

[Sarah]

Today is Monday, November 9, 2009, and I'm in Salina KS. OK. I'm in Salina, KS with Jim Ryan and we are going to get this interview started. Ok I guess we'll start with, where did you grow up that you have your earliest memories about going to church?

[Jim Ryan]

In Smith County, Kansas which is about a mile and a half inside of the Nebraska line in Kansas. My dad was a Catholic, I'm not sure what denomination my mother was. Her folks were German, so I'm not sure what church they attended, but after they got married she attended the Catholic Church with Dad.

[Sarah]

Ok, so you grew up Catholic?

[Jim Ryan]

Yeah.

[Sarah]

And did you guys go to church every Sunday?

[Jim Ryan]

No, not every Sunday, I can't tell you how many. Back then it kind of depended on the funds. Cuz we was about 20 miles from church one way. So gas was kind of a problem during the war years and stuff. And price, and money was tight, but as often as, didn't miss too many Sundays.

[Sarah]

Okay, I know you're a member of the Methodist Church now, so when did you switch?

[Jim Ryan]

Oh, either in 1959 or 1960. After I got married. We got married in the Methodist church so, you can no longer be a Catholic.

[Sarah]

Now did you actually have to go through any type of conversion classes or anything like that? Or was it just.

[Jim Ryan]

To be in the Methodist church?

[Sarah]

Yes.

[Jim Ryan]

No, it was just a matter of joining the church then I guess.

[Sarah]

Okay, so would you say you've been more involved as a Methodist, or more involved when you were brought up as Catholic?

[Jim Ryan]

Oh probably more involved as a Methodist because I was older then, so probably been more involved as a Methodist. And I guess I've been Methodist longer than I was Catholic.

[Sarah]

Okay, so what city were you in when you first started going to church as a Methodist?

[Jim Ryan]

Probably in Manhattan I guess, Manhattan, KS.

[Sarah]

You said you became a Methodist through marriage. Well I guess tell me a little about, did you go to church pretty regularly on Sundays?

[Jim Ryan]

As a Methodist?

[Sarah]

Yes.

[Jim Ryan]

Not the first few years, probably not, but later on we went pretty regular.

[Sarah]

And you have three kids, were they brought up in the Methodist church as well?

[Jim Ryan]

Yes.

[Sarah]

And what kind of programs for youth did they have? Did they go to Sunday school? Did they go to the regular service, with you guys?

[Jim Ryan]

They went to Sunday school. And I think then, they went to Sunday school and then attended the regular service too. Most of the time anyway, later on it might have been where they went to Sunday school while we went to church, but I think most generally they went to both.

[Sarah]

Ok, so it definitely was a family event, and they tried to incorporate the kids into the regular services?

[Jim Ryan]

Yes.

[Sarah]

Do you feel that your experiences with the church, did they have an influence on your daily life, or was it pretty much, just something that you did on Sundays?

[Jim Ryan]

Probably, mostly something we did on Sundays. Had some influence on your daily life of course, but most of it was on Sunday probably.

[Sarah]

I know that you moved around quite a bit so, when would you say that you finally kind of settled and were at the church that you currently go to?

[Jim Ryan]

In 1970. We settled here in Salina, and I don't know, I guess we really joined the University Methodists here in Salina at that time. Either in '70 or '71 anyway.

[Sarah]

Okay, so you've been pretty much an active member in that church since then.

[Jim Ryan]

Yeah, for about forty years I guess.

[Sarah]

And what, have you seen any major changes in those forty years? Within the church?

[Jim Ryan]

Yeah, there's been quite a few changes in the forty years.

[Sarah]

Can you talk about those?

[Jim Ryan]

It's uh, I don't know, I guess it's gotten more liberal maybe. Cuz it used to be, that when you went to church or whatever you usually got dressed up in your Sunday best and you went to church and that was part of Sunday, getting dressed up I guess. And what do I want to say? There wasn't very much talking among the congregation in the church part, because everyone was supposed to be quiet I guess. And so now that's all changed, because now people visit back and forth, which is good, better than the other I think. And the dress isn't so critical anymore. I still think it's nice for people to dress for church, but now they wear most anything they want to wear. And the music has changed quite a little a bit. It's more modern I guess you'd say, and I kinda like that; rather than the old hymns and stuff.

[Sarah]

Would you say as far as the sermons go, have they gotten more modern to kind of relate to what's going on around the world, or are they pretty much still scripture based?

