

Interviewer:

So, the Department of Religious Studies at The University of Kansas is conducting a research project that seeks to preserve the history of various churches and other religious organizations in Kansas. We would like to record your memories of your experiences in religious organizations. We expect that each interview will take about one hour. We assume that you are not- We assure you that you are not obligated to participate and may discontinue your involvement at any time. Since we are trying to create a public record of Kansas religious history we are primarily interviewing persons who agree to let their interviews be available to the general public through a website, and to be identified by name as the person who was interviewed. If you have any questions about the project please contact professor Tim Miller at 785-864-7263 or at tkansas@ku.edu. If you should have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Office at 785-864-7429 or email mdenning@ku.edu. We say that at the end of each interview so it's recorded. Today's date is April 23rd, 2018. Alright, so what is your name?

Michael Swoyer:

My name is Michael Swoyer. And that's spelled M-I-C-H-A-E-L S-W-O-Y-E-R.

Interviewer:

Excellent. And where did you grow up?

Michael Swoyer:

I grew up here in Kansas City. Well, actually I grew up in Kansas City, Missouri since we're in Overland Park.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

But yeah, I grew up in Kansas City and have basically lived here all of my life.

Interviewer:

Okay, excellent. Where did you go to school?

Michael Swoyer:

High school or college?

Interviewer:

High school or college if-

Michael Swoyer:

Well I went to high school North of river in North Kansas City. I went to Oak Park High School.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Michael Swoyer:

North Kansas City. Well, Kansas City North, since North Kansas City is actually a separate city and a separate high school. And then I went to MU for my undergrad, and got a masters at Central Michigan University that actually had a cohort down here, so-

Interviewer:

Okay, very nice. And so, sort of repeating, where do you live now?

Michael Swoyer:

I live North of the river in Kansas City, Missouri.

Interviewer:

Okay, excellent. And you are a member at Trinity?

Michael Swoyer:

Mhm, Holy Trinity.

Interviewer:

Holy Trinity. Excellent. And do you know where that's located? Not the exact address, but-

Michael Swoyer:

Well it's at 119th and Pflumm.

Interviewer:

Okay. Wonderful. And you are a convert to Eastern Orthodoxy?

Michael Swoyer:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Excellent. What practice or religion did you follow before conversion? If any.

Michael Swoyer:

I didn't really have one, I mean vaguely I was a Methodist. United Methodist Church.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Michael Swoyer:

Okay, but it was very vague.

Interviewer:

Alright. Can you tell me a little about the process of conversion to Eastern Orthodoxy? How long did it take? Sort of, what was the process for you?

Michael Swoyer:

I- It happened about 2000. I went to a friend of mine at work, was an Eastern Orthodox, and I- He invited me- For some reason I had just heard about Eastern Orthodoxy and expressed some interest, and it just seemed like it was very interesting. There was a lot of- There was a lot of the belief system that was completely different from what I heard before, and it just intrigued me so I decided to go with him. There was a lot of things going on personally in my life at the time, too, that made me question a lot of the beliefs that were going on that I already had. The Methodist Church wasn't really cutting it. It was just kind of a- It was just kind of a I-don't-know- Kind of a bland sort of experience. The church I was in was, and I guess you could say still is, to this day, very much a middle-of-the-road sort of non-threatening sort of church- Not very committed to anything. So I just went to Eastern Orthodoxy. It was very deep. And fulfilling. And not in a wild, emotional way, but actually more of a rich and enveloping way- If I can put it that way. It's not- It fulfills you, rather than frightens you or anything- Or anything else. And, yeah, it fulfills you, and comforts you, and makes you feel like home. I remember when I actually was- When I actually joined the priest at the time, Father John, looked at us all and said "Welcome home." And he was right.

Interviewer:

That's fantastic. And that process, what was that- What was the timeline for it?

Michael Swoyer:

Probably about- Probably about four months from start to finish. Yeah.

Interviewer:

Alright. Excellent. Alright. Did you do that at any time, like, during- Were there any major holidays during that time period? Like Easter or Christmas?

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah. Pascha. I joined- I went- I started going, I think it was during the wintertime, and went all the way through lent, and was chrismated on Holy Saturday before Pascha, and then celebrated my first Pascha. Pascha's our Easter.

