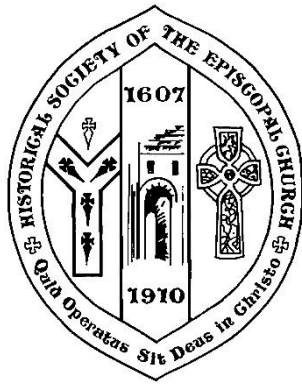


Arthur B. Williams, Jr. Oral History, Interview Transcript



African American Episcopal Historical
Collection

Virginia Theological Seminary Archives

Bishop Payne Library
3737 Seminary Road, Alexandria, Virginia
22304-5201
703-461-1752

askaaehc@vts.edu
<http://www.vts.edu/aaehc>



Narrator: The Rt. Rev. Arthur B. Williams, Jr.

Interviewer: The Rev. Melana Nelson-Amaker

Location: The Virginia Theological Seminary

Date of Interview: October 19-21, 2009

Length of Recorded Interview: 9 hours 15 minutes

Abstract: In this interview, Bishop Williams discusses the Black Episcopal experience, his family, home, and work life, and his lifelong commitment to the church and social justice.

Transcriptionist:

Same Day Transcriptions, Inc.
11523 Palmbrush Trail, Suite 102
Lakewood Ranch, FL 34202

Transcribed: August 2013

Repository: African American Episcopal Historical Collection, Virginia Theological Seminary Archives, Bishop Payne Library, 3737 Seminary Road, Alexandria, Virginia 22304-5201, 703-461-1752, <http://www.vts.edu/library/archives>

Collection Number: RG A54

Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use: Permission is required to cite, quote, and reproduce.

Preferred Citation: Arthur B. Williams Oral History, RG A54, Interview Transcript, October 19-21, 2009, Minute XX:XX:XX, Page X, African American Episcopal Historical Collection, Virginia Theological Seminary Archives.

Key:

[] = Note or addition of transcriber, narrator, or interviewer

Time stamps are noted in red and bold for ease of identification and citation.

Processing and Content Notes:

A recording of the interview was sent to a professional transcriptionist who transcribed the conversation using a “light edit” method. This entails the omission of most verbal pauses and false starts. The initial transcript was then sent to the narrator who suggested further revisions, including minor deletions, additions, and substitutions (e.g., giving an individual’s full name and title), for the sake of clarity and accuracy. The interviewer incorporated those revisions, as well as minor revisions of his own. This transcript is thus an acceptable rendition of the recorded interview. However, the audio, as well as the written edits of the narrator, are also available to researchers. The written edits are kept in the collection control file.

Finding Aid: There is a thorough finding aid that includes information about all of the individual interviews in the Arthur B. Williams, Jr. Oral History, RG A54. It may be found on this page:

<https://www.vts.edu/Resources/African-American-Episcopal-Historical-Collection/Collections>

Access Points:

Williams, Arthur B, 1935-
 African American Episcopalians
 Black Episcopalians
 Blacks -- History
 Blacks – Religion
 Episcopal Church
 Episcopalians -- Biography
 United States Navy
 Grace Church
 Detroit, Michigan
 East Providence, Rhode Island
 King Jr., Martin Luther
 Primo, Quintin
 Burgess, John
 Tutu, Desmond
 Brown University
 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
 House of Bishops
 Black Power Movement
 Civil Rights Movement
 Union of Black Episcopalians
 Office of Black Ministries
 Lift Every Voice and Sing II
 Lambeth Conference
 African Independence Movement
 Virginia Theological Seminary
 General Seminary
 Ministerial Association of Rhode Island

TRANSCRIPT

MZ000008

[Informal background]

I'm the Reverend Melana Nelson Amaker. I'm here at Virginia Theological Seminary with the Rt. Reverend Arthur Benjamin Williams, Jr. who is retired in the diocese of Ohio. And we're here to record some of Bishop Williams' life story by way of an oral history interview. Bishop Williams thank you so very much for agreeing to come to sit for these interviews. I have enjoyed the association that we have had over the past years in one way or another. And very pleased that you are being our first interviewee for this series and just really looking forward to hearing from you about your life, of course your ministry so that not so much I will get to hear it, which I will enjoy, but so that people all over the church from now until time in memorial will get to know something of your life and ministry.

Thank you, I'm glad to be here as the first.

You're welcome. You know we're always interested in knowing how people start out. So I would like to hear from you really about your growing up, about your family, about just the early parts of your life perhaps before ordination was even a thought for you. Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Providence, Rhode Island; I was born there in 1935. My family lived in Providence from about 1900. My grandparents on my father's side came up from Augusta, Georgia and my grandparents on my mother's side, well my grandfather came from Baltimore and my great grandmother came down from New Brunswick in Canada. So on both sides they were in Rhode Island from about 1900.

And would you name for me your parents and your grandparents; so that's just part of the Record. What were their names?

Well I was named after my grandfather; his name was Arthur Benjamin Williams. And my grandmother's name was Rosa Pickrum Williams. My mother's father's name was Harry Turner Smith and her mother's name was Clara Walker Smith, My parents' names are Eleanor Enid Williams and Arthur Benjamin Williams. He was really a junior but his father died when he was 16 and he dropped the junior. I took on the junior later on. But my grandmother, Rosa Williams, always addressed my mail Arthur B. Williams III. As I say they were there by the first part of the 20th century. Actually I've done a little research on my family and my grandmother was associated with St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Augusta as were her sisters; I found some records there. But my grandparents on that side were married at the CME church, Trinity Church in Augusta. So I assume that, though I'm not sure, Trinity was the primary church they went to. But when my grandmother came to Providence it wasn't long after they arrived that grandparents on both sides were charter members of Church of the Savior founded about 1914. And in fact, my grandparents on my mother's side, records show, that they were the first couple married there. And that was about 1915 or so; 1914 or 1915. And that's really my first association with the Episcopal Church because my grandparents on my mother's --

MZ000009

side were in the choir and were very active in this church, the little Church of the Savior. And in fact my mother -- my mother's middle name - was named after the Vicar's daughter who was named Enid; so my mother's name is Eleanor Enid Williams. So they were very close to the Vicar. Percival G. Moore-Brown, who came by 1910 and was ordained in 1917 and he was in that mission until he retired I think in the 1940's. And part of that I'm sure was that he wanted to be there, but part of it was because African Americans were not deployed very widely and so he was in some ways restricted to that church in Providence. That church was there until I think the late 1950's when it was merged with the cathedral.

Did you have siblings?

One brother, Jerry (Gerald) who now lives in Daytona Beach in Florida. When I went to Cleveland in 1977 he left Providence and went to Florida and after being there a short time he vowed he would never spend another winter in Rhode Island and he hasn't. We were very close growing up. I re-found the Episcopal church during my second year at college and when I did that my mother became active in the Episcopal church, as did my brother. He and I were both acolytes at St. Stephen's Church in Providence.

But you did grow up in this church that your grandparents helped found or not?

No. My earliest memory of going to church was when I was about 4 sitting in the pew with my grandparents. I don't know why they were not in the choir that Sunday but they weren't and I remember Father Brown going up the aisle and I must have been about four I suppose and as he was just going by looking down at me and giving me a great big wink and so that's my earliest memory of church, the Episcopal church in particular. Since my grandparents were founding members of the church, they were very concerned that their grandchildren at five and four had not been baptized. My parents were not church goers. And so when I was five at Church of the Savior which was meeting then in the chapel of the Cathedral at St. John, that's where I was baptized at five and my brother was baptized at the same time at four. And my grandparents, again, were my godparents. So that -- that was my earliest association with Episcopal Church. My grandfather died when I was about seven and we moved then from Providence to East Providence, which in Rhode Island is not a very distance -- three or four miles. And then my parents wanted us to go to a church where we wouldn't have to cross any major streets and so that happened to be what is now the United Methodist Church; that's before the Methodist Church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church and then it was just called the Methodist Church. So Haven Methodist Church on Taunton Avenue in East Providence is really where I got my formative training. I went there from the time I was seven until I was about 12 or 13. Billy Wallace was the son of the Minister and he and I became very good friends and we went to junior high school together. But when I became active in the band in my second year of junior high school and all through high school - when I started that activity in the band there was a falling away

MZ000010

from the church attendance. But I was very -- I was very active in church until that time. In fact, at 12 or so maybe a little younger I was extended the right hand of fellowship in the Methodist Church, as they called it, and I was the youngest member of that church at that time. So as I said I was very active. And then in junior high school and senior high school I didn't go to any church and I really

became interested again in the church at the end of my freshman year at Brown. I began to ask questions that come to you while in college -- what's life all about, and what is its meaning for me -- those kinds of questions. A friend of mine who was a former Methodist had found a lot of those answers in the Episcopal Church and so he said, "Why don't you come to church with me?" And so at the end of my freshman year, Trinity Sunday 1954, I went to church with him. It was the church on the campus, St. Stephen's was described in its founding in the 19th century as being on the edge of the Brown University campus, but now it's completely surrounded by Brown. And it still sits there as a parish of the Diocese. So when I walked in it was Trinity Sunday. This church was very much from its beginning in the Tractarian tradition, an Anglo catholic parish; so I walked in -- a former Methodist at a solemn high mass and solemn procession and solemn Te Deum in station. And so I didn't know what was going on but I just remember being kind of caught up in it with my friend handing me the books as we went through the service. But I realize now that what I was going through -- what happened emotionally was that the Church of the Savior, under Father Moore-Brown, with his West Indian background was himself an Anglo Catholic so what I remember is that -- as I say at least emotionally - was that this was the tradition of church that I knew as a boy and that in some ways I was responding even though I didn't have an intellectual understanding - I was responding to some of that I believe. And then I went on to go to confirmation classes in my sophomore year and the Bishop of Rhode Island lived around the corner really -- the Bishop's house was on the Brown University campus. So I had a private confirmation with one other person who was ready. So when it came time for me to be confirmed the Rector asked Bishop Bennett if he would come on over at lunch time and confirm Madge Holmes and me. And so I was -- I was confirmed at a private service at St. Stephen's and thus began that commitment and deep activity in the Episcopal Church which never stopped. And the Bishop arrived -- dressed like the Bishop. The Rhode Island tradition was not Anglo Catholic but Bishop Bennett was a very cooperative Bishop. I remember when he came out of the sacristy all dressed up in his cope and miter and he confirmed me. And as I say by then I was serving at the Sunday and daily Eucharists. My first year at Brown I commuted to school since Brown University was by bus was probably 20-25 minutes from my house. During my second year --

MZ000011

there was a dormitory founded -- I was part of this movement. The dormitory was founded to be a place where commuting students could gather and occasionally could stay overnight I was on that board of Plantations House after Rhode Island and Providence Plantations - that's the full name of the state of Rhode Island; so it was called Plantations House.

Thank you for explaining what that was.

It's interesting that just recently within the last year or two there has been a move I understand in the legislature in Rhode Island to drop Plantations from its official name. I expect that won't get anywhere in Yankee New England - I don't expect it's going to get anywhere but we'll see. I was very active in that organizing and I was on the first board and spent a lot of time staying overnight. I spent a lot of time on the campus because of that opportunity offered by Plantations House. And then during my third year I lived in an apartment near the campus and then my fourth year I lived on campus. And so I got closer and closer; the determining factor of that was the cost of Brown. I remember when I was talking with my father when I was in high school about going to college and I expressed an interest in Brown. He said, "Well apply" Later on I found out that my mother and he had a conversation. My mother was saying to him, "Why are you encouraging Arthur to go to Brown, we can't afford Brown" and my father being who he was said, "If he can get in we'll find a way to afford it". And so with some money saved and some gifts from my grandmother who was

living with us by then and working and loans, I got through Brown University. And my best year was that last year on campus as you would expect.

Yes.

All four years I was very active primarily in the Brown University band. In fact, I was drum major of the marching band.

I was going to say what was your instrument, drums?

No my instrument was baritone horn.

Okay.

But I was drum major of the marching band and played baritone horn in the symphonic band. The interesting thing about the Brown band was that I was student director, drum major and played baritone horn with my high school band. As I told you my high school was only 20 minutes away from Brown University and the director of the Brown University band lived in East Providence. And one time he came by for a concert. He needed a baritone horn player to play in the Brown Band so he asked the director about that and so for my last year in high school I played in the Brown University band. So when the admissions officer asked me about my interest in Brown I told him that I was a member of the Brown band and he just kind of looked at me, "You're a member of the Brown band?" And I told the story I just told you. So that was my connection with Brown. I knew it was a good school, although I must say that I was naïve in some ways about -- about the national reputation of Brown University, which has grown tremendously even since I graduated in 1957. Now it has an international reputation. But to me it was a school that I knew best and I was in the band. I knew I'd get a good education there; those are my basic reasons for wanting to go to Brown. And if I had it to do over again I would choose Brown. The admissions office --

MZ000012

asked me whether had I applied to any other school and again, out of my naïveté, the answer was no. And he said, "That's what we like to hear". So when I was at Brown it was before they merged with the women's college, which was a college called Pembroke. Then they admitted about 600 students and then they had quotas for blacks and others. And so when I was admitted less than 1% of the student body was African American. There were about half dozen of us out of 600.

All men?

Brown was an all men's school, although because there was a close association with Pembroke which wasn't very far away there were women in all our classes. So as you walked around the campus you would see a lot of females. And I think Pembroke had entering classes about 200. As soon as I graduated Brown merged with Pembroke and now they admit about 1000 students. Now the percentage of -- not just African Americans, but all the races has increased. But African Americans, in particular, the percentage of black students is close to 8 or 10% now. And part of that was because in 1968 the African American students walked out of Brown, walked down the hill to the Congdon Street Baptist Church, which was the oldest black Baptist church in the state. They made demands on the university about its admissions practices. And so they changed and Brown began to diversify in the way that they hadn't.

Excellent.

So that's some history.

Six hundred students for the whole undergraduate university per class?

Per class.

So there were half dozen of you in your class?

In my class; yes. So at Brown there were -- there were maybe twenty five of us out of 2,500 undergraduates. There were perhaps 20-25 black students in the whole student body. Plus of course the graduate schools and I don't remember the statistics about the graduate school, but that's the way it was in 1953. Under the leadership of Ruth Simmons a recent African American president a Committee on Slavery and Justice was appointed in 2003 to report on the historical relationship of Brown with slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. Some other universities have now followed suit.

And your parents were also college educated or not; I didn't ask you that?

