in the church. Then I journey home.

Wednesday mornings, I have meetings with some of the individual staff I supervise. I go through correspondence with my assistant. Occasionally, depending on the day of the week, I have a hospital call on Monday or Wednesday. Sometimes there's a funeral that changes the rhythm. Wednesday afternoon, I'm preparing usually for a Bible study or something that's that evening, or attending to correspondence or administrative responsibilities. I'm trying to get some time devoted to the message for the week. I record a little video insert that goes out in our service with our media crew. Then there's

a Wednesday evening meal that we host here. Sometimes I'm teaching and sometimes the meal is the end of my day.

On Thursdays I try to devote significant time to the sermon for that week. I work on that Thursday morning, noon I usually have an appointment over the lunch hour. Once a month, I have a meeting with about four to eight other pastors. We review one another's messages and critique. Once a month, I have a district meeting of clergy in the United Methodist Church. So, really only about two Thursday mornings a month do I really get to have a head start on the message. It takes about 15 hours a week to produce what I would call a quality sermon. It's probably possible to do it in less time than that but I've never found a way to do it and still have it be fresh. I block those ahead of time often Sunday afternoon I'm gathering thoughts to help lead me into the next week. Thursday afternoon, I have meetings internally, at least two pastoral calls a week. When we're finished here I have an appointment with an administrator. There's a big church dinner tonight so I'll be attending that. We'll be heading home about 8 o'clock this evening.

Friday, I try to clear my calendar except for funerals or a wedding rehearsal in the evening, I pretty well block the entire day Friday to write and finish my message. It's a straight 8 hour day of writing. If I have a good start, I can get the message completed by Friday. If not, then it's Saturday morning when I'm finishing that. I try to preserve Saturday as a family day and am mostly successful at doing that.

Sunday morning, our first service is about 8:30 so I arrive at 8 o'clock. During the Sunday school hour, I have a new member reception this Sunday. Between those services 10:55 we have our televised service. I have a noon luncheon with my family, and a few hours Sunday afternoon I try to keep clear of major commitments because there's usually something happening in the church that I often choose not to attend so I can have some time with family. Sunday evening, we have a service that meets at Corner Coffee House which we own and operate and I often attend that to support that service and I preach about once a month at that service. And then Monday morning it starts all over again.

Student: The Coffee House – I didn't know about that until we talked on the phone. Is there a separate pastor for the services there? You mentioned you speak there every now and then.

MG: Right, either myself or my associate pastor celebrates communion. That's kind of a new work for us. We have a retail business there that gives us an opportunity to interact with young church people. We have a service there every Sunday evening and pretty highly engaged young group of adults who are there. At some point, we probably will assign a campus pastor to that location, but it's not large enough yet to devote those kinds of resources, so the associate pastor and I attend on alternate weeks. We're on the preaching rotation. We also have several candidates for ministry, several younger adults coming up. We have a person who's going to seminary next year who preaches there. We have a director of our youth ministry who preaches there on rotation. We have a Nazarene pastor who is on our staff who preaches on rotation. We have a missionary

from Bolivia who preaches there on rotation, then the associate pastor and myself. That's how we handle that responsibility. But we will eventually assign a campus pastor there as it grows.

Student: Speaking of some of the other people there, what are the people at First United Methodist like? Are there any noteworthy characters or specific people who have made an impression on you? Even outside of this church.

MG: Yeah, I would say First Church has had both clergy and lay leaders who've kinda cut a wide swath in Wichita at some point in its history. We have a retired bishop who was one of the senior pastors here and who is a good friend of mine, Bishop Dick Wilkie. Our current Kansas bishop, Scott Jones and his spouse Mary Lou Reese, attend here when they're in town. Mary Lou is actually a member here. We have thirteen, I think now fifteen, retired pastors who are here which is an interesting process.