Interviewer:

Uh-huh. Wonderful.

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

And can you- Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt- Go ahead.

Michael Swoyer:

Nah- I just- Yeah. Very- I went through a lot of the rituals and everything else, a lot of the services and all that. Did a lot of the different things, and then- And then Pascha, and then Holy Saturday, was chrismated, took my very first communion and then afterwards celebrated the first Pascha.

Interviewer:

That's wonderful.

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Do you think living in the midwest influenced your conversion journey at all? Like there are considerably more, say like, Lutheran churches in the midwest than there are Orthodox Churches in America. So was that ever, sort of, an obstacle for you at all?

Michael Swoyer:

No. No. There's just something- There's something really special about the Orthodox Church, you know? I mean, yeah there are- There's a lot of different denominations throughout the- Throughout the- And you know, you could walk in on any denomination and they'll all say one thing or another, you know, but they don't have that sense of history. And they all- They all believe in different- They all believe in different things and different ways to believe, and they all emphasize one thing over another. And I just, you know, I just don't find, I guess- They kind of talk about the fullness of the faith, you know when you're in an Orthodox Church. It just seems like everything's there. They didn't leave anything out. They didn't add anything either. So it's just the fullness of it all. Now I'm far from a perfect person, you know? Far from it, but I get the sense that- That no matter what I do or how short I fall, that the Church is there to heal me as opposed to condemn me or point fingers at me, or whatever- Say "you're bad" or "you're good" or absolve me, or anything else. It's there as a spiritual hospital to take care of me. And everybody else there, you know, we don't all- We're not all there to- We don't go there individually, you know? We're all grouped, getting there together. You know, we're all like, rowing in a boat.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

You know, we all have to row together to get there.

Interviewer:

That's a really good way to put it.

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

So you've already sort of talked a little bit about your conversion journey. Is there anything else that you think attracted you to Eastern Orthodoxy besides what you've already sort of expressed?

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah, well, like the history. I'm a big history nut.

Interviewer:

Oh, yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

You know, so yeah. I mean, huge history nut. And just following the history- I mean, the fact that it, it literally does go all the way back to the beginning, you know? I mean, it's not like something else where you find out, you know "oh and by the way, our founder picked up a rock and there was the truth" right there five-hundred years ago. Nah, this goes all the way back, you know, and they just- You can follow all the people all the way back to Jesus and everything else, and the disciples- And the apostles, I guess. You know, down back to pentecost. Those apostles ordained other people who ordained other people- All the way up, you know? So you can follow those people all the way up, so it's- And the historical record there, I mean, you know- The liturgy we use, even though it was written in 325, is still basically the same liturgy they were using before, so you know, the services are the same. The- Everything has basically continued on for thousands, a couple thousand, I shouldn't say thousands, but a couple thousand years, you know? So yeah, it's just got a tremendous, it's just got a tremendous track record and that, that impresses me because they don't- And the- Has a- You know, a kind of- I like, I like the fact that it self-corrects, too. You know, you don't- Yeah, you get wild bishops that say weird things, or you get wild people that say weird things, but, you know, you have to have everybody agreeing on it, so- And yeah, it's slow to change. And while, in this world today, we're all like "we've gotta be competitive" and "we've gotta change" and all that. Well, that's good in some ways. Some ways, that's not so good. You, you know, if you have something that's steady like that you might not want to change. And maybe there's- Maybe there's things you don't want to change. And maybe there's a reason why you don't wanna change. Maybe there's a reason why you wanna stay and fast.

Interviewer:

Definitely.

Michael Swoyer:

Too what's been- What's been thought of before, and, you know- All the, all the councils, I mean, they were basically unanimous decisions. What was- What was believed. So, everything's just come all the way from there, so, I mean, it's just got a really solid background that- I don't know, instead of one guy sitting there going "oh, I found the truth. Here it is" getting a bunch of people to agree with him, it's a whole bunch of people agreeing on something- Following up from there.

Interviewer:

Gotcha. Yeah. So, sort of moving towards Holy Trinity specifically, what sort of fellowship activities do you do outside of your regular worship services?