My mother was not. She went to East Providence High School, the same high school I did. My father graduated from Hope High School and spent two years at Providence College, which was a Roman Catholic Dominican College. But then when I was born he had to leave school and go to work and my brother was born one year later. And so he worked -- I forget his first job but he ended up in 1936 working for the Post Office. And he worked for the Post Office until he retired in 1976. And he really rose up in the Post Office to the highest rank in the Providence Postal System, the highest position below Post Master, which was a political appointment. I forget his official title, but the Post Office was very important in our life growing up. And at college during the Christmas season he always made sure that I applied to deliver mail since you could make quite a bit of money in a short amount of time. I did that all four years I was in college. But interesting because I was my father's son I was held to a more strict discipline than those around me. I mean people used to sit down and sort the mail; well officially you're supposed to stand up and sort the mail; so my father would go by and he would say to me, "Stand up".

MZ000013

I sorted the mail one season but the rest I was out delivering mail in the snow.

And what did your parents make of this return to church and your sounds like passion for it since they had not been church goers?

Well my mother was always supportive and she was -- of the two parents she was the more excited about that fact. She became active again in the Episcopal Church. She was -- she became a choir member of a very fine choir at St. Stephen's Church, the music program that was endowed. She was active -- I think she may even have served on the Altar Guild and that sort of thing. She became a very active member. But my father he would -- he would always say -- my father didn't go to church and -- and he would always say that he was a Congregationalist. And that's because as a boy growing up in Providence -- his mother took him to the congregational church that has since closed

and merged with Central Congregational Church. And so he would always say that he was a member of the Central Congregational Church. But he never set foot in Central Congregational Church that I know about. His father was a 32nd Degree Mason and -- and after my father retired he became a Mason and -- and then became a Shriner as well and became very active in all of that. The Masons and the Shriners have a religious requirement that I don't know enough about it to know why on St. John the Evangelist they all should go to church. So anyway, so my father used to go -- I think twice a year he would go to church. And so my father would went to church. And then occasionally people would say, "You have a son who is a priest and you don't go to church"? And he would say, "I go to church", he said, "I went to both of his ordinations", he said "And his brother has four children and I went to all their baptisms"; that was his claim to fame in the church. But -- frankly when I first told him it was in my second year in college. He asked me what I was thinking about doing. That was when I was most enthusiastic. Now all that enthusiasm and just re-finding the church I not long after that began to think that I wanted to be ordained to the priesthood. And so I said to him, this is maybe my third year in college, so he asked me what -- what I thought I might do after I get out of college. And I said to him, "I think I want to go to seminary and be a priest." Because his reference to priesthood was out of the Roman Catholic because of his college experience his response was quite frank. He said to me, "What are you nuts?" I did not find that particularly encouraging from my father. And I began also to think of other fields I might go into. I thought at one time I would -- because I was working part time in the library system at Brown all while I was there. During the year and it became a full time job. I kind of admired the director of the library system and thought that I might go and get my master's degree in library science, but I changed my mind about that. And then the head of the Industrial National Bank, the president, went to St. Stephen's Church. The Rector wanted me to meet him if banking was my field and so I actually applied for that job, but I knew that I wouldn't want to do that after a while. In college I was a deferred student --

MZ000014

That is the draft was on then, so I had a student deferment; so I knew that when I graduated -- if I didn't join the Army I would be drafted - I would be drafted unless I chose to go into the service.

Yes.

And so I chose one of the services. I preferred the Navy so I went to Officer Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island, not very far away and I became a Naval Officer in 1957.

I neglected to ask you what your undergraduate major was.

Musicology, music history and theory. And music has always been an avocation for me and I did that without any intention of either performing music or teaching. My father encouraged me when I began to think about my major at the beginning of my third year. He said to me, "Major in whatever you want to major in. Major in what you like". He said because the important when you graduate from Brown University, he said, "Have a degree from Brown University" and he said, "And when they come to interview you they're not going to ask you much about what you majored in". The other thing my father said to me when I was growing up, he said when you come to choose your life's work it doesn't matter how much money you make, it doesn't matter about prestige or it has all the comforts. He said you're going to spend a lot of time working and so you should choose to do what you like to do. Now he told me that before I told him about the priesthood, so he kind of shifted. But I have to say that if he had his druthers, my father had some political connections and

my father wanted me to go to the Naval Academy because he could have gotten me a political appointment. And -- this is before I applied to Brown. And when I was in the Navy in his heart of hearts he was hoping that I would after my required time was up, which was about four years or so, that I would -- I would become a career Naval Officer. And so he would ask me from time to time if I was thinking about that and I would tell him no I wasn't. But then about my fourth year in the Navy he said, "Well you're going to come out of the Navy in a year now" and he said, "What are you thinking you might do"? And then even though I had completely changed my mind about going to seminary in my first years in the Navy, about my fourth year that call returned, the poet wrote the poem about, "The Hound of Heaven"?

Yes.

Francis Thompson I guess his name was. That was true of me and around my fourth year in the Navy when I was at sea I had a sense of call to the priesthood again and so when my father asked me, "What do you think you might do"? I told him, "I think I'm going to go to seminary". And he said at that point "That's what you should do". He said the reason I was not positive about you doing it before -- he said because when you talked about going to the priesthood you had only recently moved out of the house, he said you went across town and you hadn't been out of the state. And he said, "I didn't think you knew anything about what life was about". He said, "But now you've been all over the place" and he said, "Sometimes all over the world and so you've seen what's out there" and he said, "If you still feel you have a call to the priesthood, that's what you should do" and so -- so he was from then on pretty supportive. And he came, of course, to my ordinations as Deacon and Priest in the Cathedral of Providence. And then when I was consecrated bishop in October 1986 (my mother had died by then) he was present and was interviewed by the local religious reporter of the Plain Dealer and said some remarkable things to the reporter that I didn't think he remembered.

MZ000015

To the reporter he said he was -- he was proud of his son being ordained as a Bishop in the church.

Where did the Navy take you and what was your Naval Officers position?

Well as I said I went to Officer Candidate School in Newport so then really unlike a lot of my classmates I got to go home most weekends. And so I went from Officer Candidate School -- I don't know if you remember that the United States Navy in 1957, was a very segregated service and I would say of the armed services the Navy was the most southern oriented. A lot of the leadership in the Navy, the career officers I think more were from the south than the north. And so interestingly when it came time for me to be assigned to my first duty station I was assigned to school which was the first thing I did after OCS and it was -- it was a secret program that the Navy had which was part of the early warning anti-submarine system on the east coast of the United States. So we had bases all the way from Canada all the way down into the West Indies. So the naval personnel office wrote to the commanding officer of one of these bases, it was in -- I think it was in Eleuthera. They wrote to ask him -- these are small bases just out of half dozen officers -- and he wrote to ask him if he would be willing to take a black officer on his staff. Now a friend of mine was stationed there (he wasn't a friend then I came to know him later on.) but he was stationed there when that request came. And that commanding officer called together the other officers to ask them what they would think of that.

What year?

This would be 1957. And this friend of mine told me that -- they were young officers, many just out of the candidate school and they said it didn't bother them, but the commanding office wrote back and said that given that this was an island culture he didn't think I'd be very happy there and he wrote back and said, "No" he would not accept me. So then they wrote in that same program to the commanding officer of the base at Cape May Point, New Jersey and that was another one of these stations and that commanding officer, I remember his name was Rosencrantz, wrote back and said, "Yes" he would accept me. So -- so I spent about two years there stationed in the most southern point in New Jersey and --

Doing what kind of work?

Well this early warning submarine system what it did was listening -- there were speakers, not speakers but receivers all up and down the coast from these various stations and the signals came in constantly from these receivers from Canada all the way down to the West Indies recording all the shipping activity off the east coast. The motors of all the vessels had a certain frequency and we were able to translate these frequencies into the written record in this --

MZ000016

this great room where all this information came in. I remember particularly when we started the nuclear submarines which had a very particular kind of signature which we called their recorded frequencies. And so there were indeed, from time to time, Russian submarines off the coast. So what would happen was we would get them at one angle and then the station in Nantucket would get it at another angle and then you could -- you would know exactly where they were. And then if they became a threat then orders would go to one of the naval air stations to go out to investigate. I was the officer on duty on a schedule with other officers to be in charge of the -- this activity for -- for a period of time, eight hours at a time.

It sounds like intelligent work; was it considered intelligence work -- was it considered that?

It was a kind of intelligence. It was an aspect of intelligence work. So that's -- that's what I did when I was on duty. But everybody on duty also had a -- had another piece of work and I -- I had the -- the job that a civil engineer officer would normally have. In fact, I relieved the civil engineer officer when they decided they didn't have to have that much expertise so they gave it to line officers like myself. And so I was called also the base logistics officer, which means I had under me sailors who were plumbers and utility men who ran all the transportation and electricians and those people with those kinds of expertise. And we maintained the vehicles on the base and all that sort of thing. And what's really kind of ironic about that is that I could say when I was in the Navy I did not have my driver's license. I -- I don't remember -- I had driven a few miles but not many. So all this to say that I had all this kind of expertise around me, about which I knew very little, but fortunately I had a chief petty officer who was excellent and so I administered the work and he implemented it. So that was the line of work I did for two years along with this intelligence work as you called it. I thought that I would want to be a career naval officer, but in order to do that I had to extend my time, my active duty; so I wrote to the Bureau of Naval Personnel and said I would like to go to sea -- that I was considering being a career naval officer. If you are really considering that you have to go to sea and so I did ask for orders to go to sea. In fact, the papers I'm going to give you this week -- I just put them in an envelope, are the very letters, the correspondence of what I

wrote to the personnel Bureau and they were assigning me to a heavy cruiser, which is one of the large naval ships which maintain all the tradition of the Navy, which was home ported, not very far from Providence in Boston. And so I was aboard ship there for two years and in the communications department. That's when I began to think about becoming a priest, going to seminary. And I had everything all figured out because I was making a pretty good salary then about how I was going to finance this. I had paid off my college debts and I was beginning to save money towards whichever seminary.

MZ000017

They decided to decommission the ship to put it in mothballs and therefore to release me to inactive duty and that really upset all my plans. So I went to Washington and to the Bureau of Naval Personnel and I made my case and -- and convinced them that they should let me stay in the Navy for another 14 months I guess it was and so they assigned me to -- to Quonset Point, which is a naval station which is about 20 miles from Providence, Rhode Island. And I headed up a courier transfer station. It's really -- it's really an internal post office. A post office internal to the armed services and its moving material from one place to another that is too classified to go in the United States mail - accompanied by an officer who is armed. And so they put me in charge of this small unit. There were about four or five officers and a few enlisted men who did administrative work and drove vehicles. And so that's what I got assigned to and that's what I did my last year or so in the Navy. And then I finished my tour of duty in the Navy in August 1961 and then I went to seminary the next month.

What was interesting about that was the ship I was on because I had to go back to see the Bishop -- have I ever told you this story about when I went to see the Bishop when I was in college? I'll tell you that story. But I went back to see the same Bishop in 1961 and interestingly the ship went to Providence. So I went to see the Bishop and then after some conversation with my Rector I was approved for the General Theological Seminary by the bishop and went to New York City and was interviewed by Dean Larry Rose and therefore, as I said, came out of the Navy in August of '57 and went to -- I'm sorry, August of '61, and I went to seminary the next month. So that's some of what happened to me.

You asked me where I traveled. The ship I was on really did travel -- did move around much more so than most ships during peace time. I liked it because I was single then. Married sailors didn't like it a lot. But we went -- we went to Puerto Rico twice, we were sent to the South Atlantic so we went to Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro and then we went to Trinidad on the way down. Then we went to Germany and spent a little time in northern Germany, we went to Bermuda; we went up and sailed into the St. Lawrence Seaway; so this ship really steamed around. We did not go to the Mediterranean, but we had a chance to see the world. That's part of what my father meant when he said "You've seen this world and if you still feel the same way you do (about the priesthood), you should do what you want to do". I want to finish my naval experience. In fact when I finished my college experience I went to Officer Candidate School; it wasn't something I would want to do again. But I was glad that I had that experience. My first experience in the Deep South was while I was in the Navy. One of the responsibilities at that base in New Jersey where I was stationed was to be the atomic, biological, chemical defense officer. It was just at the base in case of attack; and so I had to go to school for that. So I went to school on an Army base, which was located in Anniston, Alabama.

MZ000018

And that was really my first experience into the Deep South. Now my parents had close friends in Washington D.C. and I went there as a young boy, but segregation by law I had not experienced. I lived in New England where the prejudice and racism were supported not by law but by custom.

So Bishop Williams, during this early period of your life from the -- your growing up time and through your college years did you have experiences of prejudice or racism that you recall?

When I was young in Providence -- the African American community was a small community in Providence and the middle class black community was very small. I felt like we all knew each other - played cards together and my parents and grandparents moved in this group. So there was a lot of conversation that I would hear. There were restaurants that you knew you could go to and sit and they would not wait on you. And there was housing - the rental situation and the buying situation. Housing was pervaded with prejudice and so -- so I grew up kind of knowing how to survive as all blacks do in Providence.

And your public school experience?

The public school experience, I went to predominantly white schools. In Providence blacks lived in three areas. The oldest families lived east and north of town. And when I say that my family came into Providence in 1900 or so, that's kind of where blacks originally came into that area. And then blacks began to move over into East Providence. And poor blacks were south of the city. In East Providence there was one central high school -- although there were several communities in East Providence there was one central high school. And so there were -- there were African Americans at that school but were in small numbers. I think my high school class had about 250 in it and probably five or six percent of that number were African Americans. I occasionally would run into prejudice --

MZ000019

But -- but that didn't dominate my high school. And I -- I told you before I was active in the band and I was very fortunate in the director of the music program - director of the bands and the music program in high school. I was always grateful that he took a special interest in me and so that when it came time to appoint a drum major he encouraged me. I wasn't going to try out for it but he encouraged me to do that. We all had to kind of march around. But it was really his choice and so he selected me to be the drum major in junior high school and high school and to be student director of the band. I became quite efficient on the baritone horn. And so I was in all-state band and all-New England band and the solo ensemble festival where I won medals; in fact I still have those medals which I discovered last week, I didn't know I had them in a little box. That's because of Dr. Farnum. I found out later that because of a situation that he got some criticism for doing that and in fact, I heard this from his daughter. It's interesting that a few years ago when he died his family called to ask me if I would come and take the funeral and I was grateful to be able to express my gratitude to him. But she asked me if I had ever heard the story about a mother of one of the clarinet players who was concerned because her daughter was expressing feelings positively toward me to her mother. And her mother went to Dr. Farnum and wanted him to remove me from the band

Lest her daughter's affection for you go somewhere.