[Jim Ryan]

Most generally they're more modern. It's more about now than it was in the early times anyway. I guess cuz now they talk more about what's happening today. Which that's better, I think.

[Sarah]

Trying to relate the message...?

[Jim Ryan]

Yeah, than going way back, but there's still some of that they have once in a while.

[Sarah]

In the Methodist church, they rotate pastors, correct?

[Jim Ryan]

Right, yeah.

[Sarah]

And how often do they do that?

[Jim Ryan]

Well I don't know that varies. It seems like, you're lucky if you keep the same one for two or three years. I think they can be rotated every year. But, myself, I think it'd be better if they could keep the same Pastor for...well, the longer the better. Of course, I guess if you get a bad one, it's better to have a change, but there's not too many bad ones I don't think.

[Sarah]

Have there ever been any issues where you did have a Pastor that the congregation didn't really take to or didn't agree with the message they were putting out?

[Jim Ryan]

Yeah there's been a few times in this church.

[Sarah]

What were some of the issues?

[Jim Ryan]

I guess they just didn't really care much for the person, or for the way he preached, and some of the things he done. I don't know just for sure what all those was. There's probably been, oh in the forty years, I suppose there's been only about three or four over that whole time that the congregation didn't approve of and they just stayed about a year.

[Sarah]

So did they take steps to try and get that Pastor rotated out, or did they just bide their time until you were assigned somebody else?

[Jim Ryan]

That I really don't know cuz I think that's kinda left up to the parish staff to decide with the bishop, and the superintendant, and I'm sure they recommended that they be transferred somewhere else. I really don't know how the Bishop and Superintendant would react on something like that.

[Sarah]

So is there kind of like a...well I know within the Methodist church there's kind of a political hierarchy of how things break down. Do you have a structure within your church itself of people that are on certain committees?

[Jim Ryan]

Yes. Yeah there's, well like I just said, the Prairie Staff which they just recommend different stuff I guess. And then there's the board of Trustees that takes care of keeping the church more or less running, and fixing things up, and what they need. And then there's the finance committee allots the money out to have things fixed, and there's a committee for the memorials, another committee for endowment, and there's probably more than that.

[Sarah]

How do people get on these committees? Are they elected? Are they assigned?

[Jim Ryan]

No, they're most generally asked to be on them, and then assigned.

[Sarah]

And how big would you say that your congregation is?

[Jim Ryan]

Oh, I really don't know how many members we have. There's quite a few members, but there's quite a few who don't attend very regular either. I think on the average Sunday with the two services, both of them together, there's probably 150.

[Sarah]

Would you say that in the forty years that you've been there, that the number has gone down, gone up, stayed about the same?

[Jim Ryan]

I think right now it's increasing a little bit with the minister we have. He's doing, doing a good job, so I think right now it's increasing and it has dropped down because some people left on account of the minister they didn't like. They went to another Methodist church, but right now I think we're increasing.

[Sarah]

So the two services that you mentioned, are they the same, or do you have one that's more traditional and one that's a little more modern?

[Jim Ryan]

We have one traditional and one contemporary. And I go to the contemporary one.

[Sarah]

Which one draws more of a crowd?

[Jim Ryan]

I think the contemporary one, but they're both pretty close to the same. And, might be because the contemporary one is at 10:45am and the traditional is 8:30am, so a lot of people don't really like to go to the 8:30am just on account of the time.

[Sarah]

Does the church that you're currently at have a youth program? Are there younger people that are involved in that?

[Jim Ryan]

They have a youth program, but there doesn't seem to be too many youth involved in it. The younger youth, from say maybe, 3 to 12, 13 in there, there's quite a few of them. But the older teenagers on up, there isn't too many of them involved with the church anymore.

[Sarah]

Do you think that that will be something that eventually...there's won't be a program needed, or do you think that maybe there will be more people that join it in the future?

[Jim Ryan]

I think maybe there will be more joining because they have an associate Pastor there now, and she's working with the youth and stuff and seems to be doing a real good job. So I think she's gonna get more interested in the youth kind.

[Sarah]

So that's more of a, that's just started?

[Jim Ryan]

Yeah, it's started probably within the last two years.

[Sarah]

You mentioned before, as far as the upkeep of the church, and the grounds, and just basically keeping everything running, do you have volunteers within the church that help with that or do you contract work out as far as keeping the grounds up, or hiring people from outside?