Michael Swoyer:

Well, Holy Trinity is, right now, a half hour from my house so it's a little- That's a little tough, I mean, I sing in the choir and I go to choir practices when I can, and I've agreed to participate in the- I think we're in the- I think it's the mission group or something like that. I've agreed to participate, but so far that hasn't really happened, you know? I'm just super interested in a lot of- I'm super interested in the future of Orthodoxy in the United States, you know- I'd love to see an Orthodox Church, an American Orthodox Church, but, you know, you know with our rapid change capacity, I don't know how that'll work out. Won't happen in my lifetime. But yeah, there's missions and we're all trying to cooperate and everything else and have an inter-counselor- Everybody gets- We've got all the different diocese, kinda talk. So I'm involved in that, but so far nothing's happened with that. But I sing with the choir, I mean, when I converted the church was on Russian Hill in Kansas City, Kansas, which is only about ten minutes from my house. And that was very, very convenient, but you know, they had to move, because they were outgrowing that church.

Interviewer:

Yeah. Yeah. That's what Father Tim was talking about. Okay. So what does a typical worship service look- You can be as detailed or not detailed as you want.

Michael Swoyer:

Have you been to one?

Interviewer:

I have been to one, but not at Holy Trinity. I went to a service in Lawrence.

Michael Swoyer:

Okay. Well, to be frank about it, I always miss, like, the first ten or fifteen minutes.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

Not intentionally- It's because my grand- My mother- My daughter's seven years old, okay, so she takes- My daughter's- My daughter's, like, the darling of my old Methodist church, so my mom takes her with her to the morning service where everybody just pets her and all because she's, like, the only child there. The church is really, really old. You know, a lot of old people go there, so everybody just loves my daughter and wants to be, you know, wants to be- Wants to give her high-fives, and candy, you know- All that as she's walking- My daughter naturally eats it up, you know?

Interviewer:
Uh-huh.

Michael Swoyer:
So, she- So I have to go by and pick her up after the service is over and then take her out to our church-

Interviewer:
Two church services-

Michael Swoyer:
Yeah. Because my daughter, when I took her out there the first time, said basically "I wanna, I guess I basically wanna be Orthodox." You know, she immediately- It was like- I didn't say a word, I promise you. I was just going like "okay" you know?

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:
I was just going like "okay well, honey this is my church" and, you know, and she- "I wanna be Orthodox"- She immediately fell in love with it, and she's got a lot of buddies out there too, so that's helpful.

Interviewer:
Are there lots of kids at Holy Trinity?

Michael Swoyer:
Oh yeah.

Interviewer:
Okay very nice.

Michael Swoyer:
Yeah, you- Yeah, there are a lot of, lot of kids.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Michael Swoyer:

Lots of kids. You find that- I was listening to, I was listening to a podcast one time. They were talking about- I probably- This is way off topic, but, but they were talking about how many of the Western churches had become really feminized, and not that that's a bad thing. Okay? I mean, I'm, believe me, I'm- I've totally become much more of a feminist since I have a daughter.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

So it's like, you know, yeah "girl power, yay".

Interviewer:

Uh-huh.

Michael Swoyer:

But, but yeah, many of the churches become feminized and that was part of the reason you find that a lot of the church- What's keeping churches open is the women, you know? The men just kinda show up, but the women are the ones that are keeping the doors open. Did not happen in Eastern Orthodoxy. It was a conscious decision by the Catholic Church to do that and the Protestant churches, which were- I don't think Catholic churches followed suit, so to this day it's the women that are the backbone of the church, and the men are just, more of less, there. They're- They show up, but the women are the ones who are really running things. And this was in a- This was in a podcast fairly recently, so, but they said "yeah, the only one that that doesn't happen in is, are the Orthodox Churches"- So-

Interviewer:

I really hadn't considered that at all.

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer:

Do you know the name of the podcast?

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah it was the, it was, gosh, what was it? The Manliness Podcast. Can you believe it? The Art of Manliness Podcast.

Interviewer:

The Art of Manliness?

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah, the Art of Manliness Podcast. I just happened, you know- Like I said, I'm not, you know, I'm not this- I'm probably a lot more liberal than most people you're going to interview.

Interviewer:

Uh-huh.

Michael Swoyer:

So, because I'm sure we have a lot of, we have a lot of people from the Church that are very, you know, conservative.