That's what she said.

Remove you from the band entirely; not only from being the drum major but from the band?

Yes, and I was told that Dr. Farnum said to her that he was not going to do that and that the solution would be to remove her daughter. I don't know what happened. So I do know that even though I didn't hear things directly -- those sorts of things happened. And the other thing was there was a small group of us who became very good friends who were a mixture of blacks and whites who socialized pretty much among ourselves for high school activities. I was in the class play, as were most of them and so a lot of my social interaction was with them; so I really didn't experience the wider high school socially--

10 or 12 of you or something like that?

You're right, probably the core group was 10 or 12 out of the whole class. When I was in high school people were on the college track. The pre-college students were on one track and that all the way to high school. People came and went but you became very close to the 25 or so kids that were on that track. And so as I say we studied together and did activities, not all the same activities in high school but they overlapped. So there was a lot of that and I realize in retrospect that that this system in many ways was protective.

MZ000020

The black people in East Providence pretty much lived in two areas. I lived in an area that blacks were moving into; so there were still a lot of integration in the area. And then there was Dunbar Avenue, which was in another part of East Providence, which was pretty much all African Americans. I got to know where all the African Americans lived in East Providence because when I was 12 besides delivering the regular daily newspaper a friend of my father's came to me and asked if I'd like to make up a paper route to deliver an African American Newspaper. So I delivered the Pittsburgh Courier, the [Indiscernible] News, The Baltimore Afro American and Ebony and the local black newspaper called the Providence Chronicle. Which most of the people wanted because it contained local news. So I used to get on my bicycle once a week and drive all over East Providence where black people lived. In some cases like Dunbar Avenue, they lived in neighborhoods- all lived here in there in small enclaves or individually around East Providence. East Providence was a town, -- eventually became a city of 32,000. The high school --was a collector high school therefore, they came from all over the town.

That's how you got to know where most of the African Americans lived because you were delivering their newspapers.--

And many of whom were friends of my family---not all of them of course. I'm not sure, they weren't necessarily going to read all those newspapers but they ordered from me because I was 12 years old.

And they knew your family.

Exactly, and many of them knew my family. The other group that's strong in East Providence were The Cape Verdeans who came from the islands off the coast of Africa that were owned by Portugal. And so they were a separate culture in many ways who identified as being Portuguese. But I remember my barber was a Cape Verdean and although he identifies as black now, he didn't then.

As a group they didn't when I was growing up as much, although many of them identified enough to buy my newspaper.

So Dr. Farnum was important in your life in terms of someone who mentored you and --

No doubt about it; yes.

It seems as I hear the story that along the way there were a number of people who sort of put a hand on you and said, "Come this way" --

Yes, there's no doubt about the fact that a teacher or two and certainly Dr. Farnum were major figures for me. Dr. Farnum was a major father figure for me from the time I was in the 7th grade. He was away my first year and he came back and developed a music test that he patented, that was his field music testing. But he also developed one of the highest level music programs and band programs. He had a great -- I think the bands went through level six and we always played very serious and complicated music in all the festivals and we were always a grade one band both in marching and symphonic music. And that was because of him. And my mother was active in a group called the band parents and sometimes they were chaperones on many trips.

MZ000021

A lot of their work was to be supportive of students and to raise money; so she was active in that. But she was very close to Dr. Farnum; she had great admiration for him and he for her.

And it sounds like the Rector of the church while you were at Brown was also -- was he supporting and encouraging?

Yes he was. When I started to appear at daily Eucharist at the end of my freshman year- at the end of the Eucharist he would just speak to me. After I was confirmed he appointed me to one of the highest honors that you can have in an Anglo Catholic parish—sub deacon at the high mass. So yes, I would say that happened in high school and it happened in that parish. He was very supportive to me when I was preparing for the seminary; I'll tell you more about the contact between him and the Bishop when we talk about that. And then I have to say the same about the director of the Brown University Orchestra and Band who lived in East Providence. He brought me into the Brown Band in the last year of High School. His name was Martin Fisher and he also was very supportive of me--not as much as Dr. Farnum, but there's no doubt about the fact that he was. When I majored in music he was my faculty advisor and we have a very good relationship. And then when I was commuting to Brown occasionally he was going home to East Providence he would drop me off at home; so I had a lot of conversations with him.

I was thinking it would be unusual for an African American at that time to be a sub Deacon in the Solemn High Mass.

Absolutely; Yes. I was the first African American to go to seminary from the diocese of Rhode Island. And -- and then what happened historically the Church of the Savior closed, and merged with the Cathedral against the will of many of the members of the congregation.

Do you remember what year that was back then?

I would think it was probably in the late 1950's.

Okay.

When the congregation merged with the Cathedral, which was an all-white congregation, you had all these leaders in the black community. I mean you had lawyers, not a lot of lawyers but it was a small community. You had lawyers and some doctors and social workers and teachers and -- and when they merged with the Cathedral these persons were not raised to the same role of leadership of the vestry and that sort of thing. But the other thing that happened that was significant in the life of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Rhode Island was, that when they merged the Cathedral with the Church of the Savior there was also a merging of churchmanship. The Cathedral was very much in the Low Church tradition and the members of the Church of the Savior were Anglo Catholic. And so what began to happen because it didn't feel like church at the Cathedral of St. John, they would begin to go to the Anglo Catholic Church in town, which was St. Stephens.

On Brown's campus?

On Brown's Campus, and that's how my father's mother ended up at St. Stephen's. I didn't realize it but she had visited St. Stephen's on and off even before I became interested in that.

MZ000022

There were a few blacks at St. Stephen's. Interestingly I found this out later on when I was reading some vestry minutes at St. Stephen's after I was ordained is that there was an influx of blacks in the 1950's and probably early 1960's. I guess, was referred to the agenda of the Vestry of St. Stephen's as the "Negro problem". And so at the beginning of this time people were treated graciously. I never heard anyone say they weren't treated well but they were never put in places of leadership. I remember an African American Person was going to be put up for Vestry and it was, you know absolutely, it was racism that prevented his nomination because he would have been the most likely prominent black in the community -- a person of means and he was not nominated; so they made up reasons. So all that was -- all that was going on.

So no vestry position automatically means no other positions? Did they do any reading? Did they carry a chalice? Were they parts of guilds in the congregation? How did that go?

Well they were members of the choir.

Yes.

Some members (a small number) were members of the choir. And there was a teacher or two in the church school. Altogether, it was long established so there were no African Americans. St. Stephen's Church, which was founded about 1839-1840, began to draw its membership from the east side of Providence. And the East side of Providence is the oldest part of Providence. And for instance, Brown University was named after the Brown family in the late 1700's. Well the descendants of that same Brown were members at St. Stephen's Church for instance, John Nicholas Brown. He and his wife are very gracious people but I discovered that old money always seemed to have come with a certain amount of grace compared to the *neuvau riche*. When he was in church he sat in the front pew with his wife; certainly with many others particularly conservative in the area of race, which I'll tell you something about in a few minutes.

So all this is in answer to your question. When Father Ward appointed me to that position I had no idea how much criticism he received for doing that, but I do know that there were other black acolytes serving including my brother. Maybe the way he dealt with it was that I was thinking about the priesthood and this was a thing that I should know about. I don't know what he said to people, but I can't imagine that in that culture and at that time in Providence at St. Stephen's he didn't get some criticism.

Thank you.

MZ000023

This is the Reverend Milana Nelson Amaker back with the Reverend Arthur Benjamin Williams Jr. This is session two of the oral history interview with Bishop Williams and I want to say also that today is the 19th of October of 2009 and we are Virginia Seminary. So Bishop Williams I just wanted to pick up with you where we left off in our previous session and you were telling us some things about your experience in your early and young adult years with prejudice in Providence and places that you encountered it. And we had brought the story up to the point of your getting ready to exit the Navy and go into seminary, but I understand that while you were still at Brown University, or when you had come into the church there, St. Stephen's and were in consultation with the Rector about ordination because you'd been thinking about a call for some time-- there was a visit with the Bishop of that diocese, was there not?

Yes that's true.

What was his name?

His name was John Ceville Higgins (ph). And he had become Bishop about 1953 or 1954, something like that.

And what year would this have been?

1954.

And you went because the Rector had set up a meeting; how did you get to go?

The Rector set up the meeting.

Okay.

When I was thinking about seminary at that time there were no canons that established the Commission on Ministry and The Standing Committee had a minor role. The way that the ordination process worked was if you had a sense of vocation, you talked to your Rector and then your Rector would speak to the Bishop and set up an appointment with the Bishop. The Bishop would interview you and the Bishop would decide whether or not to accept you as a postulant. And the Bishop would assign pretty much what seminary you would go to.

So that was ordination process at that time in that place?

Right, that was The Episcopal Church's ordination process. Those canons on commissions on ministry and they didn't come in until the 1970's. So up until that time the admission to the ordination process and whether or not you were ordained pretty much in the hands of the Bishop. The Standing Committee always had a role, but as I say it was not a major role, but it was the role of approval. And there were no General Ordination Exams, but there were examining Chaplains in each diocese and when you graduate from seminary you had to pass exams in six areas I think it was.

So seminary was still -- was required then as well?

Oh yes.

Most everything else was different but --

Yes seminary was still a three-year requirement and you had to have a Bachelor's degree to enter, so that was the same. So I was at that place in the process where I had spoken with my Rector and he had affirmed my vocation and the next step was for me to go into and have an interview with the Bishop. And I would say that that happened probably at the end of 1954—when I was a sophomore.

MZ000024

Okay.

Well when I went to see him, the main thrust of his conversation was to express regret and whether there would be a place for me in the church.

The Bishop's that his response to you concerning your seminary admission was one of reserve and caution is what you said?

That's right. And that's what he said to me in summary. In summary, he would hope the church one day would be a place where African Americans could go any place in the life of the church, but that was not the case (presently) and he was not sure that there would be a place for me. I think he probably already had in mind that the one place that I could go to would be Church of the Savior and that that would be likely merged with the Cathedral or whatever other plan he had. That last part is a surmise; so anyway -- so I didn't come away from there encouraged.

Did he actually say no or just was it saying no by not saying it?

No, he didn't say no. In fact he said he would make me a postulant that would be that first step. But he certainly wasn't enthusiastic and when I reported that to my Rector he was enraged that I should have had that kind of reception. And so that kind of comment really would dampen my enthusiasm.

You were maybe 21 at the time, something like that?

When I went to see the Bishop the first time I would have been about 20.

And were you sad; were you also angry; how did that feel to you?

Well, it was a combination of those feelings. I knew I was naïve about society and the church. It was so unlike these other person's we talked about in my life who reaching out and enabled me to go forward and what I got from him felt like a full stop. And so there was anger and there was sadness because I really at that time I felt that I did have a vocation and now I was confused. I didn't know what I was going to do about all that. And the thing that I didn't do was to father. When he asked me about going to the priesthood he couldn't understand why I would want to become a leader in an institution that was as segregated as the church was-- he just saw that as kind of contradiction.

To the faith itself?

To the faith itself and it was also a contradiction to my social experience growing up.

MZ000025

To who he had raised you to be?

Yes. So that was his response. So when I told him the Bishop's response he was supportive to me personally but I think in some ways that he was relieved that I had some reality placed for me by the Bishop. So what happened was I continue with my enthusiasm with the church and my involvement in it, but I have to say that by the time I was a senior, for all sorts of reasons I decided that I did not have a call to the priesthood. So I went to the Bishop and I asked him to remove my name from petulancy list that he said to me that he would readily do. And my mother never said much about it; I think that disappointed her but she never said anything one way or the other, nor did my father really. My Rector was very disappointed as were people at the parish who knew about my sense of call. Well when I went to see the Bishop I hadn't really quite decided. I thought that the priesthood was not for me.

What you meant to say the second time they --

The second time --

Had your name removed?

When I was a senior I had my name removed. But then I had to contend with the fact that not going to seminary and graduating I had a student deferment; I think I mentioned earlier that the draft was on. And that if I didn't go to seminary, I didn't want to be drafted into the army. Then I needed to make a move to go in the branch of service that I wanted to go into.

That's when you went into the Navy?

That's when I went to Officer Candidate School, which given the armed services the United States Navy culture was supported that even more than I think the others. President Truman, in 1948 desegregated the armed services by executive order, but they were slow. I think the Navy in particular, was slow in getting to it. Well that's what I did and spent those four years in the Navy. I just kind of went my way, continued to go to church on Sunday and even in the Navy we were

fortunate to have an Episcopal Chaplain aboard the ship so I asked him if would he be willing if I could pull a congregation together to celebrate the Eucharist according to the Book of Common Prayer and he said yes. So at 8:00am on Sunday even when we were at sea we had Eucharist. And so as you can see my enthusiasm for the church continued but not my sense of call to the priesthood. When in the fourth year my call to the priesthood returned, I returned back to my rector and had to go back to the same Bishop. But you see, by the time I went back to the Bishop in 1960, the Civil Rights Movement, was in full swing. The Civil Rights Movement had affected the Bishop and I think he was glad to have an African American go from his diocese to seminary.

So he could say he had one.

Exactly.

MZ000026

So he approved me and he told me that one of the reasons his approval was because I had matured during my time in the United States Navy. In those days you didn't say everything that was on your mind to the Bishop because they had too much control over your future. But it was clear to me that when he said that I had matured, it was clear to me that he had matured as well.

Yes, yes.

So then The Bishop and my Rector got into an argument about the seminary I would go to. He thought that my churchmanship was such that I needed to be balanced so I needed to go to what was then called the Episcopal Theological Seminary in Cambridge that has since merged with Philadelphia Seminary. And my Rector wanted me to go to Nashotah House because he was on the board of trustees at Nashotah House. And so they got into this disagreement and they compromised on the seminary that I wanted to go. Because I had visited friends there. And that's how I ended up at General Theological Seminary. So as I say I came out of the Navy in August 1961 and went to seminary the next month; so that's how I got there.

And what was it like being at General; what was it like officially taking up this vocation that had been present in greater and lesser strengths for all those years?