[Jim Ryan]

Well it's a little bit of both. There's some volunteers that do some of the work, and then we have two custodians and one maintenance person. They do the lawn mowing, and snow shoveling,

and then cleaning the church, that's mostly done by them. Some volunteers, every once in a while they'll have a work day, or what, and then volunteers will come in and help them clean part of it. But there's three people that are more or less responsible for the upkeep I guess.

[Sarah]

Do you guys have social events, besides just the normal church service? Like potlucks, or are there groups where people get together to do certain things outside of just the Sunday mornings?

[Jim Ryan]

Oh yeah, they have quite a little bit of stuff going on. They have, oh every once in a while they have a brunch, fifth Sunday morning brunch they call it. For every month that has a fifth Sunday in it, they'll have a brunch for that. And then they have quite a few potlucks. And then they have a program they call the "Buck Night". And on Sunday night, all the kids going to Kansas Wesleyan College, can come over and eat there for a buck. And the meals vary from hamburgers, to I don't know, just whatever they decide to fix, but anybody going to school can eat there for a dollar on Sunday nights. And then they have a Board Acre sale, and they sell different crafts, and food, and items, and a Matador dinner. And then there's a lot of different classes they have, as far as religious classes and stuff that they teach during the week too, so there's quite a few functions that go on besides just Sunday morning.

[Sarah]

Do you know anything about, how long has that church, that particular church, been here, do you know?

[Jim Ryan]

100 years. We celebrated 100 years in April. So that was a good one, I can answer that one. So it's just a little over 100 years old.

[Sarah]

So I'm assuming, there's not a mortgage on the church. Do you know anything about that?

[Jim Ryan]

I don't think there is. I'm not sure but I don't think there would be. Because I think the last addition was built in '82 I believe, so I think it should be all paid off.

[Sarah]

Would you say that the church has an open-door membership? Do they use any kind of recruiting process, or any kind of advertising to try and get new people to join the congregation?

[Jim Ryan]

Yes, with the University what across from the church, Kansas Wesleyan, I'm sure they're always trying to get some of the students to come which very few do. But then they advertise every week in the paper about the University Methodist Church, "If you don't have a church try us". So there's, they advertise too.

[Sarah]

Does the church have any type of relations with other organizations? I know there's Methodist churches all over Kansas. Do you ever have joint trips with other churches, or anything of that nature?

[Jim Ryan]

I don't know about trips and stuff. They always have the conference here in Salina, for, I don't know if you would call it the Mid-Central conference or what, but anyway they always have a conference here where all of the ministers and the lay-leaders come and meet up at the Bi-center. And I think maybe they take some camping trips with other churches, but I'm not sure about that. I never went on one so I'm not sure.

[Sarah]

Now within the church, the actual building itself, what kind of artistic expressions are there? You mentioned that instead of the Hymnals, now you sing more modern music. But do they have a band, do they have a choir?

[Jim Ryan]

Well they have both. They have a choir that sings at the traditional church service, and once in a while at the other one, but not always. And then they have praise team, that sings the modern music and it consists of six or seven singers and a guitar player, a drummer, and flute player, piano player, so both I guess really.

[Sarah]

What kind of symbolic statements of theology are within the church itself? Is there stained glass, are there crosses?

[Jim Ryan]

Oh yeah, all the windows are stained glass, and they're, most of them are donated by somebody that's bought the windows and had them put in. And of course they go back a long time too. They're pretty old windows. And then there's a cross of at the front, and an altar, and I don't know. I guess that's it.

[Sarah]

Do you think that, well this is the church you've been at for forty years, this is the church that you'll stay at?

[Jim Ryan]

Yeah, I'm not planning on switching anyway.

[Sarah]

And, as you said, they're trying to get the youth program going and, maybe even recruit new members. Do you think that, this church will continue for a long time? Do you see any threats of maybe the congregation getting smaller, and it having to close its doors?

[Jim Ryan]



I think it'll be around for quite a while. It's, I don't know, there's a lot of older people there, so I'm sure it's going to decline a little bit if some younger ones don't come in, but there's getting to be a few more younger ones. It's been here for 100 years, so I kinda doubt if it closes, and with the college right next door, that should help it some I would think. I guess I forgot to mention one service. We've got a Spanish service now too. It meets on Sunday morning, and that's, well, I don't think they have over about maybe, 10 to 15, but then there's some Spanish people coming now too.

[Sarah]

Does your normal pastor conduct that service?

[Jim Ryan]

No they have another Pastor that does it. That does the Spanish.