Interviewer:

Mmhm.

Michael Swoyer:

Not me, but, yeah, the Art of Manliness Podcast that was one of the chapters they were speaking about- The feminization of churches and everything else- And it was just- I thought it was fascinating. And they specifically said Orthodox churches do not, are not falling victim to that.

Interviewer:

Huh. I will check that out. Thank you. That's awesome.

Michael Swoyer:

So anyway- And you see it, I mean, there are lots of families in Orthodox churches, and they bring their kids. And, as a matter of fact, Pascha, you know, I don't know if you're aware, but Pascha starts at 11:30 at night and goes until 4:00 in the morning, basically.

Interviewer:

Wow. Wow.

Michael Swoyer:

I mean, and the kids are there.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Michael Swoyer:

I mean, I took my daughter for the first time and she's freaking out because I'm going at, like, 11:30 at night. "Come on, honey. We're gonna go- I took a nap. You took a nap, we're gonna go." And she'd never been there before and everything. "Come on we're gonna go." So she

ends up- She's laying on the ground having a little, while the entire service is going on she's having, like, a little, a little slumber party with a couple of her friends who are all laying on the ground having a- Where everyone's yelling "Christ is risen, truly is risen" or in different languages. [Repeated in Greek] You know, different languages. Greek or [Repeated in Russian] I think that's the Russian one. And they do it all in different languages. And they're all yelling it, and they're all walking around swinging incense and everything else, but the kids were all in the periphery laying down, trying to get some shut-eye. And then we have a big feast, that goes to, like, all night long.

Interviewer:

That's awesome. Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah, so I mean, it's a real feast. So that's one of the things I talk about with the realness of the Church. I mean, you know, we're feasting- I mean, we haven't had meat in forty days, so we're having, like, meat and drinking, and having a real feast. It's not like we're serving grape juice or anything like that. We're drinking, you know? Slivovitz and stuff- And shots, and everything. We're partying.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

You know, for real.

Interviewer:

Yeah. And I assume you go from the sanctuary down to, do you have a hall-

Michael Swoyer:

Down to the, down to the hall, yeah.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Michael Swoyer:

I mean, I walked out one time and, you know, we were walking out, we were having a big party and everything- These people walking by said "what are you doing?" We said "We're celebrating Pascha and everything. We're having a party." You know, and the guy looked and said "you're drinking in there" and yeah, that's what we do.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

"Well, that's cool" you know? Yeah, because, yeah, I mean, we're celebrating.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

It's a big deal. Christ is risen, truly is risen, and we're celebrating the fact. I mean, it's not just that we've- It's not just- And they talk about that- They talk about the fact that, you know, we're not doing it to deprive ourselves. We're doing it to ready ourselves, so to speak. And we're not- We don't look at it like it's a sacrifice or- We're not walking around moping. It's more like we're glad that we're doing this. We're happy, you know? You don't walk around "I've given up meat. I'm so depressed."

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

You know? "I've given up meat for forty days. We haven't had meat, milk, and cheese, and all this other stuff. I'm saluting how much I'm suffering." You know, people talk about that, you know, because- There's bible verses where they talk about people that are fasting and, you know- I can't remember which one it was- The pharisees, they're fasting and beating themselves- Well, they get their reward; Everybody gets to see how much they're suffering- That's their reward. But the people that are, you know, the people that are doing it with happy faces and everything else- Happy to be here. You know? So, I know I'm not completing any coherent thoughts, but you know-

Interviewer:

No. Very good. Thank- This is all awesome. Thank you.

Michael Swoyer:

But, yeah, it's a celebration. You know? And you really celebrate because you're really happy. And that's one of the things about the Church is they teach you, in all ways, I mean, it's a very multi-sensory experience because you're there- The sounds. The smells. The sights. The feelings. The- It's all there to provide you a lesson and let you know what awaits. So everything is there for you. It's like my ex-wife, she said it beautifully, said, you know, she goes like "well, I'll tell you what- At the end of- If you don't know Christ is risen by the end of that Pascha, you believe it." Because, I mean, the service goes on for, like two and a half hours. And it's- It is a big deal. And they're very good, I mean after 1700-plus years doing the same thing they're very good at doing what they do, so, you know. But yeah. The people participate. Everybody participates and we're all very happy.