Well almost immediately I noticed that when I got to General Seminary I was rooming with a senior and all my other classmates were rooming with juniors. And so I inquired about why that was and it seems that just before I went to General the Civil Rights Movement affected the students at General -- the black students roomed with white students and white students with black students and one of the southern Bishops made it clear that if General continued upholding this policy that he would withdraw his seminarians from General Theological Seminary. And so they were very cautious about where they placed African American students. And so this senior was asked if he would be willing to have an African American roommate. And he said it didn't make any difference to him. He may have been from diocese of Pennsylvania. But it was clear to me that this was another example of racism of the church.

And were there other African Americans in your junior class coming in with you?

Yes there were. There were -- I think in the junior class there were about four or five of us and at seminary there were even more of us. Herb Thompson was a close friend who went on to be Bishop Southern of Southern Ohio. Frederick Williams was one year ahead of me.

MZ000027

It wasn't as isolating a place to be black as was the -- as it was in college or being in the United States Navy where often I would be the only African American Naval Officer on the whole base. Certainly when I went aboard ship I was the only African American Officer. At General there was there was more social interaction in New York City. So my fieldwork was in a parish in the Bronx that was in transition from white to black. Herb Thompson and I both worked in that parish up there in the Bronx. And I know that I enjoyed the support of my classmates because I was elected first president of my class and then I was elected in my last year president of the student body. So as I said, I enjoyed a lot of support while I was in seminary.

And how did you find the study?

Studies?

Yeah, did you enjoy it?

Well I remember being concerned when I spoke to the Dean that I had not done academic studies for four years while I was in The Navy. At that time in the life of the church most of the student body went directly from college to seminary and there were a few late vocations but not many. So I had a concern about whether I could get back in the academic. But I remember Dean Rose, when I told him that, he just smiled and he said, "We have found that our students coming from Brown University usually can make the grade". That was a supportive thing to say. Frankly I wasn't a very good student; I got through. The courses that I elected were my best courses—I really did enjoy the classes at General. My favorite areas were church history and liturgics and one of the reason liturgics interested me so much is Dr. Boone Porter, one of the great scholars came to the faculty just before I got there and I was able to take both the basic liturgics with him. So I would say I was an average student back at General.

And what was it like for you to be officially pursuing priesthood, to be in school? And was the experience saying, "Yes this in fact after all what I'm going to do"? You said that you maintained an interest and a connection to the church because no matter where you were you went to church and you worshipped etc. Did it settle comfortably on your shoulders in seminary that you were going to be a priest or were you still wrestling with it a bit?

No, I had wrestled with it from my second year in college on and off and then through the Navy; and In the midst of all those experiences I was having. When I made the decision and when I arrived at General Seminary I knew that that's where God was calling me.

MZ000028

I was enthusiastic and it was a joyful place for me to be. And I had one bout with bad health while I was there, but I overcame that and graduated. I was ready to go. Loved the community at General—it's daily worship. It was a very satisfying place to be. I really found my destination to be home at seminary. The first summer I was there I worked with the Rector of St. Cyprians Church in

Hampton, Va, Walter Dennis who later became Suffragan Bishop in New York. He had put together the first summer program with an integrated staff south of Washington. He also had a lot of contacts and brought in speakers who just told us about the life of the church for Ex. Tollie Caution. I remember being down there with all of his stories; and it was a wonderful summer.

So you had to go spend the summer --

Yes it was required. -- I don't know if it is now or not but one summer you were expected to do some kind of parish training program.

Okay, yep.

So I went to St. Cyprians in Hampton. And the second summer seminarians had to do clinical pastoral education and I went to do work at a mental hospital in Westborough, Massachusetts. And that was a significant experience for me. It changed my perspective of looking at myself and gifts and personality and all that sort of thing. So that's what I did during the second summer in the while I was at General. And then during the school year I was in fieldwork at St. Andrews in the Bronx.

So then the time came that you finished and were ordained a Deacon? Was it the same Bishop?

It was the same Bishop. Just before I was ordained a Deacon the state of Rhode Island was wrestling with passing a law on fair housing. We're talking about between 1960- 1963. The diocese was called upon through its social relations committee to pass a resolution supporting the Fair Housing Act, which was before the General Assembly in Rhode Island. And I received word that at that diocesan convention at St. Stephen's parish that sponsored me at seminary, where Warren Ward was still the Rector, had voted against and --

Against the Fair Housing?

Against it --

So I went to the Bishop during my last year. It was the practice to have the parish that sent you to seminary to present you for ordination to the Deaconate. And I went to the Bishop and I told him that in good conscience I could not have St. Stephen's present me for ordination. Even though monetarily and other ways they had supported me through seminary, this was against my conscience.

MZ000029

Did you converse with the Rector about why the congregation had taken that stance or any one from the vestry would?

He and I talked about it some. But the reasoning was that people were prejudice and were afraid of the effect on neighborhoods and all that kind of scary stuff. People who were at St. Stephen's were caught up with all that and the so-called economic threat and the right of people to do with their

property as they wished including renting it or selling it; so all that was in play. And so they really favored the concern of the reactionary voices.

Was it painful for you that you're sponsoring parish that had supported you made this move?

It was painful but my rage overcame my sadness. And my Rector was also saddened and angry that I made that decision.

But was it accepted --

Yes, I must say that Bishop Higgins heard my concern. And the one reason that he did this was because the Dean of the Cathedral, whose name was Ronald Stenning was a strong advocate in the arena for Fair Housing with other leaders in the community both black and white. The Bishop was very dependent and had informed by Ron Stenning. So I think that Ron was able to convince the Bishop and that the Bishop finally had taken a public stand in favor of fair housing. And so I believe that when I went to him and told him where I was that he could agree with that because he had come to that decision himself. So, he said that in my case he would make an exception and that the rector of the parish where I went to work would present be for ordination. And so that's indeed what happened. And that parish was Grace Church in downtown Providence. That was my first call.

In 1964?

This was June 1964.

So what did you go there to do? What was the church like and what was your work like as you came on board there?

Dr. Robert McGregor was the Rector and I went there on a deacon-training program, which had been set up in memory of a former Rector who had served there for over 25 years plus. It was to give a newly graduated seminarian experience at a large downtown metropolitan parish. Including me there were four clergy on staff. It was one of those old Episcopal churches in downtown that modeled a strong music program and an effective outreach program. It was reported to me that they had done a large regional search and it wasn't just because I was from Rhode Island but that they settled on selecting me for that program. So it was a wonderful program I do believe even now that where a person goes when he or she – graduates from seminary and is formative for their whole priesthood.

MZ000030

Because of its organization having direct access to the Rector and to the priest who had particular specialties in Christian Education and youth and pastoral oversight. I had almost weekly encounters or interviews with each one of them and they helped me develop my ministry in all those areas. And then it was great just to be a part of that parish, which - at that time the largest physical church in diocese.

In what ways would you say it formed you?

I was only there a year, I probably only preached at the late service maybe half a dozen times perhaps. But for me just out of seminary to preach from that pulpit was awesome! During Lent they

brought in a great Christian Preachers from across the country. When I did preach, the first thing on Monday morning or Tuesday morning I sat with the Rector critiqued and provided me feedback. The parish had a weekly newsletter, which was called “the Grace Church, Helper.” And the sermon from whoever preached on Sunday at the late service was summarized and it was sent out to all the congregations. And so there was a sermon by this young Deacon published on the front of this newsletter. So there was that, and then to work with youth and someone who had pastoral expertise in doing hospital calling all over the city. So it was an experience that formed me in various areas of an ordained person. But another part that was formative for me was being a part of the diocesan Urban Pilot Program. The diocese of Rhode Island initiated a program in the inner city of Providence where the poorest people were predominantly black. A settlement house was established where a priest could go with his family and live in the community and develop a program of service in that community. The Rev. Alan Mason asked my Rector if I could come during the summer and to be chaplain to the staff and be involved in the program. And Bob Macgregor was glad to say “Yes” that would be another experience I could have; so off I went to do that as well. A person who came to be a part of that program and was really converted by it was Jonathon Daniels. He was a seminarian at Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge and this was his summer assignment.

MZ000031

He came to Providence and shortly after that that he was called to go to Alabama where as you know, he was murdered there.

It was a great place to be as Rhode Island was moving from being effected by the Civil Rights Movement to being effected less so than the rest of the country by the transition to the Black Power movement. I was in the city working at Church House as it was called during the transition time. And that’s when school busing was a major issue. Because of the mayor’s office and board of education most of the burden of school busing was falling on the black folk who lived in the south Providence. And by then I was a member of the Ministerial Association and I was the vice president. At a very critical time a statement was needed to be made to the mayor during his press conference. The president was out of town and so yours truly who by that time I had been ordained maybe a year by then, led the black clergy of the city of Providence and invaded the mayor’s press conference. When he heard we were there he slipped out but all the press was still there. And so I read the statement, which had a major effect on changing the policy in Providence. I was the first black to go to seminary in the diocese of Rhode Island. I was the first Episcopalian from Rhode Island to be a member Ministerial Association but, there were other black Episcopal clergy who were called into the diocese to be Vicar of the local black parish. At times, we would get ready to sing, I didn’t know a lot of the black hymns, and so, they would turn to me and ask “You know that one”? And I would say, “Yes” and so they would sing something together [Laughter] .So that first year of ordination was formative and I had all of that support system around. And so it was a good year.

And that sounds to me like some things really got started for you in terms of working with this ministerial group that were to later be reflected in your vocation?

Yeah, I had not had much exposure to much black denominations and they were represented in Rhode Island as African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Zion and some of my family belonged to The Baptist Church. And this was important. I don’t know when the black clergy had come together, at least in my memory to be a strong voice for dealing with civil rights causes and races and all the rest.

MZ000032

So Deacon's training. And then what was the normal course of events?

I knew this program was going to be over in a year and there was no way for it to be extended because they were going to call another Deacon, which they did. Alexander Stewart. And then he was the Rector of St. Mark's Church in Riverside, one of the large parishes and he was a forthright thinker and he decided that he wanted to me to be considered to come to his staff. And he was encouraged to do that by the same Bishop of Rhode Island. I was invited while I was at Grace Church to come and to preach at a Eucharist on Sunday evening—by that time, I had been ordained priest. But unbeknownst to me a confidential letter had been sent to the members of the vestry saying this was a person we might consider to be associate Rector and he wanted them all to come and not say anything about responsibility and just kind of come and be there.

Come and see.

Come and see, right. And I found that letter when I was looking through things later.

How did you get it?

You know I don't know. I don't know how I got that letter but maybe after I got to St. Mark's maybe I came across it and copied it. But I didn't even know I had it until I was looking through papers to bring here and so I brought it and so it's this confidential letter from Alex (to his vestry) So anyway I went to this Sunday Eucharist and indeed I was called to be Associate Rector there. This is in East Providence, which is where I grew up. St. Marks was in Riverside where there was a small population of African Americans. So there were few African Americans but not very many at St. Mark's. I served at St. Mark's from 1965 to 1967. I didn't have a contract per se. It was really a curacy where young clergy would move through and worked with Alex who was a highly efficient, competent parish priest. Outside of Grace Church downtown, his parish was probably the second or third largest in the diocese. So I worked with Alex and among other responsibilities I had as a young priest at that time I was in charge of the youth group.

MZ000033

But Alex really shared the ministry. He pretty much divided up the preaching and the pastoral work and all that sort of thing. And so it was a wide experience allowing me to take responsibilities of associate rector. St. Mark's, another great opportunity for me in my ministry.

So your first call as a Rector was --

Well my next call wasn't as Rector. I was next called to be Sub Dean of the Cathedral.

Wow.

And that then was going to work with Ronald Stenning who I mentioned earlier.

Yes.

Ron was the Dean of The Cathedral and he didn't really want to be pastor, which is what he inherited when he became the Dean. He really wanted someone to have responsibility for the Cathedral Congregation in all respects. He wanted me to plan programs, be the pastor, chair the vestry meetings, and appoint the committees. Because of his credibility and work in the Rhode Island community, particularly the Providence community he wanted to continue to do that work. And because that's really where he felt his calling was and that's where he had influence—(as I said he already had a major piece of work in getting the Fair Housing Legislation passed.) so he wanted someone to come and be at the Cathedral and be responsible for all that happened on Sunday pretty much and preach and all that sort of thing. So he really was setting up a position that was really for all intents and purposes –The Dean of The Cathedral congregation but clearly reporting to him. And he told me that when he proposed that to the Bishop, the same Bishop, the Bishop was resistant at doing that. But Ron convinced him that that I had enough experience to be able to do that. So I went to the Cathedral to do just that. This is the church 10 years ago that merged with the black congregation so that was another reason for me being there was to recognize the African American population in Cathedral. Many of those people were friends of my parents and grandparents and so they were delighted to have me come and be their priest there.

Because as you were saying earlier there were changes in the Cathedral?

That's right, by then there was some change- and there was more African Americans in leadership positions and on the vestry by that time.

You were a young priest with a tremendous amount of responsibility.

That's true. I mean my four years in the Navy made me a little older than -- in fact interestingly because of those four years in seminary I was one of the oldest persons in my class at General. But I did have that experience and responsibility; so that enhanced my opportunity to take on the congregation. And I had some wonderful support as you know.

A lot of leadership experience throughout- from the band, to being the officer too.

That's true.

MZ000034

So I went there and I enjoyed that ministry and responsibility because I was back in Providence, continued my association with the ministerial group and by the way I said something out of sequence. The busing controversy came up not while I was at Grace Church; it came up while I was at the Cathedral.

Okay.

It's significant that in that after I had all of that publicity having cut in on the Mayor's press conference (that was too much publicity for the Bishop) by the time I had done that Ron Stenning had accepted a call from being Dean of the Cathedral to being Rector of St. Paul's Church in Dayton, which then left me directly in contact with the Bishop because in the governmental system and the diocese of Rhode Island, which is not true of all diocese, the Bishop is the Rector of the

Cathedral. And so with Ron gone as Dean, then instead of reporting to Ron then I would have to report directly to the Bishop.

You had had some question about you're taking over that position --

In the first place the Bishop was convinced by Ron to let me come and be Subdean.

How many years were you in that position --

Not very many because I didn't stay in that job very long for reasons that I'll tell you now. But I'm trying to think when I went to the Cathedral, but I think when I went to the Cathedral in September 1967. And that's when the busing issue came up in the summer pretty much --

And when you were vice president of Ministerial Association?

And by the way this speech in the Mayor's office is only a page and a half. That speech I made I also found, to pass onto you. And I got a wide publicity along with the Minister Association and the next week the Bishop called me into his office --

The same Bishop?

