

Tim Miller: Yep I believe we're going. So it is September 23rd, 2009, we are in Lawrence with Lawrence Grove and the topic today will be Methodism in Kansas. So I guess to start it off, will you just say a little bit about yourself and how you came to be a Methodist and things like that?

Lawrence Grove: Certainly. That's really an interesting question because I was born a Methodist. My great grandfather was a Methodist minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church Southwest Kansas conference. He was ordained in 1889 and he retired in 1929 and he died in 1949 so all those 9s. One of his sons, my great uncle Paul was the Methodist minister serving his years in Illinois. My mother and dad went to Baker University, the first Methodist university in Kansas. And their experiences was that during the general conferences which united the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South and the Methodist Protestant Church into the Methodist church. They sang in the conference choir at the service of unification. So that was always an important part of our life together. My dad, though he was a pharmaceutical salesman, up until 1966 he called himself either a drug pusher or a pill pusher but then he got a letter from Kansas City where the Upjohn company was quartered for the region and was a very tirsh memo, it said "you are no longer a pill pusher, you are no longer a drug salesman, you are a pharmaceutical representative." So those were the drugs years and dad always thought that was an interesting thing. He always thought that he was pretty much a pharmaceutical representative anyway.

But he was also a very important part of the laity of First Methodist Church in Winfield, Kansas. He enjoyed what we called a preaching. He taught Sunday school. He was involved in Methodist men activities, both in the local church and in the district and conference church. My mom was involved in church camping. In fact, my wife knew all of my family before she knew me. We always thought that was a rather interesting thing. Everybody had heard of Mary Lou, except me. But when I heard of her that was all I needed so that was good. (laughter). The issue of being a part of the college. I went to at that time the University of Wichita for a year. Never really did feel home there. Went to southwestern college in Winfield, Kansas where I finished my Bachelor of Arts degree. I was headed towards medical school early and then I began to realize that maybe medical school wasn't really where I was called to be. That God really wanted me involved in ordained ministry rather than the practice of medicine. I've never been sorry. I'm sure I haven't had as much money as I would have had, had I been a physician. But the life satisfaction and the opportunities for service have really been important to me.

In terms of my ministry after I went to Southwestern I went to Emory University Candler School of Theology and I noticed that from 2007 that the law and religion, I remember seeing that poster before it was posted here. I don't know how long it's been posted here. It was in 2007 and I was on campus and there was that very same poster there before that conference was held so I felt right at home when I saw that being displayed here. After graduation, I came back to Kansas and served in what we now know as Kansas West Conference for 37 years. And then I had transferred to the Kansas East Conference when I had an appointment here. So that's basically it. I've enjoyed my time as a minister. I wouldn't have it any other way. I don't know that I would recommend it to anyone who hasn't been called. If one doesn't feel the call to ministry I would say "do something else". But if you do, you will never be happy with any other type of commitment. So does that get us started?

Tim: Sure

Lawrence: Good

Tim: Ok. Could you go back and say a little about how Methodist came to Kansas? Because they were here pretty much at the beginning of settlement.

Lawrence: Right. Kansas was really an important part of an important area to the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Methodist Episcopal Church started on Christmas day in 1785 I believe it was. And one of the hallmarks and one of the big interests of the Methodist Episcopal Church was that of opposing slavery. Slavery was a really significant evil as far as the Methodist Episcopal Church was concerned. So when the Kansas Territory was formed in 1854, and of course Missouri was already a slave state, there were a number of people in the Methodist Episcopal Church who believed that this was the place, Kansas was going to be the place, where either slavery was either given the okay to go from the middle part of the country as far west as it might go or if possible to stop it right here in Kansas. That was the big issue. You take Independence, Missouri, was an important part of the stepping off place into the western part of the country and Baldwin City, where Baker's located, was four days away from Independence so there were a number of entrepreneurial type people, we would call them, who set up repair shops, general stores who were able to serve that western movement. Well the issue then became where people were. The Methodist Episcopal Church was the church that decided where people were, we needed to be there too. So the Methodist preacher was not very far behind the general store, or the railroad or the army. So there was quite an interesting relationship between people who were lay preachers, we would call them, trained in some Bible, trained in some administrative activity, given then they were committed to meeting each other annually. It's an annual conference. And as a result, the Methodist preachers were in communion with each other. And that is a pattern that was still have today. The State of Kansas of course, was known as Bleeding Kansas because of everything. Lawrence was at the center of the issue. The first area of the capital was very close to Lawrence. Lawrence, if you read the Lawrence Daily Journal World, had what I thought was a very interesting editorial called "the big birthday" on Sunday saying how Lawrence was established by conviction that slavery needed to be opposed and needed to be abolished. And that is really why the Methodist preachers and those who were interested in the Methodist Episcopal Church chose Kansas to be such an important area. A lot of resources were here, there were a number of lay preachers who died here, not only because of the bullets but also a lot of the time because of the weather. Just various things happened that were very difficult. A lot of accidents, Bishop Don Holder, one of our United Methodist bishops has written a book "Fire on the Prairie" and if you have any interest in the Methodist movement from a more technical view, Bishop Holder's book is very very good book. Very good resource to indicate that. But the church followed the people; in fact the way that the Methodist preachers found their way across Kansas was two ways. One where the railroad was, they followed the railroad and wherever there was a settlement they would usually stop and hold services and begin to make contact with families that would be sympathetic to the Methodist cause. Or another way they did it was that they followed the wagon tracks. If you had wagon trail, you could expect a Methodist preacher to be very close behind. The Methodist preachers also found it very important to serve the needs of the army. A number of Methodist churches were established around forts. Fort Larned, Fort Leavenworth, in fact one of our oldest churches in our Kansas