Interviewer:

Okay. Awesome. That's very cool. That's very cool- I didn't

Michael Swoyer:

So, to answer your questions about the services that you originally asked me. What is a service? A service starts with just- Service starts with the, the praise. I'm sorry I didn't actually really answer the question-

Interviewer:

No. You're, you're fantastic. Thank you.

Michael Swoyer:

You do praise. You ask God to have mercy on you because we're humble, because we know we can't possibly do it. We know we're not worthy of mercy, but we ask God to have mercy on us. You know, we're not worthy of mercy, but through God's grace, God gives us mercy, grants us mercy. So it's like, you know, Jesus came to lift us up, and so we ask God for forgiveness and everything else, and then there's a reading of the- The Apostles or something like that, followed by the priest coming out and reading from the gospel- From the life of Jesus. And then they go into a homily, which is the sermon, and, which is, you know, typically the highlight of most other churches, except for us and Catholics, I guess- But then there's a lot, there's a lot of praise after that we do- We always do, obviously we do a lot of praise. And then we do our belief system. The- The Nicene Creed. I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker- Big difference between us- Did they tell you about the difference about the Catholic and the filioque?

Interviewer:

Go ahead. Go ahead and-

Michael Swoyer:

That's one of the reasons- The history. That's one of the reasons why we and the Catholics are no longer together is because they added the phrase "The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father" and then the Catholics added the phrase "And the Son" to that. And all the Protestant churches kept that, by the way. So that's one of the- They kept that in their DNA. Catholics added the filioque. And we've always said the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father, and didn't add that part- We say they added it. We might have allowed it, but we never had a council about it, we never agreed to it, and that was the other reason we split is because the Pope had said "I'm the head of the Church, and so I get to say what's in there. And you have to obey me." And we said "you're more like the chairman of the board. You get a- We give you, like, honor and everything else, but you get one vote just like the rest of us." And so, so he said "no, I'm the head. I get to decide everything." We said "no, you're-" Basically, that was you know- There were a few other things too, but that's basically the two reasons. They added the phrase and he said "I'm the head so I get to tell you what to do." Yeah. The other- All the other patriarchs are still in

communion, and he's not. Which is not quite fair, too, because the Oriental Orthodox, if you're familiar with them, split off a lot earlier, from us, over some other issues- So, you know, it's a little, it's a little tricky. Although, we're thinking about- I think we'll probably be back with the Oriental Orthodox because a lot of that's all- A lot of that's all semantics now. It's over the nature of Christ. I know, it's all-

Interviewer:

I mean, the nature of Christ seems pretty-

Michael Swoyer:

It's a pretty big- It was a pretty big deal at the time, yeah, but- And, you know, the Greeks were really, really big into theology and they were- In the Eastern Mediterranean they had big, big arguments about it, and it was basically: Was Christ divine, or was he man, was he both, or was he one nature or the other? Was he two separate natures or was he intermixed? What was the deal- And so, you know, and then we had, we had the Aryans up above who were going like "No, Christ wasn't divine. He wasn't really the son of God, he was just a man and all that." Which, we have Aryans now- We have people that believe in different things, now, that don't believe that Jesus was the son of God. And so, you know, we have all these, we have all these philosophies that have existed, but they're, like, heresies, to put it- To put a name on it.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

And- To us.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

I shouldn't say to us because, you know-

Interviewer:

I understand what you're trying to- Yeah, of course! So after the Nicene Creed is-

Michael Swoyer:

After the Creed we do the Lord's Prayer, we do, and, you know, there's a lot of stuff- There's a lot of ceremony leading up to both of those.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

And then we eventually get to the part where we do the communion, which is really the highlight of the service, the liturgy. The communion is where we all eat, partake of the blood, body and blood of Christ. We all do it together.

Interviewer:

Yes.

Michael Swoyer:

And then after that- After we do the body and blood of Christ it's pretty much, zip, bam, boom, we're done.

Interviewer:

And, sorry I had a question- Have you been to any other Orthodox Churches? How has it- Holy Trinity- Is it all, would you say, is there any slight deviances that you've seen at all?