The same Bishop who told me that that kind of action was not in accordance with my job description and that I was called to be the pastor of the Cathedral and that's what I was to do. I took to him my job description, which Ron had written very carefully and it was clear in my job description there was also my responsibility to reach out into the community and to be an advocate. And so then when the Bishop proceeded, I'm sure he was getting a lot of pressure from the Episcopalians because I was a member of his Cathedral staff. Then the Bishop moved unbeknownst to me in such a way that I would end up off the Cathedral staff. He went to the new Rector of St. Stephen's Church and who was looking for an assistant, and he arrange with him to have me called as that assistant.

Unbeknownst to you?

Unbeknownst to me he made that arrangement I found out later. But I knew that my days both at the Cathedral and in the diocese of Rhode Island were numbered. So I began to seek a call. Fred Williams, whom I knew in seminary and was now Rector at St. Clemens Church in Inkster in the Diocese of Michigan, had now recommended my name to the Rector of Grace Episcopal Church, Detroit; located in an inner city there--

MZ000035

Marshall Hunt was Rector of that parish there. And he called me up to go to Detroit for an interview; I met parish leaders, I came back and he called me to be the associate rector. And then very shortly after that I made an appointment with the Bishop. Now the Bishop thought I was coming in to tell him that I had been called to St. Stephen's Church but I told him I had been called to Grace Church in Detroit. Luckily the Bishop of Michigan did not check with the Bishop of Rhode Island about me. So it came as a complete surprise to him. And he was enraged and began to say some very kind of cutting things.

He was already angry I would expect by your coming to him earlier saying, "Sorry but my job description does" --

I wasn't going to change.

That was a very bold move on your part.

But he was wrong and I was right. I knew that taking that stance, given his personality, I would have to leave. And after Ron Stenning left I just couldn't continue in this job description, which had been written for our situation, that is Ron's and mine, to report to a Bishop with whom I had no relationship --

You came to him to tell him not what he was expecting concerning assistant rectorship at St. Stephen's but to say that you had been called to Michigan.

That's right.

And he was furious?

He was furious. And I'm dwelling on this too long, but anyway another evidence of this happened within a couple of days. There was a meeting -- some kind of diocese meeting at St. Stephen's and I just happened to hear the conversation between the Rector and the Bishop. Something to the effect, "Will Arthur be coming" and the Bishop very abruptly said, "He's accepted another calling". And so I knew that he was angry about that. And as I said in the conversation he began to berate me for one thing or another. And then because of my roots in the Providence Community -- when it was announced I was leaving it made the newspaper. The religion editor called me to ask me if my work in the community and if racism had anything to do with this call with my departure. And I said that no it hadn't; and that I had accepted a call to Detroit and that's where I thought I was called to be. So in my final meeting with Bishop Higgins he went on in this negative way and then finally I was able to say to him, because I knew that he did not have any more influence over me, I said, "Bishop Higgins you should know that the religion editor of the Providence Journal has called to ask me if racism had anything to do with my move. And up until now I have said no. And what I say to the religion editor will be determined by you". And then he just stopped short and became very pleasant and asked me to kneel down for his blessing and I left the diocese; so then that was that. My experience with Bishop Higgins was difficult.

MZ000036

He would ask me at my Christmas visit if I had a chip on my shoulder and he asked me that two or three times until I finally felt I should answer it straight out and it was that sort of thing that made my relationship with him difficult. When I was in seminary, while he was addressing the Diocesan Convention he made the statement that all of us know from our experience that some individuals are more intelligent than others and that some of this is determined by race. And when he said that explicitly he proved he was certainly not enlightened. --

To the Diocese and Convention?--

Yes. He proved that he was certainly not enlightened. So that was my experience with the Bishop.

So I have a sense from some of your earlier conversation that you were certainly fond of Providence --

Oh, I was.

As a place to live but in terms of the diocese I can only imagine that as you exited you were sort of shaking dust off your feet?

Absolutely, I made a happy issue out of that affliction. But most of that really came from the Bishop and his office. I mean I was really supported by people like Robert Macgregor at Grace Church and Alexander Stewart and Ron Stenning at the Cathedral and the clergy in general and the people. I was very active in the diocesan conference center-- particularly the music program that they instituted while I was there. Even with that support all around the unhappiness that came from the Bishop's office I just found myself having so much in contact with him that I just had to leave. And in many ways Providence was a very comfortable place; I was born there, I went to school there, I was in the Navy there (and one point in Boston), went to seminary from there and went back again. So it was a very comfortable place where my family was and my grandparents, and strongest friends lived long time into my adulthood. I knew all the places to eat and where all the alleys were; so it was very familiar. And I don't know if I would have left Rhode Island. That was -- God's working in God's own way, God's mysterious way to move me along because maybe I just would have been too comfortable in Rhode Island. The truth was that after those three experiences I'm not sure where I would have gone in Rhode Island that would expand my experience. It was true, there was no place in Rhode Island that would call me as Rector. Big churches in Rhode Island weren't ready to do that and so the closest I could be was by this job description that was written for me--clearly a Rector's job description reporting to the Dean. After that I really had to move on to something that would not necessarily be another Rectorship, but something else that would widen my gifts and skills and experience. And that was clearly Grace Church in Detroit --

Detroit must have been a very different place.

It sure was. I literally had to lie down at night and think about the experiences I was having compared to Providence, Rhode Island. When I first arrived there I didn't have housing so I was in this residence that was on West Grand Boulevard. I lived up on the 10th floor and from my window I could see the headquarters of General Motors. I could look over into Canada; Motown was just up the street a little ways.

The Black Christian Nationalism Church was just a couple of streets from where I lived. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was a major agency group and I went to their annual meeting where 1,000 people gathered. The parish I was in did a fundraiser and bought out the Fisher Theater and brought The Supremes back to town. That was their first return to Motown after they had made it big. So all this was happening around me and I literally had to lie down and kind of absorb all this.

You're not in Kansas anymore.

That's right. And the church I was located in was six blocks from where the Detroit Riot of 1967 broke out and so that whole area was devastated. It the most devastating riot this country had known. Grace Church had decided to call a Rector who was white and that Rector accepted the call, but knew immediately in no way could he relate to the community. He could relate to the congregation and be pastor to these people most of whom had moved out to northwest Detroit but in no way could he minister and move comfortably in the middle of the inner city of Detroit on twelfth street. And so I was called to be Associate. We never called it co-rector; that's really what it was. And I had responsibility for the parish's work in the surrounding community and relating to the other black parishes. At that time there were several strong black parishes in Detroit. There was an organization called new Detroit where business and finance institutions and the churches all came together to try to rebuild Detroit after the riot.

What year did you go there?

I went there in 1968. And within one week, Dr. King was assassinated. And so that of course added to all the confusion. That's when Marshall Law was declared in Detroit because leaders were afraid it was going to blow up again --

Again --

And so from my residence I could look out my window and see the tanks going up and down West Grand Boulevard. One night I went to a preacher's house for dinner who lived in the inner city. I left there after curfew and was heading home. As I went down one side of West Grand Boulevard, which was divided, the National Guard vehicles was sitting on the other side with men sitting in the back with their guns. So I just continued on my way and went down and they began to follow me. So I went into the garage where I lived. When I got out of my car a bright light was shown on me and four guardsmen jumped out of their vehicle and went down on one knee pointing their rifles at me and so I raised my chin so they could see my collar. And then the person in command asked me if I knew the

MZ000038

Curfew was on? And I said, "Yes" and they said, "Why aren't you home"? And I said, "I am home, this is my home" and I was late leaving. So they just gave me a warning. The black leaders came and quieted folks and so there wasn't a major uprising. So nothing happened compared to the year before.

How long was Marshall Law in effect in Detroit?

It went on for five days or something like that.

But Dr. King's assassination did not derail Detroit looking to come back from the riot?

No, no it didn't. In fact the -- the forces came together. This was 1968 and Detroit now was really the center in many ways of the black power movement. And so that movement was really attracting people's energy and imagination. The first National Black Power Conference was held in Newark in July of '67; I was present at that. That was when I was still in Rhode Island. That was another reason that my presence made the Bishop nervous.

What was it like at that conference?

Well it just happened that -- that the person who called it was Nathan Wright, the Reverend Nathan Wright who was an Episcopal Priest but for being an Episcopal Priest had more radical ideas than a lot of people. And again you have to remember I was still in Rhode Island and there were over 1,000 people there from about 25-26 states representing over 200 black organizations across the continuum. That's when I learned firsthand how long that continuum was. There were people in Rhode Island that thought Dr. King was a radical. But when you compare what was going on in other parts of the country he was a conservative in many ways. You have people walking around talking about the violent overthrow of the government and cutting out parts of the United States where black people would settle and there was a renewal of the Back to Africa Movement, the Black Panthers, and The Republican and New Africa--they were all there. And for some reason because I knew Nathan (I assume it was the reason), when I registered he wrote -- he wrote "Staff" on my name tag- and I still have that name tag.

MZ000039

As a member of the staff I really had access to wherever I wanted to move knowing that a lot of the members of the conference were suspicious of me because I was a priest. I was an Episcopal priest in what was a predominantly white institution. And so it was good that he wrote "Staff" on my tag. So I had some credibility and I moved around. I really learned a lot. There was only one paper that was published out of that conference. So you had solution and philosophies across the gamut. But it was quite a learning experience. And I'm glad I went -- I was the only person present from the Ministerial Association of Rhode Island. I just took some days off and went, and it turned out I was the only member of the Association there. When I came back, because it got publicity both negative and positive, (mostly negative in the white press) many were eager to hear my first hand report and so I was interested to give them some of my impressions. I'm pretty sure I was the only ordained person, black or white at that conference from Rhode Island.

Yes.

So that was my experience when I arrived in Detroit. Many of these groups were headquartered in Detroit. The Republic of New Africa was there, the Black Panthers had set up headquarters next door to the church. Albert Clague had formed the Shrine of the Black Madonna which supported Christian Black Nationalism. They believed a reinterpretation of the scripture, which said that Jesus was black and the images around the church of both Mary and Jesus are clearly black African figures and people wore African garb. The black manifesto it was written in Detroit, at Cleveland State, so all that activity was going on when I arrived, while I was there.

I would think that your attending The Black Power conference in New Jersey was helpful when you got to Detroit because as you said there were these organizations there and you had been exposed to all this and there in your new city of residence.

That's right, that's right. And I don't know if I mentioned to you that the parish I went to (Grace Church) was just six blocks away from where the riot began (the Blind Pig) so there was a whole area of unrest, expectation, frustration. It was exactly where I needed to go and to be on the cutting edge of all that was happening. Malcolm X was also there. He was assassinated shortly thereafter he had separated from the Nation of Islam and had set up separate mosques in Detroit.

MZ000040

Interestingly Rosa Parks had moved to Detroit, so she was living there as well. Detroit was the center of thinking and planning, reacting. New Detroit offered opportunity for people to write proposals for projects that would enhance the relationship between the races-And also for self-determination in the black community. So two friends of mine Dick Weber and Pat Midol and others wrote a proposal and we called it "New Perspectives on Race". It was based on the fact that in 1967 when President Johnson asked Governor Kerner of Illinois to pull together a commission to determine the cause of the riots in America, which had been going on since 1964. Governor Kerner wrote his report and concluded that America was growing more and more divided, black and white; that comes out of that report. But he and the Commissioner also said that the basic cause of the riots was white racism. Interestingly what that report did after making that analysis, had all to do with what needed to be done in the black community- the development of black community which was all well and good. But nobody had picked up very much on the fact that the report did say the basic problems was white racism. So Dick, Pat and I and others decided that we would develop an agency whose work would be to deal in the white community with white racism. We and others developed a curriculum to be used in city agencies and educational institutions and schools and in churches. Robert Terry had written a book called "For Whites Only" and in that book he referenced the Kerner report and then moved the analysis forward to talk about what the nature of white racism was in society. And he directed the solution toward white people. So that's really what we did and developed by 1970. We spent a good number of years putting on those kinds of conferences. So that that was an interesting experience in addition to being in the black community.

I look forward to hearing more about that. Let's close for this time --

Okay.

And we'll pick up there the next time.

Okey doke. All right.

MZ000041

This is the Reverend Melana Nelson-Amaker with Bishop Arthur B. Williams. We are on segment three of Arthur Williams's oral history for the African American Episcopal Historical Collection. We are at Virginia Seminary and it is October 20. So we got a good start yesterday and we're picking up some things that we just started to touch on yesterday and some things that you've remembered since and I was thinking your mention of attending the first Black Power conference in New Jersey as a quite young priest and one who as I have assessed what you told me about growing up in Providence and came from middle class circles; that you in your high school and your college years had friends of both races, that there were several people who were helpful to you, that you were aware of racism certainly as your parents taught you, and as you knew in the community. But also did not sense that it had been a terrible burden for you. So I'm wondering coming out of that kind of background when you went to that Black Power conference in New Jersey you already said you learned quite a bit, but did it have an impact on you to be in that circle with those folks; and what they were talking about and what do you think that impact was?

Yes, when I got involved it had a great impact on my personal life. When I came out of the seminary I began to do things like look for housing and when I went to Grace Church I was confronted directly. That was the first time I had looked for residential housing and I was confronted directly with the racism in housing. The old story of there being a sign "For rent" and you would go and was told that it wasn't for rent anymore and of course the sign stayed there. And when I finally did find a place to rent, when I was at Grace Church, my first parish, the owner of the property took me to the person who lived. It was a duplex and he wanted me to meet this person because if this person did not want me there he was not going to rent to me. And he said, "I'll be very frank with you, he's been a tenant a long time" so I was faced with that sort of thing. Now it turned out that when I met him he said it was fine that I rented the other half of the duplex. But those were examples of the racism coming directly at me and not of course the first time in my life. It was a growing awareness of what it was meaning to be black in America. And unlike white people I think every African American child somewhere along the way, no matter how protected by their parents as I was, has to ask as he or she becomes a young adult what does it mean to be black; what is racism and all the rest. I was affected by the Civil Rights Movement; I didn't mention that when I was at General Theological Seminary in my last year a group of us from General Seminary, and other Theological Seminaries went down to stand a vigil for us on the Lincoln Memorial until Congress passed the Voter Rights Bill. We were confronted by the Nazi Party, which when they found out we were there they set up on the other corner opposite ours.

How long were you there?