East Conference is in Leavenworth. And of course Fort Leavenworth was the reason for that church being founded. Fort Scott, another church that has a long history. It came too, because of Fort Scott. Fort Hays was not one, Fort Larned, Fort Dodge, some of the forts that you don't hear of now. Fort Harker, near Salina, Fort Phillips, not too far from Salina. All these places became locations for early Methodist work. And at one time, I'm not sure it's true now, but at least ten years ago, there were those who did some work and said there were more Methodist churches in Kansas than there were post offices. So that is one part. The church has always been interested in the rural areas and small churches. Three quarters of our churches now are smaller than one hundred members. We have some huge ones too, but three quarters of churches in our denomination are under a hundred members. Now I'm in retirement I'm serving two churches. One church has a membership of 33 and the other church has a membership of 26. And at some point they will die. But my commitment is that of providing ministry to meaningful ways and I'm finding though I'm doing ministry very differently than I did at Hays or at College Hill in Wichita, gives in Salina and various places it is still is a significant part of my life and that helping people face the end of life issues, help people face a number of the economic issues of unemployment. Now we have some of our folks that are in the prison system. They go home every day but a number of them work at Leavenworth federal penitentiary. Others work at Lansing. We have a couple of families that are army personnel working at Leavenworth Disciplinary Barracks. So the Methodist church in Kansas followed the way west and a lot of the reason was the issue of slavery and as a result there were a number of issues that were encountered in this day that have kind of come out of the slavery concern. Civil rights, if you read about the civil rights movement, the Methodist church was very much a part of that movement. As Doctor Shelton can tell you. Were you ever in jail, Bob, or just close?

(background answer: Just close.)

Lawrence Grove: Is transparency the jargon word here? Ok Bob's my brother-in-law. He's been that way for 44 years so Mary Lou's his sister. So I've enjoyed being a part of Methodist concern here at KU as well, and part of it is because of Bob's concern too. Well I'll stop there and let you go with another question.

Tim Miller: Just to follow up on where we've just been here, Methodists of course, were very well known in the early 19th century in their involvement with the revivals that spread through the west and stuff. I wonder, thinking of that, what were distinctive, how were Methodists unlike Presbyterians, and Lutherans or others who were also here?

Lawrence Grove: Well, the early Methodists were formed into what we would call circuits. We had circuit riders. The genius of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, always a member of the Church of England, never a member of the Methodist church, was one who had the practical skills of getting people organized so that they could do Christian work. He had a way of helping people learn in some cases, a matter of reading. The Methodists preachers, one of the first things they were asked is "can you read?" If they said no then that did not disqualify that person from being a Methodist preacher, that person just had to learn to read. And so there was a lot of literacy that happened as a result of interest in Methodist work. So that was a part of it too. The other part of it was the deep and abiding concern that they believed that Jesus was talking to them. They were to go into the world, they were to preach the gospel, they were to baptize. And

they believed with all of our heart and soul that Jesus was going to be with them until the end of the age. Taking that, and realizing that wherever people were, that's where they were called to go. Didn't make any difference if it was dangerous, didn't make any difference if it was out in the middle of nowhere, whether it was in a town. But the thing that probably brought the Methodist church as quickly as anything was the willingness to go west with the movement of the army, the movement of commerce. So those were the issues and the Methodist preachers basically had just a few sermons. In fact there was one, my great grandmother; the wife of my great grandfather who was a Methodist preacher in the Southwest Kansas Conference, said that in her early years, she remembered a number of Methodist preachers. She said she didn't like to hear them preach very much because they always used the same five sermons. And my great grandfather said "Fanny now don't be too hard on them, they were not educated people like you are. I was just glad they were able to learn five sermons and I'm glad they used them effectively" "Well William, I don't like them. I like to hear more variety than five sermons." But the reason they got by with that is because they were often in that church or that gathering once a month so they didn't really get tired of those five sermons. But they had what we might call "canned sermons". Usually there was one sermon on salvation. There was one sermon on assurance, which was one of John Wesley's very important concepts. There was another sermon on Christian living, living responsibly in most cases not using alcohol, not using tobacco. A fourth sermon was usually around doing good. And the fifth one was often about not doing harm. And if you are familiar with the general rules of the Methodist church, the Methodist movement, that was pretty much it. The first rule was "do no harm", the second is to "do good", the third one was to "attend to the ordinances of God." Or as we are now saying stay in love with God. So Wesley was able to take the gospel and distill in into a small portion that just about anybody could use. And they were very effective in their work. Now, when you begin to look at Baker University, 1858, you look at Southwestern College, which was started by the Southwestern Annual Conference in 1885. The conference started three years before. They put the college in place in place three years after the conference was installed or established. And then the third one, the north part of the state in Salina, the Northwest Kansas Conference was started in 1884 and Kansas Wesleyan was started in 1886. So the annual conferences started colleges very, very quickly. It wanted educated people; they wanted to be able to have people be a part of society. They wanted people to be able to read the Bible and want them to use Christian life in a healthy way. So our colleges were a really important part of helping the church in its revival activities. Still today, in our Book of Discipline, what is the mission of the church, well the mission statement is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. That's it. Very simple. And yes I use it every week. Not always on Sunday but if anybody says "what is the purpose of the church?" ...bang... I bring that out of the discipline. I don't carry that around with me all the time but "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world". A lot of times people say "wow, ok, that sounds good". So that is a recent statement of how the circuit riders saw it too... the transformation of the society was a big part of the revival movement that we experienced. and the fact that we were oriented toward the rural area I think really made us a bit more open to people because we would take the church to where they were expecting them to go to the gathering place. We would always gather where they were.