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah. There's a few. I mean, you know, it's not much, but, you know, like the one down in St. Mary's- Down, or East- The one- Is a Serbian church. Serbian diocese- And they do, they say like, Lord's Prayer "forgive us our debts", we say "forgive us our trespasses". Little, tiny things.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Michael Swoyer:

When they're doing their- When they do the Creed they have all the kids gather together, and they have all the kids ring bells at the important stuff. We have a big bell-ringer that rings the bell. Nothing, nothing major, just little, cultural things. Okay? Little cultural differences that are inherent in each culture.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

Because each culture has their own church. Each country has their own patriarch and church, more or less. A lot of times- I guess the history of is is that a lot of times churches declare themselves autosephalic, in other words, self-headed- And the other churches go "no you're not. You're not ready yet." And then a hundred or two-hundred years later they go "okay, I guess you were." So it's like, it's like that, I mean, we're OCA- Saint Holy Trinity is an OCA, Orthodox Church in America.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

And we declared ourselves autocephalic, and we are autocephalous. In other words, we're self-headed. We have our own metropolitan, but the other churches like the Ecumenical Patriarchy in Constantinople, you know, Istanbul, said "no you're not. You're not self-headed." So, it takes a little while for them to recognize us as being self-headed, and besides that, we're in the situation where all these other jurisdictions are here and they're all under the jurisdiction of somebody else from overseas. So it's- We're supposed to be all under one jurisdiction. Am I airing too much of the dirty laundry or is that-

Interviewer:

No. No. This is fantastic. Thank you.

Michael Swoyer:

Do you know about all this?

Interviewer:

I'm not super aware, but I know of it- In passing.

Michael Swoyer:

Okay.

Interviewer:

But yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah, I mean everybody is supposed to be under the same jurisdiction basically. In the United States, the lower 48, the first church a Greek Church in New Orleans, but the first liturgy was celebrated by Russians in Alaska.

Interviewer:

Yeah. Alaska has a very rich history of Eastern Orthodoxy.

Michael Swoyer:

Well you know, it was Russian for up until 1867, I think it was. So they were all- And then they declared- They came down to San Francisco and declared that the head of the Church was Russian, and then along comes the Russian Revolution, which messed up everything.

Interviewer:

And then in the Russian Revolution they were like "no, church" yeah?

Michael Swoyer:

Basically, yeah, I mean, I've studied a lot, I'm probably gonna get dates and names and places wrong, but yeah, the Russian Revolution said, there were people that said "well we're still

following the patriarch in Russia.” Some people said he was compromised because he was operating under the communists- So he’s compromised. So we can’t follow him. And they formed another branch that we’re now in communion with- For a long time we weren’t- Called ROCOR- Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. But now we’re in communion with them again. Meanwhile all these other churches had come in and-

[Break in recording due to disturbance during interview]

Interviewer:

There we go. Excellent. Yeah, and it’s still recording.

Michael Swoyer:

So, yeah, all the different jurisdictions had come with their own, with their own ethnic groups, and had already formed up all these churches- So we already had all these different churches and bishops coming in, and everything- You know? Theoretically, or under what we were supposed to do, we should have one church under one jurisdiction. And it should be- It should be united. Technically- Who knows? You know, because who should it be? We don’t know. Like I said, the first- It could be Greek. It could be Russian. The Greeks have the- But they’re apparently really Greek. I mean, I’ve only been to, like, one- I think I’ve been to one Greek Church and it wasn’t too Greek because it was in the South and they really had to accommodate everybody. It was in Huntsville, Alabama.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah. The Greeks were really thin on the ground there, so they had to accommodate everybody, so they’re- As a matter of fact, I walked in and somebody was playing an organ up above while they were singing, and I was kind of like “where did I wander into?”

Interviewer:

Yeah. Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah, so, yeah. So it’s a little- There’s a lot of- There’s a lot of stuff going on, and, you know, there’s a Western Rite Orthodox Church too, you know?

Interviewer:

Really?

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah, I guess the Antiochians sponsor that, where it’s basically a Catholic-sort-of ceremony, or what looks like Catholicism, but it’s got a Western Rite. So it’s a Western liturgy. I guess that’s

under the Antiochian bunch. So, yeah, there's different. I mean those would really be different than what we're used to.