In terms of laity, the congregation contains former mayors of Wichita. But we are a congregation of very average people. At one point, one of our very active members who is now deceased and lives in the kingdom of heaven was Olive Ann Beech of Beech Aircraft; she was a member here, very active one. There have been noteworthy individuals in the community who were members here, but it is a congregation I think that has always had a variety of people. It has had people who were movers and shakers in the business community. Also people who were educators, architects, doctors, lawyers, but one of the things that's been true during my tenure here, is the congregation has grown more diverse in terms of its income base. We're working hard to be externally focused and to have a very active outreach.

Student: How is the church governed? I'm not very familiar with the United Methodist organization.

MG: Be glad to talk about that. The United Methodist Church is an international denomination and the levels of leadership are we have a general conference. It meets once every four years. It sets the law of the church, passes resolutions that are non-binding, but they are of the sense of what the church's positions on particular issues. They are primarily looking at our book of law, which is called the discipline, and there have been books of discipline since our founder, John Wesley, was alive. So, every four years, there are smaller organizations called jurisdictions. Those organizations meet to look at institutions that relate to those jurisdictions. So, we are in the south-central jurisdiction. It meets every two years, so there are jurisdictional organizations. So, we have Southern Methodist University, in the south-central jurisdiction, which is our jurisdictional college. Within each jurisdiction, which is a geographical area, there are annual conferences that meet annually. The other thing the jurisdictional conference does is elect bishops who preside over the annual conferences. When bishops retire, they're elected for life; they elect their replacements from among elders, ordained pastors.

Annual conferences are where clergy hold their membership also a lay person from every church, and also one lay person for every clergy person, is a member of the annual

conference. Equal members of the clergy and the laity. The annual conference meets once a year. That's where the business of the United Methodist Church is done. We ordain pastors, we adopt budgets, and we determine the mission, of the annual conference each church is supposed to participate in.

Then each local church has what's called a charge conference. A charge is a place to which a pastor is appointed. So, we meet once a year at an annual meeting, more than once a year if possible. At one time in our history, there was a quarterly conference at every local church. Currently, it's an annual conference and it's called the charge or church conference. They meet once a year with a district superintendent and the district superintendent in the Kansas west conference there are, I think, six districts, and the district superintendent has a supervision function for the clergy and churches in his district. They report directly to the bishop. So the superintendent will come and conduct the annual church conference. The local church has the church council, which is the governing body for the local church, and then a variety of committees which report to the church council. So that's our basic structure. Pretty highly organized.

Student: So, you were speaking of budgeting every four years at the general conference.

MG: It is established as a budget, but then apportioned to each of the annual conferences. The annual conferences then apportion a portion of their budgets to each local church. Each local church, with their apportionment, participates in funding and local ministry for the denomination.

Student: How does the church support itself then? What are its sources of income?

MG: Sure. Member contributions is the largest source. We have both pledged and unpledged income. We have people who just put cash in the collection plate. We have Sunday school classes that take an offering that comes to the church. We have some endowed funds that provide interest annual to support the budget.

Student: How does the First United Methodist Church perceive itself in relation to other Christian bodies as well as other religious groups?

MG: I really have to talk about how I perceive that rather than in terms of the entire church. We are really a very diverse congregation in terms of political perspectives. We have pro and anti abortion persons in the same congregation. I would say in terms of our relationship with other Christian denominations, we have close working relationships with most of the other churches out there. Downtown, I know the pastors of all the surrounding churches. Our congregation's members, probably many of them, probably know members in the other churches in the area. We work cooperatively. In some ways there are some organic connections. We participate in the World Council of Churches; I think it's now called the National Council of Churches of Christ United. So we have a sense of relationship with other denominational bodies.

We also have a looser relationship with non-denominational churches like the Pentecostals, or bodies like the Roman Catholic Church. We are Protestant, but we have many religious practices in common with our counterparts who are Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or who are part of other denominational bodies. We cooperate in serving with a lot of people through a variety of denominations. We provide volunteers to The Lord's Diner, which is a Roman Catholic outreach to people that provides a meal. We work cooperatively with the United Methodist Open Door, but we also work with other organizations in the community who have needs that are being met through the ministry. Grace Community United Methodist Youthville, Salvation Army, we work through a lot of agencies where Christians come together.