Tim Miller: What kinds of rituals and ceremonies did they have back in the 19th century?

Lawrence Grove: Often, the basic service of worship was basically singing. In fact, Charles Wesley had set in place, the hymn position that the Methodist use. Charles Wesley wrote, depending on how you count, some people say he wrote 3000, some say he wrote 9000. I don't know, some of the ones are so similar to the others that I don't know if they would really qualify for having their own title particularly. But he would write, he wrote them in all sorts of meters, so not matter what, if you found a tune that had a certain meter to it you could find a hymn to fit that meter. And as a result, one of the ways in which the Methodist preachers were taught, they were taught a few hymns that could be used by, in some cases, the drinking songs of the day. It was not unusual for the Methodist preachers to know how, all you did was count that syllables in each line and he'd figure out the meter and hum along and figure out a tune and usually he could find a tune that would line up with the words. And that was a very effective use of outreach. Second was reading the Bible. They read the Bible publicly. They prayed publicly. Then after the sermon there was a time of offering people an opportunity to become part of a small group. It didn't make any difference whether you were rich or poor. Or whether you were army or whether you weren't army, it didn't make any difference who you were, you were welcome. Now if you were there more than three times you were expected to begin, as they said, exhibiting the fruits of Christian life. If you were a person who had been selling spirituous liquors, then you were to stop. If you were one... the only person who could not be part of the Methodist society, was a person who owned slaves. There were some other reasons not to, spirituous liquor was a big deal too, but if there was a person who owned slaves, that was a big issue. So, it was a combination of public worship and then small groups. Now remember that the circuit rider was on his way; on Monday morning, he was gone. So these people became very good at selecting lay people to lead those groups. Then when he would come back on the circuit again he would check back on those leaders and there would be a time that he would spend with leaders to encourage them and to make sure they were offering quality leadership. There was always a concern that quality leadership be provided. If they didn't offer quality leadership then the Methodist preacher, by tradition said that you could no longer lead, and find somebody else. We don't do it quite that way anymore, but it was an interesting way. And there were some people that got angry and would say "forget it". But that issue of leadership was a big part. So if you are with a small group, that was one of traditions of our church and our movement. It's a really good way to help people grow.

Tim Miller: You talked about how the church planters would follow the trails, now what do you do in the mid 1850s in Kansas when the trail leads off to a town that probably has two houses in it. There's not much settlement in the very early years. What would they do physically, where did they stay and where did they worship? Just in people's houses?

Lawrence Grove: Yeah they did. Again from my great grandma, and she died at 96. Her life started in Kansas shortly before the Civil War. And as a result she was one who had some connection and knew about some of these things. She said there were very few places where Methodist preachers weren't welcome. If there was a farm house or a little place that often the Methodist preacher would be given a meal and bed down with the horses in the barn. Sometimes, the house was small to the point that it couldn't hold more than the family. And the Methodist preacher was very happy, the barn's fine. And then usually it was not uncommon for the people to put the word out that there was a Methodist preacher and that there would be a potluck. Potlucks became a really big part of the early church and still I would say that a matter of what

church you're in, you probably have the chance to pick up a meal every once in a while. Fellowship meals of different kinds. And as a consequence, that would happen more than one would realize, it would be four or five people, some of the families were anytime between five and eight. So there was kind of a nice congregation there. You have to get another family together and you have about a dozen or maybe a little more. It just kind of snowballed. Yeah, once in awhile it wouldn't work, but it was amazingly effective. And just being willing to relate to the people that are there and being willing to live a simple life style and being willing to endure the hardships that nature and the situation would put on you.

Tim Miller: Let me see if I can lead you into this. Did they ever preach in commercial establishments?

Lawrence Grove: (With excitement) Oh! Absolutely! Tommy Drum! I was pastor in Hays for six years and one of the things that I found when I got there were two things. One was that Fort Hays was really an army fort; of course I knew that before I went. But that was that Fort Hays was an important army establishment helping to protect the businesses from banditry etc. And the railroad was there early on. And as a result of the railroad being there a Methodist preacher came and was looking for a place and he happened to encounter a man by the name of Tommy Drum. Tommy Drum was a saloon owner. So apparently, this Methodist preacher didn't have it in his mind that selling distilled spirits was something that he shouldn't be involved with so he went into the saloon and just asked a question, "Is there any need for Methodist work here?" And Tommy Drum said "absolutely."

Tommy Drum came from Boston and he had been aware of Methodists there and knew that they were good responsible people or so the Hays story goes. And he invited the preacher and anyone who followed him to hold Sunday services in his saloon. So what he would do would be to take the whiskey bottles down, he would cover the bar and so the bar was basically the altar. And that was an important part. However, by that time Welch had pretty well figured out a way to keep grape juice from fermenting and so the early Methodists didn't use real wine for communion services. I never quite figured out how the Methodist preachers always came up with the grape juice, but they seemed to. So they used their communion services with grape juice rather than with wine. The thing about Tommy Drum was that especially with the army guys, they would come in Saturday night after a long week at work, he would make them promise that if they were to be drinking Saturday night, they had to come to church Sunday morning. And apparently there were those who were "I'm not coming to church" so he wouldn't let them in the saloon Saturday night. So Tommy Drum was one of those people that every once in a while you think about saloon owners not really caring about people but he was there to serve the needs of the army. He was making money but also was providing an important service, to have a good quality place for the men to gather. And the Hays church came out of that environment; as a result there became, to this day, a very strong congregation. Now other Hays people may tell the story differently, but that's what I heard.