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:
We follow the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom most of the time. But these guys are following a completely different one. And, like I said, it's a Roman, basically, liturgy.

Interviewer:
Yeah. Roman.

Michael Swoyer:
Without any of the stuff that Rome threw in there afterwards.

Interviewer:
Ancient Roman liturgy?

Michael Swoyer:
I would guess so. I don't actually know who wrote it.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Michael Swoyer:
I don't know for sure, but yeah.

Interviewer:
Excellent. Oh gosh, sorry, circling back, a little bit.

Michael Swoyer:
Yeah, too much detail.

Interviewer:
I apologize. I don't want to seem off-topic- So you, you sort of described to me the typical worship service- What's your favorite part?

Michael Swoyer:
What's my favorite part?

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

Well I sing, so-

Interviewer:

Okay.

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah. I like the, I kind of like the homily because we get to sit down. We always stand through the- We stand through the whole thing so I- "Oh, thank you."

Interviewer:

Yeah. I noticed that you guys have pews in your church which- I didn't see that when I visited the one in Lawrence. That was interesting.

Michael Swoyer:

They changed that. It used to be we didn't have pews. I was kinda surprised because I left for a while- I had a little bit of a crisis of faith and then I left for a long time- And then came back. And it was- They had the pews in place when I came back. Pardon me?

Interviewer:

Are you happy to have the pews now?

Michael Swoyer:

Well, I'm up there singing so we have chairs.

Interviewer:

Ah- Behind. Gotcha.

Michael Swoyer:

So we have chairs up there, anyway. And I do- I have a bad back so I kind of like the- Sitting there going "I'm an old guy now- You have to let me sit down occasionally."

Interviewer:

Yeah. Gotcha. So, we talked a little bit about just sort of all the different branches, but how is Holy Trinity sort of governed? I know the church I work at, we've got different boards for, like, fellowship, mission- So I didn't know if perhaps Trinity had something similar at all.

Michael Swoyer:

Well, I'm not really that privy to it, but I know we have a Parish Council.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Michael Swoyer:
And that's as far as I really know.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Michael Swoyer:
It's a Parish Council and they, pretty much, run things, as far as that goes.

Interviewer:
Okay. Okay. Excellent. Wonderful. So what kind of relationship does Holy Trinity have other local religious organizations? Do you guys ever host-

Michael Swoyer:
We have rumbles with the-

Interviewer:
Well hi-

Michael Swoyer:
Yeah, we have knife fights with the Protestant church across the-

Interviewer:
Oh, of course. Yes.

Michael Swoyer:
"Come on, you." No, we-

Interviewer:
Naturally.

Michael Swoyer:
[Jokingly] "Come on you filthy Protestants," No, we actually. No, we seriously, we have- Saint Mary of Egypt is an inner-city Orthodox Church and they do sponsor free meals, so every Friday they give away free meals and we go down and cook. We cook and serve with them. And I know there's an inner- I know there's a council of, like, Orthodox- There's kind of, like, a Kansas City Council. I don't know how frequently they meet. I know they exist. I don't know about other groups in Kansas City because I'm not really privy to that-

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

But I know we do help serve-

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

Those meals- Kind of on a rotating basis.

Interviewer:

Okay. Excellent. So you, like, volunteer on, for, like certain days?

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Do you, like, volunteer ahead of time or do you-

Michael Swoyer:

I think the church volunteers so they-

Interviewer:

Okay.

Michael Swoyer:

Whoever sends their people down. I haven't been down there in a long time. I need to get down there more, but like I said, I've got a really bad back, and so-

Interviewer:

Yeah. Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

I used to go down more.

Interviewer:

So you said you had a daughter- How did having kids sort of change your experience in Eastern Orthodoxy and did she- Was she born into it? You said she goes to a couple different church services. What's the-

Michael Swoyer:

No she was- She was born, and this was during my period of wandering out in the wilderness, and so she was born and I came back- Went back- Then I'm a little bit sad about that because there were some people I wish I could have- That were my friends when I was there before that passed away, or whatever, that, while I was gone, I wish they could have met her. But they

didn't get to. They see her, obviously, but yeah so- But she is- Yeah, it's like she wants to be- Like I said, she just fell in love with it the minute she walked in. I think she freaks out her Grammy, though, because her Grammy's been here a couple of times, and you know when they do the thing where they- Her Grammy is very much a little bit like "what in the world is going on?" So when my daughter gets up and the priest goes back with the Holy Host and everything, down the procession, and she gets up and touches- To touch his robe as he goes by- She goes, like "what are you doing?"