We were there for about a week; it was a 24 hour vigil which we stood for about 3 or 4 hours at a time.

MZ000042

That was a very meaningful experience, ecumenically and interfaith. All this leads up to a gradual awareness and my experience at the Black Power conference that summer July '67. I listened to a wide range of people speak who were speaking in a more radical way than Dr. King and I was hearing truth in what they were saying. It was the beginning of the whole black is beautiful movement. There was a lot of imitation of the white society and in many ways integration meant to give up one's background and culture and to be maybe like the white society. I learned that that was a false value. There were a lot of values that were good, but some of the values denigrated black culture or didn't recognize it at all. As I was growing up in East Providence it was almost as if blacks did not exist historically. We didn't study anything that pertained particularly to the black community, except when we talked about slavery and the Civil War. And still that was from the point of view of those who won. So there was awareness and rising of my consciousness by my experience in Black Power conference. And also I was aware of the depth of the anger in the black community by those who had been subjected to culture racism more than I had. It was the beginning of my understanding of a rift that was happening in the middle class black community. My experience at Grace Church (which was a middle class black congregation) got me caught up in that. By the time I got to Detroit I was moving very, very quickly. The ways to confront the American system were across the continuum-some by violence and others by radical education.

MZ000043

Many said capitalism in and of itself was racist, and so their interpretation, well, their solution was a Marxist solution. So, all of that came to me in the four or five days I was there. And, again, I say

there was not just the anger against whites and white society, but on the part of some anger against those who had compromised blackness and black culture and stood for values of integration and giving up one's identity. And so, there was hostility therefore toward, by some of the people there toward me, and so I had to kind of work through that as well. So, that is a response to your question.

So, shortly thereafter, you were in Detroit.

That is right.

Where, as you were saying yesterday, they had just lived through a riot that had devastated much of the inner city, where people were looking to reform that area and see how life was going to go for African Americans in Detroit. And, you came to this position in the church, which technically was an associate, but there was a white rector, right?

That is right.

And, the two of you led the church together. What was the church like, the congregation, that community? Who were they and how did you work with them on these issues?

Well, when I arrived in Detroit, I arrived in a city very unlike Providence, Detroit had a large black population and a strong middle class black population. There were lots of professional black people in Detroit. I mean, so much so that they could have an annual dance (what they called "Barristers Ball,") which would include all the lawyers putting on this magnificent event. And, they had the medical ball for the doctors. And, so it was, this strong professional group. And, as you know from my conversation that we had a small professional group in Providence, but nothing to compare with Detroit, which of course was true also of Chicago ,Washington, and Atlanta.

And, Grace Church was, along with a church called Plymouth Congregational and a small Presbyterian church, which was also on 12th Street --Those churches, not exclusively, but primarily were the churches of the black middle class, or coining the phrase, the black bourgeoisie. Grace Church grew in the 1950s and really epitomized all that we meant by that term at that time--A kind of separate society that the black middle class had built up that paralleled the white society. This was the group that held cotillions and the strong sororities and fraternities, and the links and all those social groups. Grace Church people who were upwardly mobile left their predominantly black congregations and became in Detroit either Episcopalians or Congregationalists, or Presbyterians as they moved into the white churches and formed separate middle class, strong, black congregations.

A Priest Henry Stines [PH] was the rector. He was...

MZ000044

...of Haitian background and quite the preacher, quite erudite, articulate and was the kind of person that people wanted their face to the community to be. And, he was indeed a priest of the time of Grace Church. It is interesting that when he left Grace Church, he left and became a staff member for Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity, which at that time was a strong advocacy group around the issues of race.

Because of their feelings about their role in society, when he left, shortly thereafter they called Marshall Hunt, because they valued having a white rector. But, when Marshall became rector it was

clear to him that he could not, especially after the riot minister in the immediate community on Twelfth Street. It was a major crisis at Grace Church. And, what began to happen is that people moved out of the inner city. And, in the inner city, parts of the inner city of Detroit, there were the large houses and mansions that still existed, where many members of this congregation lived, on places like Chicago Boulevard and some of the others. But, even they, after the riot, joined the exodus and moved up to Northwest Detroit, and there began to develop another black parish All Saints Church, up on 7 Mile. So you can see how far out of the city it was.

I was primarily responsible for youth work. And, the young people really began to identify in their own way with the Black Power movement, and in many ways they rejected the values of their parents, and this caused a lot of family stress in families. And, I think some of the biggest Afros around were on the heads of the young people in my youth group and among the acolytes.

But, there was still a conservatism in that congregation. I still remember that the adult head of the acolytes had set a policy that one could not be an acolyte unless his hair was cut. And, I just told him that if he did that, if he maintained that policy, he would decimate the acolyte corps. And, so he changed that. But, that was just one example of the tension. As I related to the community, one year after the anniversary of the riot, we wanted to show a different side of inner city. We developed a black arts festival. But, to do that, some of the artists we brought in were certainly more radical than the members of the congregation. And, so I found myself in tension with them. And, the congregation was really pervaded with classism. It was not said...

MZ000045

directly, "We do not want those people in our church." But, it was necessary to open the church up if we were going to have a black festival on 12th Street, centered around Grace Church. And, so I ran into a lot of tension with the congregation, some of them said they had brought Marshall as rector and he had brought a black militant to the staff. But, again, I do not think that many of them knew, when I was called a black militant I just had to smile, because I knew what militancy looked like having my experience in Newark with the Black Power conference and following.

I had a different mindset than many members of my congregation. I mean I had some loving, wonderful relationships in the congregation, I did some of the pastoral work and I joined members of the congregation at social events. And, enjoyed Detroit for what it offered. But, there is no doubt about the fact that a segment of the congregation did not support the values that I espoused from time to time.

But, I can only imagine that you were so important to the younger people there.

I think that is true.

That, if you had not come, I can imagine that many of them would have just felt disaffected entirely.

I think that is true.

And, the fact that they were in the church, I would think had a lot to do with the fact that you were there as a priest and that you understood.

A few of them when they wanted to get married (By that time I had left the church), they asked me to come back and to officiate at their marriages, mostly at Grace Church, even though Grace Church underwent a great transformation. Because, when I was there, it was really the beginning. It was a strong parish when I arrived, but it was really the beginning of the decrease in membership and resources, so that now Grace Church in recent years has really been a question of survival. I was there a long time ago when it was a very strong parish.

One of the things that I supported when I was there was connected to the Black Arts Festival, but went on beyond. Some black artists from Chicago came to town and, they wanted to begin to paint on an exterior wall of Grace Church, what came to be known as the Wall of Pride. There was a great exterior flat surface, because Grace Church was basically an unfinished building. They ran into the depression back when it was a white church. And, so they had a great flat surface that faced right out on 12th Street. 12th Street was a main thoroughfare to go out of the city. So the artist wanted to paint on that wall heroes of black history and culture, African and African American Heroes. I was able to convince the vestry that that was a good idea. There was a small minority that was utterly opposed to the idea that the church would identify with that sort of militant exposure, but it was painted.

MZ000046

The agreement was, that members of the congregation would look over all of the people that were painted on the wall. And, the person that could not be painted on the wall was the Reverend Albert Clague who was a former pastor of the Presbyterian Church up the road. He had moved politically and socially radically to the left and founded the Shrine of the Black Madonna while he was pastor of the Presbyterian Church a lot of associations in the middle class community. So, they felt that he was not, in many ways, that he had rejected them and their values and had moved so far to the left that he could not be tolerated. So it is interesting that, symbolically they picked out him and he could not be painted on the wall.

Well, the wall was painted by several artists each taking a section. So, there must have been about eight or ten different persons painted on the wall. One of the artists decided that he was going to paint Albert Clague's picture on the wall.

Even though that had been officially ruled him out.

Even though the agreement was that that would not happen, he felt it was a compromise of his conscience not to do it, because of Clague's role in the Detroit community. And, so he painted his picture on the wall. It went up very quickly. And, so parishioners that were heading up 12th Street suddenly saw Albert Clague's picture on the wall, and there was a special vestry meeting called. And, the vestry said that he was to be painted out. So I told the person who was heading up this project (I cannot remember his name, he was from Chicago) so, he went and he painted Albert Clague out. He painted out another hero who had been up on the wall. And, he painted one or two others, and then, of course, we had an unfinished wall. I called the artists to say that we had an agreement and it was going to be a wall of pride. The artists went up on the wall and replaced the absent figures with the most militant figures in Black Society- H. Rap Brown went up, the Black Power fist went up flames of fire coming from it. I cannot remember the other person that was put up there. Frankly, because Reverend Albert Clague was up there, the vestry, although they were upset at what had happened, it stayed there, the wall stayed up there.

Did it really?

Stayed up there...

With the Black Power fist and the flame and everything.

With the Black Power fist, yes. I wrote an article for the *Living Church* called "The Wall on 12th street" --- it had a picture of the wall in black and white. Because, this was all done in blazing colors it was very dramatic. I wrote an article about the fact that walls usually divide, but this was a wall that attempted to unite the communities through the understanding of culture.

Oh, you have it.

I have it. I discovered it when I was going through a box.

Did the parish relate to other ways to the surrounding community?

We had projects in the community. Sometimes we just cleaned up a lot or whatever. Because, a lot of places were burned down and there were a lot of empty lots, and most of the businesses had left the community. It was a pretty devastated place to be.

And, you got congregants of Grace Church to go out and do the work?

Yes, there was a small group of people who were absolutely supportive to what I was doing. They supported the wall, they supported my community outreach, they supported me when I wanted the Black Panthers and their breakfast program for children who needed to have meals before going to school. And, they supported me when I suggested to the vestry that we allow the panthers to come in and feed the children in our parish hall. They certainly did not support, many the values of the Black Panthers, because the Black Panthers had begun as a group so violently. They moderated some as they moved to their breakfast program and some other programs. And, so this small group supported me in that.

And, so the breakfast program did go?

Yes, the breakfast program for a while was very successful at Grace Church. They were next door, so I got to know them personally. But, they were interesting, because they felt they had to maintain a certain image to maintain. And they wanted to make it clear to me that they were using this "bourgeoisie" church to accomplish their ends. And, they did not, in public let it be known to the public that they had with me. But, that was understandable given what they were trying to do.

When I left Grace Church (after I had been there about two years) I was called to the diocesan staff in 1970. This parish group gave me a going away party that was in one of their homes, and it was a fun party and it was recorded. I do not know if I have the tape or not. They told the story about "Father Williams, our hero". And, it was a kind of a roast and they said that I had done this and I had done that, and then came "the wall!"

[Laughter]

And when I went to the diocesan staff, within 48 hours, the vestry ordered that the wall be painted over. So, the whole wall was painted over.

Within just a couple of days?

Within a couple of days, yes, in 1970. It was developing for several months, it probably was up there a year and a half or so. In fact, Time Magazine came and they were taking pictures of the wall, but it never developed into an article. But there was enough interest in it that it drew a black photographer. I remember setting up across the street. When I went over to see who he was, he was from Time Magazine.

So, that is some of what was going on when I was at Grace Church. I celebrated the Eucharist and preached and pastored the congregation and ran the youth group and called on the sick and wrote reports for annual meetings, and all the rest that a parish priest would do.

All the regular priestly business. So, then on to the diocesan staff, that is the archdeacon?

No. This was the era, because of the general unrest all over the country, this was the era when staffs which had not had blacks on them all added black staff members. Particularly, to do urban outreach and ministry and to relate to the black community, which white staff members could not do anymore, particularly in a city like Detroit. I am not saying they were violent, but they had a kind of a radical reinterpretation. It was an era of self-determination in community groups and confronting the institutions.

The director of a program had responsibility for several aspects in the diocese. He met me very quietly, asked me to go to lunch, and asked me if I would be interested in coming to the diocese staff. Bishop Richard Emrich, by then, had become fairly conservative, but, who had sense enough to know that he needed to have an African American on his staff.

Richard Emrich was...

The bishop of the diocese for a long time. He was elected at 38, and by now he had probably been there about 25 years plus. So I began to do urban ministry and to attempt to support the urban churches. There were lots of churches in the city, not just Detroit, but were primarily in Detroit. But also in Flint and Saginaw and Jackson, all those cities were in the Diocese of Michigan.

So, I began to do congregational support work. There were the major black congregations, but some small ones as well, and so I attempted to bring resources to them.

What was your title, what were you called?

I was called The Assistant Director of Program for Urban Ministry. There were several of us- there was the Assistant for Training and Education, and a position for Social Christian relations, so there were four or five of us. But, in some ways, while Bishop Emrich was still there, the urban work was really a ways down in the diocesan structure. And, anything, any policy change or proposal or funding, would have to be first approved by the urban unit, and then it had to be approved by the program unit before it went the diocesan council. So, we did not have direct access to the diocesan council. So we were able to do some effective work, but a lot of our work was modified.

And, I maintained my contact with the community groups that I had developed while I was at Grace Church. Bishop Emrich really had the idea that I had much more influence with those community

groups (the self-determining groups than I had). By this time the national church had developed the General Convention Special Program, which was a program by the then presiding Bishop Hines, John Hines. It was a program to provide monetary resources directly from the church, from the Episcopal Church at the national level, to community groups. And, that ran well for a while. But, because it was set up to jump over the diocesan structures it also ignored the leadership in the black churches. That was a major flaw in the program. The money would go directly to community groups, some of which were not very accountable. Others were doing good work.

There was a General Convention in 1969 to decide whether to maintain the program – it was held in South Bend, Indiana, and was my first General Convention as a visitor. And, it was a convention to either reject the program or not. And, people were converted by the articulate speakers at that convention and the education program that was done even Southerners who came ready to dismantle the program supported the program. And, so it was then more clearly developed and put under a black leader at the national level. It was set up, as I said, for funds to go directly to the community groups, so that the conservative black parishes and the diocese could not reject proposals coming out of the local community.

But, it began to fail because of the lack of accountability and proposals were being made that were not used for what they were intended. That was made public and then the black rectors of black parishes that had been in the black community for years opposed it and the conservative bishops opposed it, and so finally the program was dismantled.

But, from what you said, it is the Episcopal Church money going to support community organizations, but the black churches and the black Episcopalians who were present in the community, really had nothing to do with this, is what it sounds like.

That is exactly right, because the money was not given through the churches. It was given to self-determination community groups who would determine how to deal with poverty and racism, and development in the black community.

But, the churches were given no way to participate, even by the community groups.