Tim Miller: I want to pursue the alcohol thing a little more. The Methodists are very well known for being one of the most resolutely anti-alcohol churches through much of their history, I think not as much today as they once were, but could you say a little about where that came from and how pervasive it was and why that has been toned down in more recent years.

Lawrence Grove: The early Methodist did a lot with the New Testament, with the total Bible. John Wesley was really quite a remarkable scholar. He was one who learned the Greek language when he was at Oxford, learned the Hebrew language when he was at Oxford. He also was a good church history, a good student of liturgy. But he also was deeply concerned about the lives of people. The early Methodists of England had a view that God made both rich and poor. This is right out of the book of Proverbs if you're familiar with the Bible, you'll find that that's part of the wisdom tradition. In James, a little so-called letter, he makes that point too, that you just must not differentiate between rich and poor, God made everyone. And James's view was that the poor were poor in things, but they were often rich in spirit and they were those who would inherit the Kingdom. So Wesley took that very seriously, to the coal miners, to women, to children, to people who were seen as the marginalized people of society. As a result, the practice was, especially in the coal mines, in Bristol, etc., the guys would come out of the coal mine at the end of the week and they would get paid and there were saloons that were placed right close to where they were paid by the coal company and it was not uncommon for them to really drink up the family income on that one night. So Wesley said that's not right, families are suffering. If these people are going to suffer because of spirituous liquors, distilled spirits, we won't use them either. Taking out of the reference in the Corinthian letters, to the issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols. The issue was, well I don't think of the idol when I eat meat, so what is the problem with my eating the meat? And Paul said well that's fine but what about the person who does think about the idol when he's eating the meat that's sacrificed to the idol and the mystery religions would then take the meat and distribute them to the poor. And so Paul said, if you run into this issue then you don't eat meat either. If you're around these people that can't handle it then you don't eat it either. You don't want to cause them to fall or to sin. So Wesley took that same principle and said with spirituous liquors, if this is a problem then we will not be involved. Noticed he said spirituous liquors, distilled spirits; what we found out since we have had access to Wesley's diary is that Wesley always did encourage people to have a pint of bitters a day. He was very concerned about health and he believed in eating moderately. He believed in having a pint of bitters, of ale, per day, not more than one, but have one, to get plenty of exercise and to get plenty of sleep. Some of the stuff you're hearing in good health practices now, John Wesley was encouraging Methodist people to do. So what we found is that Wesley was not a teetotaler. He did use wine in communion services as a priest. He did have a pint of bitters per day, but it was the issue of spirituous liquors that was a problem. When the Methodist movement came from England to the United States, that distinction got blurred. There were some of the Methodist-Episcopal Church people that were very rabid about the use of any kind of alcohol. But now the issue is that of responsibility, which I think Wesley was about all the time. So we still don't use wine at our communion services. We don't at our social gatherings. I got a letter from Saint Martin's Lutheran Church up on K-7 "come to Oktoberfest", dinner was \$10 for adults and \$4 for kids and the beer garden, the draws were 2 bucks. And I still thought that still kind of grates against me a little bit, here's a church that's having \$2 draws. It's not that I openly oppose that particularly, it's just that I think, "Isn't that odd, isn't that different, that that church life is different than what we experience." I would say most people, many United Methodist people, drink responsibly and have no problem with it and I have no problem with it either. But that history was not totally understood, but let's face it, along the frontier there was a lot of alcohol abuse too. And so there was really a big concern about people living well.

Tim Miller: What was life like for children? Were there Sunday schools or children's programs from early days?

Lawrence Grove: Depending where you were. The more developed that the Methodist church got, the Sunday school was put into place very quickly. Two reasons, one was the issue of raising, again the biblical faith, talking about raising a child well so the person would have a good adult life. So the issue of helping children learn Bible stories, learn basic "love your neighbor as you love yourself", those kinds of things, were very much a part of early teaching. On the frontier, children interestingly were just a part of the church. They really didn't have a lot of differentiation. My great grand mother, one of her earliest memories often children would take the offering at church. Now admittedly she was involved in a church that was fairly developed at that time, but kids would be a part, in that case the pastor had a story for them, then two of the kids, they would select each Sunday and it was the children who took up the offering at worship. So children were respected and I think of course, that my experience with the church was much more developed than the early part of it. But in the church that I grew up in up there in Winfield, there was a long tradition of significant children's ministry. We had two people that were part time, one dealt with K-4 and the other person dealt with 5-8, then we had a youth director from 8th grade, 9th grade on up. So the issue of children's work was really quite important. And again, as the Methodist preachers went about, they located and made sure the children knew how to read. They encouraged them. The small groups were encouraged to teach kids how to read so they could live a better life.

Tim Miller: How about money, how were things financed? If you want to build a church building how do you pay for it?

Lawrence Grove: Ok, early on or now?

Tim Miller: Well, both.