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:
Like, what on earth? All these people, all these kids, are getting up to touch it as he goes by and everything, you know? So I think that freaks her out a little bit.

Interviewer:
Gotcha. Gotcha. So can you tell me about some of your best or worst experiences- And/or best, and/or worst experiences, at Holy Trinity?

Michael Swoyer:
Well, I, you know, getting christmated was probably one of the best experiences. I remember I just felt like I said, like I was coming home. Being there, I mean, it helped me through a very tough time in my life- Both going through there, and my marriage was breaking up, and everything else, which was not good. So it helped me through that. A lot. I mean, not quite all the way because, my marriage- I kinda left and then my marriage broke up, and all that, so- No. I guess my marriage did break up first, before I left. So, yeah, it did help me through that part. But, yeah, some things just, a lot of things just happen at about that time. My father passed away. You know, there's a lot of stuff going on. And, but yeah, it helped me through that. And yeah, getting christmated definitely- Meeting a lot of the people there. Being with a lot of the people, it was very warming. Coming back, definitely a great experience. Seeing my daughter christmated was a very great experience. Having her at her first Pascha- My first Pascha was a wonderful experience. Father John's passing away- The first priest that I knew. He passed away-

Interviewer:
While he was serving the community?

Michael Swoyer:
Yeah he was at Holy Trinity and he passed away, gosh, years- I don't remember what year it was, but that was awful because he was a wonderful priest and he was really an inspiration for me. And that was just horrible.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

He passed away from cancer. Just really quick. That was, that was horrible. Kind of a funny one- The first time we ever did Forgiveness Sunday- I don't know if you're familiar with that ritual- You ever heard about that one? Where you all get down and kneel to each other?

Interviewer:

Oh. No.

Michael Swoyer:

Well that's- That's at like, the start of Lent. You get- Everybody gets together, kneels to everybody else, and begs everybody else for their forgiveness.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Michael Swoyer:

So we all get down, not kneel actually, prostrate, prostrate ourselves to each other.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Michael Swoyer:

I did that and my legs were so sore the next day- Now, Holy Trinity when it was back at Russian Hill, consisted of a whole bunch of steps-

Interviewer:

Oooh. Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

I swear it- I could just barely make it up those steps. I thought, man, I'm gonna have to establish base camp and the first two before the assault up- I am dead.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Michael Swoyer:

That was awful. I had never- I mean, you know- I prostrated myself probably fifty or sixty times that first time and it was like "oh, Lord have mercy," You know, full prostration you go all the way down-

Interviewer:

Yeah, way to start off the Holy Week.

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah. No. Holy- Lent. You start Lent. Now my daughter, she just really took to it. She thought that was just the coolest thing ever, so she loves that. She loved that the first time she did it. She was like 'oh, I love this,' and she's like- We try to work things out when we have our little tiffs. We go forgive each other and all that, so you know-

Interviewer:

That's good.

Michael Swoyer:

And, yeah, there's good and bad, you know?

Interviewer:

Yeah. As there are in communities. Can you think of anyone else I should interview? Anyone that-

Michael Swoyer:

Convert?

Interviewer:

Sticks out particularly? I got the list from Father Tim, but I didn't know if you had anyone sort of outside the community that you-

Michael Swoyer:

No. No. I don't know, I mean. Did he mention Dale?

Interviewer:

Mhm. Yes.

Michael Swoyer:

Yeah. Dale and Vicky. Yeah. Dale's the one who was my friend and convinced me to come over-

Interviewer:

I think I've been in communications with a lot of people. I'm gonna meet- I'm meeting someone later.

Michael Swoyer:

Okay.

Interviewer:

Scott!

Michael Swoyer:
Scott?

Interviewer:
Dudley?

Michael Swoyer:
I know him, probably, but the name's just not ringing a bell- Names mean- Names mean nothing to me anymore.

Interviewer:
I mean, that's the conclusion of our interview, but um-