We also have a pretty active membership, and I'm a member of the board, in inter-faith ministries, which works to bridge different religious bodies. So, inter-faith ministries have persons who are Islamic, Baha'i, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, who all work together. I hold that as a value. We often can unite, though our religious beliefs are different, in doing ministry with persons who are on the margins of life. So we have a very active partnership with inter-faith ministry and our homeless serving ministries. And again, I'm a board member of that organization.

Student: What do you perceive the central teachings or message of the church to be? This church specifically or the First United Methodist Church in general.

MG: Well, let me talk a little bit about Christianity as opposed to other religions. I think Christianity claims God uniquely revealed himself to the world in His son, Jesus the Christ, Jesus the Savior, the Messiah. We have connection with the Jewish faith, the Hebrew faith, and accept Hebrew scripture as part of our story, so we grew out of that religion. We differ on the belief that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah but we have much in common with those traditions of Hebrew faith. So, Christianity claims that uniqueness, that at a particular place and time, God became human. Our beliefs are summed up in the Nicene Creed, and historic Christianity.

There are some distinctions in the United Methodist Church that have been what I would call a Church with an outstretched hand and a warm heart. We have our roots in liturgical faith and formal worship, but also evangelical faith and a belief that God changes peoples' individual lives. So we stand in the gap between liturgical churches like Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Orthodox, and evangelical churches like Baptists, persons who have a belief in conversion, because we believe in the sacraments and the new birth, and the people who experience spiritual regeneration. So those things we hold in common.

Wesley's doctrines are a good way to talk about United Methodist distinctives. I would talk about the primacy of grace. The idea of grace is what draws us to God, helps in that grace be converted to God, in that grace helps us recognize our need for growth and then helps us grow toward God's image of who we should be. Until that time comes, we are fully conformed to the life we see in Jesus. And I think Wesley talked about that progression, how grace works before we respond, and while we're responding, helps us

recognize our need for growth. That helps us move closer to that place where we are in the image of God and Christ. I would say that's a good summary of what we hold. For First United Methodist Church, this congregation, we have some distinctives. I believe we share in common with other United Methodists our sense of purpose that is to make disciples of Jesus for the transformation of the world. It's also important for us to help to help those who have responded to the Christian message to change the world for the better. We have a stronger emphasis on changing the world than many congregations do because much of our identity is wrapped up in outreach.

Student: You spoke of responding to God's grace and spiritual rejuvenation. How does one become a member?

MG: Practically, a person presents himself at the end of any service of worship and says I would like to become a member. We welcome people with open arms who wish to make that commitment. We ask people to make some very basic commitments. We ask them, "Do you have faith in God? Do you accept Jesus as your savior? Are you willing to live a Christian life?" If people say yes, that's the end of our asking. In other words, it's not the end of faith, but we don't ask them to sign off on a statement of faith if they're able to answer those questions affirmatively. We also ask people if they will support the United Methodist Church with their prayers, presence, gifts, and service. The way we talk about here currently is if they will support the church with their spiritual life, their stewardship, and their service. If they say, "Yes, we'll do those things," then we welcome that person to membership. So at the end of worship service on any given Sunday there might be people who present themselves and there's an open invitation.

Administratively, we transfer people from other Christian churches. So if they're a member of the Baptist church, and they say they'd like to join, we write that church and say so and so has joined our church please send a letter of transfer. Same thing would be true for other United Methodist churches or in the Christian body. Some churches don't transfer membership by their own doctrine so we acknowledge that, but we always write to let their previous church know if they have an active relationship so they're not living out their membership in two places.