Lawrence Grove: Early on, the Methodist Church was, in Wesley's day in England, was an issue of being connected. He talked about the connection. That preachers are connected to each other, the society, the small groups were connected to each other. As Wesley would go from place to place he would visit with the different societies and the bands of lay people were there in an important way. And as a result, whenever they had something they held in common they always understood that the movement, or in the case the church was basic owner of the building. And when it came to the United States, all of the church building were what we called a trust clause, that the local congregation holds that property in trust for the annual conference. So how is it financed? Well it was often financed through pledges. Money was often raised, the Book of Discipline, I have the current one here, but the book of discipline early on encouraged at least ten percent of the money raised before anything was done, construction wise. A number of churches would raise more than that. The loans were not a prolific as they are now, so finding the other part of the money was in some cases more difficult. But now, often the churches are financed through the denomination itself. Some cases, they use banks, but in many cases the churches would have loans from the different parts of the United Methodist church system. So the ownership is by an annual conference and if a church closes the assets then go to the annual conference. So during the civil rights days there were some Methodist churches in Mississippi

and also Alabama as I recall, who were trying to leave the denomination and trying to take the buildings with them. They went to court and because of connectional system, those congregations could leave, but they couldn't take the buildings. The buildings were to remain with the denomination. And that became a very significant part of support for churches that were, what we might call doing the right thing as far as race was concerned. It was really a significant part of our work. Today, every once in a while, we have people who think they want to go and form their own church or do something else and they still have tried to break the trust clause, but they haven't been able to do it so far. In Kansas two years ago, in the West Conference, there was a congregation that had threatened to file suit against the trust clause, but as the story came out the attorney said "you're wasting your time, the courts won't hear it". They wanted to take with them the property. It was a significant amount of property, it was about two and a half million dollars worth of church buildings so that has been a really big part of who we are. And the whole idea is that we are connected, we are covenanted with each other. We aren't just a group of congregations, we are a connection. I find that to be very much a part of my life. I appreciate that very much.

Student: Following up on that, I'm not sure if you mentioned this previously. Following up on that, with the church body being united like that is there some semblance of an overarching church governance? And if so, when did that come about?

Lawrence Grove: Yes there is. We have what we call a general conference. It meets every four years. The general conference started out very, very early. In fact the Christmas conference was really what would be called a general conference where the Methodist-Episcopal Church was established. That governance right now is composed of a thousand delegates across the church. Half clergy, half lay. Each annual conference is given a certain number of clergy to elect and an equal number of lay people to elect. And so then the product of the general conference is this Book of Discipline which is issued every four years. This is the latest edition. And the Book of Resolutions, which the general conference is speaking to the churches. The Book of Resolutions is a very good teaching tool. This is a very thick book now; early on the resolutions were very simple, often against slavery, often against distilled spirits. A resolution to love a neighbor was one that was in an early Book of Resolutions. So yes we do have a governance. Then the general conference, the churches have 72 annual conferences. In Kansas: the Kansas East Conference and the Kansas West Conference. In 2012 it will no longer be the Kansas area; it will be the Nebraska-Kansas area. We are going to be creating a new Episcopal area where there will be one bishop over Nebraska and Kansas. So that bishop in all likelihood will have three annual conference sessions to preside over. And then each annual conference has districts and each local church is a member of a district. Is that more than you ever wanted to know? (laughter)

Student: What is the role of the bishop?

Lawrence Grove: The bishop is the basic superintendent, is the general superintendent of an annual conference. The bishops are elected for life; they are elected by the jurisdictional conferences. That's another part of it. About the only thing that jurisdictional conferences do right now is have some property, in our case, the south central jurisdiction owns Southern Methodist University in Dallas. And also, we elect bishops every four years. So the bishop is then elected for life and that person is assigned to an annual conference. In our case, Bishop

Scott Jones presides over the Kansas East and the Kansas West Conferences. They are formed into what we call the college of bishops, which is the gathering of all the bishops across the church. Excuse me, that's the council of bishops. The college of bishops are the bishops in each jurisdiction. So the bishops work together with each other, they preside over the annual conference, they are responsible for appointing pastors to their places of service. Very important position in our denomination. That's why we're called an Episcopal organization. The word Episcopal meaning having a bishop. Do I like the bishop? Yes I do. (laughter)

Tim Miller: Well, his kids went to KU so that makes him a good a good guy. Did he?

Lawrence Grove: Yeah he's an alumnus of KU. But really as far as the superintending of the church, in my years I have only had one district superintendent that I didn't like. I don't think that's half bad. But I didn't think he was all that hot. And he shall remain nameless.

Student: You said that bishops were elected for life, what if perhaps they were found or deemed unworthy of that position. What sorts of proceedings would occur?

Lawrence Grove: Ok, if there is a complaint against a bishop, it could be for sexual harassment, it could be for malfeasance, mismanagement of the position; it's not just making a mistake. We had one bishop who had his orders taken away because he was doing things with a woman who wasn't his wife. There is a procedure, there is a committee of the episcopacy in each annual conference and so the complaint would go to the committee on episcopacy. The chair of the committee on episcopacy would send that complaint on to the college of bishops. The college of bishops then is required to investigate and also if it is merited to have a church trial and if a bishop is convicted, not only will he no longer be a bishop, but he will no longer have his ministerial orders enforced. And that person would be a lay person after that.

Student: What would the proceedings of the church trial be like?