[Sarah]

And how many people attend that?

[Jim Ryan]

Probably not over 10 or 15 every Sunday. There's not too many yet but, there will probably be more coming maybe.

[Sarah]

Do they, does the group that attends that service, do they have any interaction with the congregation that attends the services in English?

[Jim Ryan]

Not really. No there's not. They have this one at 9:30am, the Spanish service is 9:30am, so it's in between the others, so no they don't.

[Sarah]

They don't seem to be involved with any of the other groups or anything?

[Jim Ryan]

I don't think so. Unless is some of the pot luck or something like that. Not as far as the church services go.

[Sarah]

You have three children, have they, who were raised in the church. Are they still members of the Methodist faith, or that same church?

[Jim Ryan]

No, I guess not. I guess just one. Just one is a member, yeah. And I'm not sure, yeah I don't know how you lose your membership, except one has moved out of town, and the other one goes to a different church, so I guess one is all that's left.

[Sarah]

So the one that, there's still one in town that goes to a different church, and with faith is that?

[Jim Ryan]

I think that's a Baptist church.

[Sarah]

And was there a reason that he chose to switch?

[Jim Ryan]

I think marriage probably changed his, I don't know whether it changed his faith, or if it just changed places he was going to church.

[Sarah]

Well I think, have there been, in the forty years that you've been there, have there been any really memorable characters that stick out in your mind? You know, they don't even have to be a pastor. It could be somebody who was just a part of the congregation?

[Jim Ryan]

Oh gosh, no, I can't think of any. There's this older lady, Helen Moppin, that has been a pretty dear friend through the years. And then the minister we have now, he's a real nice, sociable minister I would say. And then there was another one years ago, Jim Frederickson, that was handicapped and he was kind of an associate minister. Outside of that, there's probably been some others, but I don't really remember.

[Sarah]

Oh, there was just one other thing I wanted to ask you as far as the kids in the church go. For the ones that are younger, maybe even too young to attend Sunday school, do they have any type of childcare facilities that they offer?

[Jim Ryan]

Yes they have a nursery, that there's two ladies that takes care of the nursery, and keeps the younger kids that are too young to be in church I guess.

[Sarah]

And are there quite a few people that take advantage of that?

[Jim Ryan]

Well usually there's about 6 to 7 kids, that's in the nursery most Sunday mornings, so not a whole bunch. But got a few anyways.

[Sarah]

I think that about covers it, unless there's anything else you can think of that you'd like to share. I mean it could even be from one of your earlier church experiences.

[Jim Ryan]

I don't know you've covered pretty well and stuff. I don't know that anything else has changed so awful much. Well, I guess it's changed quite a little bit in forty years when you get to thinking back over some of the sermons and stuff they had. Communion is probably what's changed the most from the time it started to now. Cuz it used to be you took break, and then grape juice for the blood of Christ, and now they give you a wafer and I guess you still get the juice.

[Sarah]

Why have they changed that?

[Jim Ryan]

I suppose it's more sanitary maybe. And probably handier to serve than a loaf of bread that everybody takes a piece off of. And they used to pass it through the pews, and everybody just took it, and now they just give you the wafer and juice.

[Sarah]

How often does the Methodist church offer communion?

[Jim Ryan]

Oh I'm gonna say, maybe about once every six weeks. It seems like it kind of varies from time to time, we had one minister where we had communion about every Sunday. Why? I don't know. But he did.

[Sarah]

So there's not a golden rule?

[Jim Ryan]

I don't think there's any set rule no, not like the Catholic Church though, it's just communion every Sunday too. But then it's changed too from what it used to be.

[Sarah]

Do they have a Baptism ceremony or a confirmation ceremony? Are you born and then baptized into the church, or is there something later when you're older?

[Jim Ryan]

Well the baptize, most people are baptized shortly after birth. I mean within the first year probably, and then of course there's some that may not be baptized 'til they're 40 or 50 years old. And then the confirmation class, that's usually when they get older. I don't know, probably 10, 11 maybe. And then that's, after they finish confirmation class then they're members of the church.

[Sarah]

What if you join the church when you're older? Do you go through confirmation classes then? How do you become a member?

[Jim Ryan]

I think they do have some sort of class. I don't remember going through any class but maybe we did. But they do have a class and I don't know how long it is, but there is a class.

[Sarah]

Think that's everything. Thank you very much!

[Jim Ryan]

You're welcome.