No, there were in the cities, of course black clergy who related directly to community groups in various cities around the country, so there would be that kind of association. But, there was some whites also, who could relate to local groups. But, for the most part, the black parishes did not related to the poorest of the poor in the black community, and that is where these proposals came from.

The original money came from the United Thank Offering. Bishop Hines convinced the Board of Directors of the United Thank Offering to give their whole United Thank Offering for the whole year, to fund this. And, monies came from other places as well. But, that is where it primarily came from. But, this funding went down in flames. It was supported, as you would expect, by then the Union of Black Episcopalians had been formed, and, which had grown out of the Union of Black Clergy and Laity. We always supported the program. But, it got to the point where it was, there were enough flaws in it that it was not able to be sustained.

So, there you were as Assistant for Program and Urban Ministry, you...

...you were, I imagine around to the different congregations. You said you help with congregational development, I imagine you were back and forth supporting the clergy. Where was your preaching and sacramental life during this time?

Well, I am glad you asked that, because by that time, Quintin Primo had been called to be the rector of the oldest black parish in Detroit, which was St. Matthews. Located in the lower, southern part of the city. And, what was happening at St. Matthews was that, it was a strong middle class black parish, and, as I say, was the oldest. It was older than Grace Church, which had grown up in the '50s. Many of the old black families attended St. Matthews, and it was still a large parish that was too big for its building. Up in the middle of the city, on Woodward Avenue, was a parish that had suffered from white flight, called St. Josephs. Quintin Primo was quite the visionary and went on, as I am sure you know, to be Bishop Suffragan of Chicago. He had a vision of merging these two churches. Even though there needed to be a lot of work done at St. Josephs on the physical plant, it was a large, attractive building. And, so he convinced his own congregation to move out of their building, which they had known forever, and to move up to St. Joseph's and rename the church St. Matthews and St Josephs.

But, this process took a while because the first step was to put St. Joseph's under his leadership. So, he became really the rector of both churches. There were a few radical white voices, who were parishioners still left at St. Josephs. So there was a small congregation that needed ministering to. So he asked me, since I was on diocesan staff and did not have a place on Sunday to be regularly at St. Josephs, if I would, while all this planning was going on. I was there on Sundays, primarily and did the pastor work. But I was there to take the services on Sunday, because he needed to be at St. Matthews. And, when the merger took place, he called his first assistant the Reverend Orris Walker whose nickname was "Ja". "Ja" and I became very good friends, and I continued to be associated with that merged parish. When Quintin was elected Bishop Suffragan of Chicago in 1972, "Ja" was called the rector, even though he was the associate, he was And, I continued my association at St. Matthews and St. Josephs.

So, St. Matthews and St. Josephs it was called, was very much for me to exercise my ordained ministry, so, that is some of what happened there. Those were wonderful years.

MZ000051

The parish became a strong vibrant parish with a vision. Quintin had laid the foundation and "Ja" continued it on. So, that is some what happened. It was also at that time when I began to have a sense that I was limited. I could do as much as I could, but I felt somewhat limited in access to where decisions were made, and a lot of what I did was more persuasion than power. It was kind of knocking my head up against a wall. Congress revised the GI Bill and extended it. Therefore, the funds became available for those who had been in the military when I was in active duty. When I found this out, I said, "So, what shall I do?" And, I decided to work on my Master's degree at the University of Michigan.

In?

In behavioral sciences, which was a special program, which is not offered anymore, it was really a doctoral program at Michigan, but they allowed you to come and at the Master's level, make a decision whether you would go on to get your doctorate. It was an interdisciplinary program, which

allowed me to take courses in sociology, organizational development, psychology and in several areas. There were some basic courses I had to take in the field of education theory, and, because this new program was developed in the Department of Education at the University of Michigan.

Right across the street from the diocese, literally, was the University of Michigan Center for Education. So I took a third of my courses there, just by going across the street. And, then four of my courses, I had to drive to Ann Arbor to the university, and then a third of my courses, they allowed me to write papers on the work I was doing both in urban ministry and in anti-racism, since a lot of that was original work. The original anti-racism theory, curriculum and education came out of Southeast Michigan in the group that I was working with- New Perspectives on Race. So, they allowed me to take some of that work and do some evaluation of those conferences and write evaluative papers from them as well.

So, for the degree, I did not have to go to Ann Arbor for all of my work, for which I was grateful. And, then finally I was awarded the Master of Arts degree in 1974. By that time Bishop Emrich decided to retire, and he was replaced by Coleman McGehee, who was called to the diocese from Emanuel on the Hill, here in Alexandria. He was a liberal and he had a very different approach to the church, society and race. He was a wonderful breath of fresh air.

Bishop Emrich lived in Grosse Point, and even though he was seen as the great liberal when he came at age 38, he moved further and further to the right. I think part of it was that he was isolated in a community like Grosse Point.

MZ000052

He always saw himself as “right down the center” in all the controversy and social unrest that was happening, but he wasn’t really. And, he really was right down the right. He was not a reactionary, but he was pretty conservative. Then what happened, there was a community group that was going to receive funds from the General Convention Special Program. They were misinformed and thought that the reason they did not get funding was because the Episcopal Diocese, particularly the Bishop, had rejected their grant request. So, they came in and did a sit-in in the Bishop’s office. He was sitting at his desk when they arrived. Seven or eight of them just came in and said, “We are taking over your office. Get out.” And, so Bishop Emrich left.

He walked out of his office?

Well, he had to. He was so startled- he had never been confronted by anything like this. And, so he went over to the Bishop Suffragan’s office and sent for me. Because, he had, in his mind, because of my associations directly with the community, he thought that I had some power and influence over this group. And, although I knew some of the leaders in this group, I did not have any power over them. And, they did not tell me that they were going to do this. In fact, he called a press conference before which we had a conversation. I told him I did not have any influence over this group. I said to the director of the program department, that I thought it was very important what Bishop Emrich would say to the press, because he would just, exacerbate the situation. So, I went in, and the cameras were all set up and I asked him if I could speak with him before he spoke. He smiled and said, “Well, of course, Arthur.” We went to a room by ourselves. He was enraged, and he told me to get those people out of his office. And, I told him again that I had no influence over them, that I was as surprised by the move as he was. But, I thought it was very important that he not

say (as he was given to saying) that they were illegitimate in the black community. He would make those kinds of judgments, and I implored him not to say that to the press. And, he did not.

After they made their point, they had a press conference and stayed there four or five days and left.

But, someone was able to say to them, actually this bishop is not responsible for the fact that you did not get the money?

I did. I went and spoke to them and said, "This is the situation, and there is nothing that this office can do to get you your funds, and this was not the office that did it. I am here and I know that." And so, they, after a while, having made their point, made the statements they wanted to make to the press anyway, so they used the occasion, of course, to do that so they left.

And, then the next thing that happened was- I was chair of that time of the black clergy who had formed a caucus. There were about a dozen of us in the city. And, we had formed a caucus, and we wrote a letter, a public letter which we put in the Detroit News. It was the evening newspaper in Detroit. It was a letter directed to Bishop Emrich, and it called on the Bishop to turn to his black clergy to understand what was happening in the black community in Detroit. And...

MZ000053

...made very explicit that the way he had proceeded in some areas in the past and was proceeding was racist. And, we all signed the letter except for two of the oldest clergy, who were his close friends.

By then the major Detroit paper, this is where this appeared?

That is right. And, so I think that Bishop Emrich began to realize that he was indeed out of touch with what was happening in the City of Detroit, in the black community. Bishop Emrich had earned his PhD in a German university. He had experienced the rise of the Third Reich in Germany and how they attacked the weakest of the institutions, such as education and some of the others. And, he had that mindset, and he really was terrified at what he saw was happening. He said that given the society, given the choice between chaos and fascism would choose fascism. He saw the unrest in the community and the, beginning with the riots and the attack on the institutions, and the sit-ins and all that was going on in Detroit. He believed that the aspirations of the Black Power movement, he saw that as causing more and more chaos. And, it terrified him. And, then realizing also that he was out of touch, I think clearly were contributing factors to his retirement. And, so he did it, he retired.

But in his early days, in his more liberal days, he made great contributions to the Diocese of Michigan. He went there in the period of growth, he was in there in the '50s and built a new cathedral center, he witnessed growth of the parish of the church, and he was the symbol of all of that. But, time really passed him by, and, at the end he was not an effective voice. He wrote a column for the Detroit News, which is one reason we put the letter in the Detroit News. And, in that column, he said some things that were very offensive. So, if he listened at all to the black community, he listened to the most conservative voices.

If at all.

Pardon?

If at all.

If at all, that is right. So, when Coleman McGehee was elected, many people of the diocese thought they were electing someone who was relatively conservative. Before Coleman went to seminary, this seminary (Virginia seminary), he was the Assistant District Attorney for the State of Virginia, he was a lawyer. And, so they thought that that meant that, he was from Virginia, attended Virginia Theological Seminary, went to the finest of Virginia schools and was in the district attorney's office, would mean that he would be conservative, but, he was not. In fact, he was quite open. When people were asking him various questions, he said, "I may be too liberal for you." But, they...

They did not believe it.

... did not believe it. We did not know him. The black caucus had formed, as I said, by then, and we did not know anything about him when he was elected. So, when it came time,

MZ000054

...a motion was made that we vote unanimously by acclamation in approving this person. Well, they called for that vote, and the black caucus with one voice voted no. It is interesting in the minutes of the electing convention, it said "the resolution for a call for unanimity passed by the majority," [Laughs] which I thought was a funny statement to make. So, we made it quite clear, because we had the voice then, and, the attention of the press, just because of the times. The press came and wanted to know what our no vote meant, and we said that we were not sure that we approved of him. We were going to send a delegation to Virginia to interview him. And, that article reporting that is also in the papers that I am going to have sent to you.

What Coleman did then when they asked him if he accepted the election, he replied that he would meet first with the black caucus, and then he would give his answer. And, so we went to Virginia.

All of you?

No, I went because I was president of the caucus, and there were three or four others. I think Ja Walker came, and Quintin Primo came. There was a woman, a lay woman, who was with us as well. I cannot recall her name. Vivian Flanory who was a member of Fred Williams' parish, former parish, St. Clements in Inxter. It was not long before we realized that this was the man that we wanted. And, that he had some very clear ideas about the direction of the church and, indeed, he was, he was probably the most liberal bishop that Ohio had elected in its history. He listened carefully to the voices, particularly to the caucus and to the voices of the black community that we thought that he, had recommended he listen to. And, then reorganized the diocesan staff.

But, so after the caucus representatives came to Virginia to meet with him, then he accepted.

Yes, what happened was, I called Bishop Emrich and he said, "Well, what did you think of him?" And, we told him that we were very pleased. We did not gush over him, because that was not appropriate to do. But, we spoke positively about him, and then after that meeting, he accepted the call. He always remained very close to all of us. Racism was a major issue, but was not the only issue that he was liberal on. And, then what he did, which is important; he reorganized the diocesan

staff, the structure. And, when he did that, he made me the Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry Deployment and Urban Affairs. So, he gave me that whole billet, and that was when the canons were just changing, establishing commissions on ministry. He gave me that whole responsibility and made me deployment officer of the diocese.

MZ000055

Tim, are you ready?

Yes.

Okay. This is session four of an oral history interview with the Right Reverend Arthur B. Williams, Jr. It is September 20th, we are at Virginia Seminary and we are doing a chronology of Bishop Williams' life and service in the Episcopal Church. So, it seems to me that when we were last speaking, you were just telling the really interesting story about the call of the new bishop to the Diocese of Michigan, and your having come down to Virginia to speak with him, you and other members of the black clergy caucus, and his subsequently accepting the call to Michigan. And, then you said, coming to the diocese and reorganizing the staff, and that that reorganization affected you directly in terms of your place on diocesan staff and your ministry. And so, what happened next? You were put more directly under the bishop's jurisdiction, or reporting to him directly, I suppose, is what I should say.

Well, what happened was that the diocese was organized so that The Urban Ministry Committee now, instead of being filtered through a program committee, reported directly into the Diocesan Council, which was the policy making body of the diocese. And, then as a staff member at the higher level, having a more horizontal structure than vertical, gave me more direct access to the bishop. Then as Deployment Officer (those were all new canons as well I had to set up a pool of consultants to do interim consulting. That was not done in the life of the church before those canons came in existence. So, had to do some training of consultants.

So, my work was really in three areas now, instead of one. What I did when I went to the staff in 1970, to about 1973, I did not really feel in the old structure that my time was utilized as effectively as it could. So, that is when I decided to get my Master's Degree, and I spent more time with New Perspectives on Race. Once this reorganization took place, I really, it took a lot of time and organization, and so I, from then on until I left the diocese in '77, I spent much more time around my desk and out in the diocese.

And, did you begin to see a shift in how the diocese dealt with African Americans and dealt with the issues of the day, with Bishop McGehee coming in?

Absolutely. Affirmative action was a high priority for him, and he wanted that, he wanted the presence and leadership of African Americans represented on all the decision making committees of the diocese. That is not to...

MZ000056

...say that some were not before. But, he wanted African Americans on all the committees, and so when he had the power of appointment, he would make those appointments. Nominating

committees were to nominate as diverse lists of people as they could. And, so he supported all of that. For him the agenda of the urban community was a high agenda, the support of city parishes.

Quite a change.

Quite a change, and in our Episcopal system the shadow of the bishop falls over the whole diocese, and so that was very clear that we were in a new place.

Who were some of the people of the diocese that you helped raise up once Bishop McGehee said, “We need to have people.” Who were you working with among the clergy and the laity at that time?

Well, there were still a dozen or so black clergy in the diocese and so, they began to be stretched, to serve on more committees than they did before, and we were able to lift up people, lay people from the black or predominantly black churches. Blacks had not served very much on the Board of Trustees, which handled the portfolio of the diocese, and so we recommended names of people who had that kind of expertise. And, the diocese, for that period of time was very reflective of diversity, that is, the committees were very reflective of the diversity of the diocese.

The other thing that we did was- the caucus wrote a letter saying that an African American should be at the highest level of leadership. It was a kind of a cabinet that the former bishop worked including himself, the suffragan bishop, and at one time there were two suffragan bishops. But, when I was there one suffragan bishop and the archdeacon of the northern part of the diocese, which was more rural. And, so we pushed Coleman to appoint someone at the highest level- an archdeacon for the greater downtown area. It is called the Wayne County, and we wanted a person who was back to be appointed to be over that work. And, Bishop Emrich did move ahead with that, and he appointed Irving Mason from the Diocese of Ohio. And, so we had someone at that level. With his voice there, he was an important new voice in the bishop’s cabinet.