Lawrence Grove: What would the church trial be like? I've only read about them but what would happen, in the case of a bishop, the president of the college of bishops would then select probably three bishops to oversee the proceeding. And what they would do would be to find a person who would basically be a prosecutor; often they are people with legal experience who are ordained. One of my friends in the southeast jurisdiction was a prosecutor, he's a lawyer and then he became ordained later. But he was a prosecutor in this case I was referring to. Then there is an appointment of what you would call a defense attorney, a defender. There would then be a panel of people. It would be a panel of twelve, very much like a civilian court. And then the president of the college of bishops would preside. In the case of a minister in a church trial it's very similar except there is a committee of investigations and the committee will then begin the process. And yes, the process is described in the Book of Discipline. If you want to organize a church, here it is; if you want to try a pastor, here it is. Anything really, if you want to start a church, here you go. And I think this is one of the reasons the Methodist church has been successful. It has some good administrative processes in place. And the issue of being fair is a big idea. I've been on a hearing panel before it got to trial and it really, in one case we referred to a trial and on another case we didn't. And the issue of being a fair process is so important to what we're about. It's a gut wrenching process because putting one of your brothers or sisters on

trial, it's really really significant for their life and for the life of the annual conference. So every time a church trial comes up I just hope my name doesn't come up to be on the panel. I don't look forward to it. I've survived it so far so maybe being retired, it won't happen now.

Student: What kinds of conflicts or issues have come up with the conference, either more locally or nationwide? How have they been dealt with, if at all, and how do they affect the small rural congregations since that's what your focus has been?

Lawrence Grove: When you say a conflict is there anything in particular?

Student: say a political issue or issues that have come up in the church, things like that. I'm thinking more politically as opposed to more theological issues.

Lawrence: Homosexuality has been a big one for us in the last few years. It started out, it came into play about 1972 if I do recall. We still haven't resolved it. The way it is set now, is we say all people are of sacred worth; however, we will not ordain self-avowed, practicing homosexual people. Now, you can see there are some wiggle room in that one. Self-avowed, but what happens if they are practicing but not self-avowed? If they have never said to anybody "I'm gay" or "I have a partner"? There have been some cases of that that I know of. And that person still serves. That person has been a good minister. Before I was aware that his or her homosexuality and I wouldn't for the world want that person to be suspended. Another case where a person said "yes I am of homosexual orientation, I'm basically self-avowed, but I'm not practicing," that person is still serving. But if a person says "I am a gay person and here's my partner," that person will have their orders removed. Do I agree with that? No, I don't. I think it's a double signal. At some point, and this is my own opinion, I think we'll somehow get beyond it and realize that the concern we have about homosexual pastors is misplaced, because I have known a number of them and in some cases I didn't know about their homosexuality until much later, until they were no longer in ministry, they were very effective. Now, how has it affected people? We've had a number of people; I've had people in some of the churches I've served say "until you remove that understanding of homosexuality I will no longer be a member of the Methodist Church." And what do I do, I say "I'm sorry you feel that way, but this is where we are and we commend you on your way." It's a very difficult one. But another part early on, earlier in the 60s, was the issue of race. There were people who left because of having the ordination of black people. And we are beyond that now, and I'm hoping at some point that we can do the same with our homosexual brothers and sisters because a number of them are very capable people. So a lot of times, these political things do get people to that point where they no longer choose to be part of the denomination. And we've had people who have said that "until you change your view on homosexuality, until you ordain homosexual people, we will never be a part of a United Methodist Church." And how do I know, because one of our sons and daughters have that view. They are Episcopalians, they will not be United Methodist ever with the stand that we have. How do I know? Because he's told me. To my face.

Question: What do they do about the position of the Episcopal church?

Lawrence Grove: Well they're one of the churches that has had homosexual priests. Their diocese of Chicago has been very open. I've said to Matt, "what happens if they decide not to

continue that policy?" "We're gone, we think it's unjust." So that's one area. Are there any others?

Student: I wasn't even sure if there was something particular within the Methodist church, maybe a political issue that had come up, I mean, it's a broad topic.

Lawrence Grove: I think in other cases the issue of church and state. When Bishop Hicks, who was our bishop for eight years, was in Arkansas he was very involved in the issue of prayer in the schools. And he was at that point that schools should not have the power to force prayer in any way. And he took a lot of hits on the thing. But that was another issue that's been a part of the whole thing. Early on, child labor, the child labor laws. What do you do with children? The Methodist Episcopal Church was one of the early voices against child labor. Bishop Francis McConnelly who was pastor of First Methodist Church in Pittsburgh, was one who was very much one on child labor. One of his kids was working at a steel mill and fell into a ladle of steel. That experience just absolutely said we just can't have this anymore. When he was elected to the episcopacy, child labor became a really big portion of his ministry. And he guided the church shortly after WWI into an understanding of the value of children. That really took a lot out of him but he really gave a lot in return.

Tim Miller: Can you, we're not going to carry this on too much longer...

Lawrence Grove: Oh I'm having a great time (laughter)

Tim Miller: Okay, great. Tell us about an unforgettable character or two if you can.

Lawrence Grove: Okay.

Tim Miller: Any really colorful people?