We also receive members by profession of faith. If they do not have an active somewhere else or they're accepting the Christian faith for the first time, we record they have made a profession of faith which is the "yes" to those questions I mentioned previously. And so, we receive Christians by profession of their faith. For people who are baptized in the church as infants which we practice, we have confirmation, which is for children who are a part of the church who have been baptized or not been baptized, to accept for themselves Christianity as an adult not just as something they inherit. There are no spiritual children or grandchildren. People must decide. We believe that time comes for every person when they must decide to accept the Christian faith.

Student: Throughout the church history, has there been any division?

MG: Near as I can tell, looking over the church history that I've read, there has not been a church schism. There are churches that have experienced that nearby. For example, First Baptist Church across the street from us, experienced a division, and a portion of that congregation left to found Metropolitan Baptist. We have not had that kind of history that I'm aware of. First United Methodist has started a variety of congregations because we have been here forever, so to speak, in Wichita.

There have been episodes where the church has experienced what I would call a fairly significant crisis, but it would not be what I would call division or schism. Those moments of crisis that I'm aware of, at least in the last 100 years, have often been around the departure of a senior minister or an associate minister. And so during parts of our history we've had a resignation of a senior pastor or the death of a senior pastor. Or we've had the resignation of either a senior or associate pastor who has gone through divorce or had an affair. That's happened a fair number of times in our history. Those factors are a part of what it means to be a minister here with members who have survived those difficult memories.

So that is certainly a part of many of the congregations and certainly a part of the history here. While there's not been any division where half the congregation left or something like that, there have been challenging moments in our history. I think any church that's honest will say there have been challenging moments in the history of every church, but there have been significant moments of transition, very hard on our congregation when a senior leader has an extra marital affair, for example. Very difficult for a congregation to experience that kind of transition and it has happened here several times.

Student: Are there any other anecdotes that have happened in the life of your ministry or your previous history in Kansas City or Denver or your personal history or the history of your church you'd like to talk about?

MG: I guess I would say at the age 57, I'm 57 years old, so I've been doing this a long time. It has been my career the majority of my lifetime. I am delighted to do what I'm doing. There will come a point at some time, I'm certain, when I'm ready to retire. This isn't it. I'm having a wonderful time. I love what I do. I feel a sense of calling to do it, but I also feel a sense of fulfillment in doing it. Those aren't always the same thing. I think people sometimes feel constrained or compelled to answer a call to do something, and then don't find that very satisfying. I think that's entirely too bad and I would invite them to rethink their sense of calling or compulsion to do something that provides no satisfaction. I love what I do. I get up out of bed in the morning and I'm excited about what the day holds. I believe that everyone's vocation, that is how God has designed life. That doesn't mean it's always going to be easy or every day is enjoyable. That would be ludicrous for me to suggest that. Days have challenges. But I love what I do. I have never regretted answering the call to ministry. I've tried to always be both a person and a pastor, I think those are important, and not to be objectified by the role I play. I love what I do. I'm as excited to preach on Sunday morning as I did when I was young. I think I know more than I did when I was younger, I'm more experienced. But I find ministry very fulfilling as a vocation if persons have an interest, I don't know service as a

pastor is sort of the top of vocational profile persons look at when they graduate from high school or college. Probably not. However, I find it to be both fascinating, varied, interest, exciting, there is an opportunity in doing ministry to watch lives change. To have a great privilege of spending some time with people and watch their lives be impacted by religious faith. I have had to opportunity to watch people who were broke experience healing. I have the experience of being able to look at people who are overcome by guilt or regret find forgiveness. I have the opportunity to watch persons being a journey of faith and mature in that faith. I have had the opportunity to watch children have their lives impacted by Christianity. I have the opportunity to watch a person in their 80s still be able to capture a new idea. I have the opportunity to watch someone who is on this Christian journey inspire me by their dedication to serving God. I had the opportunity to work with and get to know some amazing human beings. It's just a delight. People don't always know that about ministry. There can be great joy in doing this job that I do.