Lawrence Grove: My first appointment was in 1967. It was a small town named Enterprise, which is near Abilene. The Airsome Company was a foundry, it's out of business now, but at that time it had been part of the Enterprise community for over 60 years. There had not been a strike in 40 years so there was reasonable camaraderie with the management. We had management and we had union folk in the church. But the thing got to the point that there was going to be a strike. I was down on Main Street and I noticed that there was the person who chaired of our pastor-parish relations committee who was a worker, not a management person. And I noticed that he, when I walked by, he had a brick in his hand. He had a fire in his eye that I had never seen that in him in my life. I've been pastor of that church eight months at that time. Honeymoon period was going real quick. (laughter) But I walked up to him and I called him by name and I said, (he was just about to throw the thing). The plant manager was driving by and he was ready to blow out the back windshield with this brick. And I said, "Do you really want to do this?" He looked at me and saw who I was and he said "I don't think so." And so I put my hand on his shoulder and I said "Let me have your brick. I'll take care of it for you." He said, "Well what are you going to do with it?" I said "I'm going to take it back to my office." I said, "Tomorrow if you want the brick, come by and we can talk about it." Now that was one that really was an interesting character.

Another character in that church was a retired English teacher. Enterprise High School had just been closed and she had retired. She said “they forced me to retire by closing the school. The only reason they closed that school so they could get me to retire.” I don’t know if that’s true or not, but she needed to retire anyway I’m sure. But she was eccentric. And how do I know she was eccentric? She said she was. She told me. When I first met her, I walked across the street to her house, knocked on the door and I introduced myself. She said “I know who you are, I was in church Sunday.” So we talked and she said “one thing you need to know pastor is that I am eccentrics” “You are?” “I am and I wear that label honorably.” She kind of took herself up and she said, “Would you like some tea?” I said “I’d love some tea,” so we had some tea and she had made some cookies. She had said that she had made the cookies and she had put on a little card the date that she had made the cookies. And so she said “you want to know why I have this date on the card?” I said “Yeah, I’d be interested.” She said “these cookies were going to stay on the plate until you came by to see me. And I thought maybe it would take six months or eight months.” She said, “You see these cookies over here?” They were sugar cookies and they looking kind of gross. She said “yes, they’ve been here for eighteen years. That pastor never did come to see me, so I still got his cookies. You know who it is.” I said, “Yes I do” “You tell him if he wants his cookies, he can come by and get them from me.” (laughter) Well that was kind of the thing. Well then the issue came by that she would come into worship sometimes ten minutes late, fifteen minutes late and she would walk in and usually the door would slam or she would drop the hymn book or something would happen. Sometimes the choir was singing and we’d hear this big crash in the back, well we knew she was here. And as a result, we just kind of expected that fact that these strange things are going to happen. One of the kids said “Pastor, our church is haunted except the ghost is alive.” (laughter) When she heard about that she said “oh, I’m going to have to remember that. I’m going to write that down in my book so when my funeral comes they can use that. And we did. She asked me if I would come by to see her. This was in my second year. I said I’d be glad to. She said, “This is Thursday”, and she said “I want you to know, I’ve decided to change my ways.” And I said, “How so?” She said, “I’ve decided I’m going to be on time at church.” I said “Oh, that’d be nice, but if you’re not, you’re still a part.” “I know; I’ve just decided to change my ways.” So Sunday came, service started, wasn’t there, twenty minutes later, she wasn’t there. And in my mind I was thinking “oh my word”, she was like in her 80s by that time. Maybe she’s sick or something and then I had just finished my sermon and the door opened and she walked in and I took a breath and she said “What on earth is happening here!?” It was daylight savings time and she had forgot that it was daylight savings. She thought she was twenty minutes early but she was really forty minutes late. (laughter) And so she said to me, “Pastor, I’m going back to my old ways. And you cannot talk me out of it, don’t you dare try.” Very colorful, very colorful.

But then you have some other situations. I remember a young woman who was frightened. She had been abused. She was pregnant and she was trying to figure out what to do about her pregnancy. And the problem was that her dad was wanting her to have an abortion. This was shortly after the abortion laws had been changed in Kansas. And she wasn’t sure that was what she wanted to do. Her mother didn’t come with her because the dad threatened the mother. So she wanted to know if she would help her visit with her dad. So I go a couple of times and sit, sure. So we had a conversation. It was one where she was this person who (unclear–recording blurred) where she says “Dad, I think this is really a baby.” And he said “I don’t care what you call it, you’re not going to have it around here.” “Well, I’ll leave.” Very willing to help the dad accommodate his views and knew that she didn’t do the right thing one

night. So she wanted to know where she could live so I made a couple of telephone calls to two sisters who were a bit older, probably in their fifties, so she went to live with them. Here the hate in the dad's eyes: "Well you've embarrassed me." She was trying to be a person of quality. And then the two sisters who said "sure." And she lived with the sisters until she graduated high school. Two women, open up their home just when I made a telephone call; "bring her over we'll do whatever we need to do." Very generous women. I don't know if that's colorful or not but it's the people who had their whole next five years really just turned around. Just with one telephone call. And when she graduated from high school, the two women were there, the dad wasn't, the mother was. The two women were there and always maintained a relationship. They helped her raise the little girl. They became an interesting family unit as a result of that very unfortunate circumstance. The dad in a very cruel way just turned his back on his daughter. So it's been very very interesting.

Another colorful person, a young marine. This is Vietnam, a 19 year old. Was going to do the marine thing. He came by and said "I'm going to join the marines." "Well, Jimmy, God love you, you know if that's what you want to do." So he was a marine and went to Vietnam, very curious sort of guy. And he died in Vietnam about two weeks before he was to come home. And come to find out, as I was visiting with the chaplain he said, "There's more to the story than what we can, what you really ought to know." I said, "What's that?" He said, "Well," he said, "the thing that I'm finding difficult about it is that this should have never happened." He said, here's a young man who didn't obey his superior. He said, "He was booby trapped. There was an orange tree that had a banana hanging on it. And we went by it and the patrol went by it for two weeks and the sergeant said, 'that's a booby trap,' pointed it out each time. Then finally, somehow Jimmy got to the point that he couldn't stand it so he reached up and touched the banana and bang." And then the sergeant was the one who told the chaplain that 'this is my responsibility, how could I have done it differently?' trying to figure out how to protect his people. Here was a sergeant, probably late twenties, having an experience that was really really difficult for him. Trying to get the ministry of the church, in fact the chaplain said that he became quite involved in the base chapel. When they got back to Fort Riley, he became a person who really matured a lot. But he left the army, a person who decided he wanted to help so he became a nurse, one of the first men nurses that I ever knew about. I saw him a number of times after that. He just said trying to help people was something that he really felt was his calling. But again, that terrible experience and how he was able to integrate it into something wholesome, whole quality. I found very interesting. It's a part of my ministry that I've never forgotten.

Tim Miller: Let me ask one more question, in the vain of where the rest of us go from here. One of the things I'm very interested in doing this semester is trying to ferret out the unusual stories, the little churches and other organizations that are not well known but have some really interesting and unusual stories behind them and I just wondered if you have any notion like that around this state. There are pockets of things or are there just individual churches that are just off in a different direction somehow?

Lawrence Grove: I've had a number of relationships with Mennonite churches, Mennonite people. I am just always amazed by a number of the so called peace churches, as they are often called. and how that whole understanding of wholeness is so much a part of who they are and how they respond. You know, north Newton has Bethel College and the Kauffman Museum. A number of very very interesting things about Mennonite churches. I don't know if any particular

one, there's one north of Newton, I think it's on K-15 called Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church. The CROP walk was happening and I was involved in a regional CROP committee and the CROP director said "I need to have someone to help me make a presentation to Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church." I said okay, I hadn't heard of it, but that's okay. He said, "Now it's just right in the middle of everything. Out in the country, nothing happening but he said it will be a really interesting experience for you." So the stated time was 5 o'clock pm. We got there about 4:30. We were the only car there. We were talking. The church could hold about 700 people about. I said "well this is strange to have a church that size in the middle of nowhere." And we went out to the presentation and the place was just filled up. The people had come within about twenty minutes and just descended on it. We didn't even hear it. Horses, buggies, some cars but it was just an amazing kind of thing. They were interested in knowing how they could help. Helping feed people. and they had pledged twelve beef cattle, forty eight hogs by the time it was over, and they had pledged two car loads of wheat. And all that was because two people from the church, as they put it, came and said there was a need for people to have food and this is what they could do. I found that to be very stunning.

Tim Miller: I think that church, if I'm not mistaken it's from Russia right? and I believe there was a Russian village called Alexanderwohl. There are a lot of German speaking Mennonites from Russia who were there in those days, but I think, as I understand the story, it's been a long time since I heard it, I think they just picked up and moved the whole village to the countryside out north of Newton basically. Tried to keep the whole life together.

Lawrence Grove: Well, in Western Kansas there are a number of religious communities like that. Some Catholic, some Mennonite, when you begin to look at the word Riga, a little town out there, that's named after a capital of Latvia. Just a number, or Scinsion, a lot of little towns around Hays, different catholic communities that came from different parts of the Volga German area. I would say those would be some very interesting, or talking with the (unclear word) at Victoria, at St. Fidelis Church. Sometimes it's called, William Jennings Bryan called it the Cathedral of the Plains. But one of my friends was a priest there when we were there in Hays. And I introduced him and said this is Father Palinas, who is with the Cathedral of the Plains, and he went like that. So I asked him after the meeting, I said "Father what's the problem?" He said, "It's never been a cathedral, the bishop has just been there, he doesn't have a chair there, it's just a church." He said "William Jennings Bryan called it the Cathedral of the Plains and we've been trying to live that down ever seen." (Laughter)

Tim Miller: put a sign out front saying that.

Lawrence Grove: So places of interests: the Catholics, the Mennonites. Presbyterians haven't been that interesting to me for some reason. (laughter) A lot of stories, I think when going about this, one piece of advice that I got from a Catholic priest, who was part of the diocese of Salina, Father Dan Sheets when doing his preaching told a lot of stories, really fun to hear. After one mass there was one of the men that came up and said "Father Dan, is that story true?" and he said "absolutely." "Really? That story is absolutely true?" and he said yea it is. Wow, it didn't seem true to me. And Father Dan said, "Now there's something you have to understand. He said all stories are true and some of them actually happened." So as you're working with the oral history, even though some of details may be off, they tell something very special about the person or

about an area. And I find that listening to a story that a person tells me provides a relationship that becomes very personal and very cherished. and you may find the same thing when you work with people too that you will relate to a person that somehow just blesses your life in a special way that would have never been possible without that story. So, enjoy the stories.

Tim Miller: Okay, we'll try to. Thank you. I want to just get one last detail; I should have said this at the outset. We're trying to get this real clearly recorded. We do hope to make a repository of information, a website and a repository here. And we just want to be able to use these stories and these conversations and have them be public and available. Just want to make sure we're clear on that.

Lawrence Grove: That's fine.

Tim Miller: Okay, so there we go. Thank you very much for coming in, we appreciate it.

Transcribed by Sara Vestal