So, then the suffragan bishop retired, and we pushed therefore for that the bishop indicate (now this is now under Bishop McGehee) that it was important that the diocese elect an African American to be suffragan bishop, because there had been no black Bishop in the Episcopate in Ohio or in Michigan.

MZ000057

Coleman appointed a search committee. Although he did not feel he could make a statement that said, “That is what I want the committee to do,” but he did clearly appoint a committee that would do that. And, so the committee finished its work and it came out with an all-black list of nominees for Bishop Suffragan, including myself. And, Irving Mayson, who was the archdeacon, The Reverend Lorenzo Wooden was on that list, and Bob Chapman, former rector of St. Matthews-- Detroit, was on the list, too; and a priest from Florida. And, Irving Mayson was elected.

Irv was a person who was more compatible with the middle class leadership in Detroit, especially people at my former parish, Grace Church. So some of my ministry at Grace Church followed me into my election and several of the people at Grace organized very heavily against me. At any rate, Irv was elected, and that election divided the black caucus, because the black caucus was, in part of supported of Irv, and in part of it supported me. As a result the caucus was never as it had been before the election.

But, we did have Irv's voice, although Irv was, Irv's voice was a little more conservative than we had hoped. I did not say to you is that Irv's name did not come out of the search committee. The committee did not nominate Irv, and I always thought that was a mistake because he was an obvious candidate, no matter how the committee, regarded his approach to various issues. So he was nominated from the floor. Then there began to be criticisms of a "Bishopsgate" and all that. Many really felt that Bishop McGehee did not want him to be his archdeacon, and that his preference was me. So they organized around that. There were all kinds of rumors and distortions, and it was a very difficult election, when there was not a truth to support their position, things were just made up. At one point, there were rumors that I was in poor health.

And, so when that process was over --Irv was elected. I must say that Irv and I worked well on the staff together. It was really the people that supported the two of us who were into this high level rivalry and distortions. But, Irv and I continued to get along. In fact, he asked me to take part in his consecration service, and I told him I would be glad to do that- anything that would unify and move us forward. But, there was so much distortion, and in some cases slander, against me, that I vowed that I would not, that would be the last time I would let my name go forward for the election in The Episcopal office.

In that place, or at all?

"I had really said it...

MZ000058

...at all." I just felt that I gotten into a process that I never dreamed would be so hurtful. And, that even some of the people at Grace Church that I had considered my supporters, were very supportive of my election. But, some, even some of the other people at Grace Church, whom I considered friends were moved into the opposition and joining all of the cantankerous energy against me.

So, that was what happened in that election of 1973. But, Coleman McGehee, the bishop, really wanted me to stay on the staff. My job description did not change; nor did my relationship with him, nor my ability to do work in the diocese. And, so that continued. There were people outside the diocese that made assumptions that, either because that was such an unpleasant process, which did get around the church; or that, assuming that Irv and I could not work together, which was not true, or just assuming that I was now ready to move someplace else.

But, I was not ready to move. I wanted to continue on in Michigan and I had several offers from around the church, but I decided to say. There was one particular call I received and I really seriously considered. It was to be archdeacon of New York, which would include oversight of churches in Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Island. I really prayed about that one, and decided that was not my call. I never really loved New York City. I loved to visit it. I enjoyed being at General Theological Seminary, but I just always felt I did not want to work there. After my interview with Bishop Paul Moore, I rode the subways around what would have been my archdeaconry, I just rode around and I came out of the subway and various points and walked around, and just said concluded that I did not want to work in New York City. So, I went home and prayed about it and called Paul Moore, and he was, actually quite surprised I said no. He threw in Staten Island, I think, but, at any rate. [Laughs] I was honored to be asked to do that, but I continued on with my work in The Diocese of Michigan, until I was called to Ohio in 1977.

That was three- four years later, something like that?

I would say about three years later, I think that is right.

And, what was it about Ohio that, after all the offers that you had turned down, said to you, “This is the place.”

Well, actually when I was considering Ohio, I had two offers at the same time. By then, The Presiding Bishop was John Allin. Presiding Bishop John Allin wanted an African American to come to his staff. So I went to interview, and he offered me the job. But, I knew that I was being considered in Ohio to be archdeacon of the diocese. And, so I asked Sam Van Culin, the head of overseas mission, if he would wait, so I could consider both positions, and he was willing to do that. And, given the call to Ohio, I accepted that call.

MZ000059

The reason I accepted it is because there was no doubt about the fact it put me in a position to have enormous influence in the diocese. The Diocese of Ohio, until I was elected in '86, never had a suffragan bishop. It was a diocese that had a very strong office of archdeacon. So that is the environment that I went into. So, when I went to the diocese, I had a wide portfolio and I was responsible for congregational life, evangelism and renewal, deaf work for deaf congregations, small congregations, urban ministry, and college work. [Laughs] My most direct responsibility was to be in charge of all of the 32 missions and aided parishes that I received financial assistance from the diocese.

I read the job description, which made clear that John Burt was willing to delegate. The diocese had taken over three years seriously the office of archdeacon, which was defined in part in the canons. I became convinced that John Burt's reputation was such that he was a person I could work for, and I accepted that call. So, I went there and began my work April the 1st, 1977.

And, was it all that you had hoped it would be?

Yes, I have to say it was. When I arrived there, there was no place at the diocesan level where urban ministry was discussed. So I was free to fill that vacuum. So, for all those areas of work that I listed, there were committees to work with, and so some of the work was more successful than others. But, John Burt was very supportive to my ministry. He and I did not always agree, but he was the kind of person that if you made your case and came and presented it convincingly and clearly, he would support you as a member of his staff. So it was a good ministry, a very happy ministry.

I think I would like to shift the type of conversation that we are having as you look over your life as a priest, what was some of the work that you enjoyed the most? What type of work do you particularly enjoy?

Even from seminary, I was always interested in liturgy. And, in fact, way back when I was in the Diocese of Rhode Island, the bishop and major committee decided to reconstruct the diocesan headquarters. When that was finished the building was rededicated. And, I was put in charge of that service, which was a major ecumenical liturgical event in Rhode Island. I had lot of fun with that.

MZ000060

In Ohio I was director of the putting together two consecration services. I enjoyed doing that. That has always been a piece of work that I have had a good time with. When I was in the parish ministry I enjoyed being pastor best. That was true in all the places that I served. The area of ministry that I liked the least was the area of administration. Whatever gene people have that enables them to keep a neat desk, I did not have it and I do not have it. But I managed to find what I needed to find and then periodically, I would get rid of all the excess and file it or throw away.

In fact, when John Burt called me to be archdeacon, he called me and said, "I have done a lot of background checks and I cannot find many people to say very many negative things." He said, when he was talking to Coleman McGhee, Coleman said, "Well, there is one thing." He says, "The top of his desk."

[Laughter]

With managing paperwork and administration I did enough to manage the work that I told you about.

Well, yeah, you must have.

But administration was not my favorite thing to do. My energy and work moved more into the institution and the internal work of the diocese. After I became bishop suffragan, then I began some of my work at the national level. But, up until my election as Bishop, besides various aspects of parish ministry, I enjoyed working with the community, doing outreach and social action. So, those are some of the things I think on.

Thinking back over your own life, are there some aspects that you might consider particularly challenging because you were a black priest in this church, as opposed to a priest who was of the majority?

Well, In Michigan and in Ohio my portfolios would take me around the diocese. And, I stood at many altars and preached at many pulpits which never seen a black person in that position before.

I think that took a certain amount of energy that a white person would not have to think about. I felt I needed to be more expert or more competent than the next fellow. So, there was that aspect of my work where I had to face the fact that that people in the parishes still were not ready to have me visit. So, I remember one place which was a mission of the diocese and therefore, I would go there by virtue of being archdeacon. I notified them that I was going to come and visit them. And, when I made that clear that I was going to come and visit, they became a parish. [Laughs]

Because, then they were no longer under your jurisdiction?

They were under my jurisdiction. I happened to make the statement to this rector, "Yours is the only mission in the diocese that I have not visited" (This was while I was archdeacon). And, he said he would make arrangements to do that, but he never did. And, then I was elected bishop suffragan. Frankly when I went visited, there was no hostility. We were a long ways down the road then. Was always conscious of the fact that racism pervaded the church and the church in many ways, instead of standing to redeem society reflected it. So I was subject to some of that.

Especially so often being the first or the only.

That is right, yes. That is true.

And, do you have a sense among your brother clergy, that were black, who you were often in some diocesan position or who were doing parish work over the long haul? Does something come to mind about particular struggles that they had as black priests in the church? One of them would be deployment, I would guess.

That is right. It amazed me that when we started to ordain women in the late '70s, that the diocese deployment officers were quick to presents women's names. And, that was on an affirmative action kind of way. But, that was far from true when names were sent down to always have a black on the list. Now, Coleman McGehee tried to maintain that standard, but what happened was, they realized that they had to accept the names, but they would not take them seriously. And, that was not just true in Michigan, but, was in Ohio as well. They would go through the steps, through the motions. It got so that I could not put somebody through that. It was a real dilemma.

MZ000062

I would get a call from a black priest and ask me, "Is this parish going to take my name seriously?" And, I tried to be as honest as I could, and it was amazing to me that some top level, competent person would be eliminated. I was amazed by the kind of statements and thinking and gyrations that people would go through in order not to consider that person. So, I have always been very sensitive about the deployment situation in my church, which as you know, continues.

Is there something that comes to mind about what was hardest for you as a priest?

The issue came forward in kind of a dramatic way about 1983. And even though I loved my work and threw myself into my work, I was single, and if there was a white space in my date book, I would fill it up. I began to realize as much as I loved my work, that there was not another person with whom I was intimate enough to share myself and my work and my aspirations and all of that. So, gradually I moved in the direction of a kind of realization that I did not want to be single – I never said I was a confirmed bachelor but, many people thought so. I just had not met a woman that I wanted to spend my life with.

And, your work was your priority for a long time, it sounds like.

Absolutely. Yes. And, I had lots of friends and I worked on maintaining relationships. I still had friends from Rhode Island and from Michigan. These various programs or enterprises that I would get involved in often they would end up being support groups and my friends. For a while I was in group process training and sensitivity training when that was popular. New Perspectives on Race, The Black Caucus and all those groups, all provided me with support groups to relate to. But, I came to realize there was a need for something deeper than that. And, so I met Lynette. Actually, Lynette had been a friend through some mutual friends, but we began to be more serious about one another and we dated for about a year. After that period, I asked her about getting married, and she laughed and said yes, but, that is another story. And, then we were engaged for six months and then we married in July of 1985.

But, that was a hard period because it began to manifest itself as a kind of an anxiety. I can only...

MZ000063

...explain it that way. I did not understand, and then I did some counseling and I think this counseling helped me realize that there was an aspect that was missing from my life as much as I loved my work. And, so that was a hard time.

And, another hard time was when I was in seminary. I had a health problem, which affected me through my second year. It just came and went, and I had to leave school and have a myriad of tests. The only test left to do was very invasive. The doctor said, "Well, you should just go back to seminary and we'll see where you are." What was indicated on the lung x-rays just disappeared. So through that time I was very much involved in healing ministry in a parish that no longer exists, and was near the seminary, Calvary Church in Manhattan, which had a healing ministry which I attended very regularly. The medical people had a name for what happened (spontaneous remission), but I was convinced it was the Lord's healing ministry in my life, and he healed my illness. That was a very, very difficult year, because of my anxiety through my second year at General.

But, the x-ray said one thing at one point and something else later.

That is right. It showed a growth in one lung, and it was clearly something there. Then at the end of that year, it was gone. I had some very, as you can imagine, some very profound conversations with the Lord and with myself about life and death and mortality and all of that. That was a very hard time.

What did come in the other side of that, in that way, leave you with?

Well, I cannot be specific, but it did leave me with a sense of what was important, and what was not important- that life itself had a priority, and a lot of things that we think are important, to support really fell away in importance. I was grateful also for the support that I received from faculty at General Seminary, from the dean and my faculty advisor who supported me through that period. And, in the midst of all that, that is when I was elected President of the Student Body. I was elected at the end of my junior year. And, so it was kind of a jumble of emotions and feelings.

Were you even wondering whether you would be able to fulfill that election? I mean was your health compromised in such a way that you were not sure you would be present at General, to be able to be student body president at all?

No, I do not recall thinking about that. I may have, but I do not recall thinking about that.

MZ000064

But, my anxiety was so high about this condition that I could not organize my mind to do my exams at the end of the year. It was interesting. I could answer objective parts of the exam, but I could not organize essays. And, by that time, as I say, I was President of the Student Body, and it was interesting that the professor, when I told him I could not take my exams, said, "Well, we are not going to say anything public about this. When the rest of your class goes to the exams, take your exams and go to your room. And when the exams are over, you join the class for meals and chapel or whatever." He felt it was important not to make a major issue of this in the student body, and

especially around the person they had just elected as student body president. I did not find that destructive. I found that his concern supported me.

So, back to the mid-80s, you were in Ohio and came to this realization after what you described as a hard period of your life, and apparently just working, working, working; And, having friends and circles, but not missing an intimate level of relationship, and you and Lynette dated and were engaged and got married in 1985.

July, 1985.

What changed for you?

Well, I came to know even more deeply about what intimacy was, and became convinced that Lynette was exactly the person for me to wait for. She was an art education teacher, by profession. She and I both arrived in Cleveland at the same time. She came to the staff of the Cleveland Museum of Art when I came as Archdeacon. And, as I say, we were not really friends during those years. And, it is interestingly, as I told you, that my grandparents helped to found an Episcopal church in Providence, and her mother and father helped to found an Episcopal church in their little town of Youngsville (in Pennsylvania), which is a little town of 2,000 south of Erie. She moved from working at the museum to working in a parochial school and then moved into tutoring. We were just compatible and enjoyed the same things such as our interests in music and other avocations. So, it has been, it has been good.

One thing that was different for me is I grew up in a house dominated by males. There was my mother and my father, my brother and me. And, Lynette grew up in a house, where there was her mother, a father (who died when she was in her early twenties), and three sisters. So, she is very close to her sisters, and so it was a different kind of family culture. And Lynette is sixteen years younger than I am.

MZ000065

So her sisters had children, and so right away I inherited six nephews and nieces. And it was our intention to have children as well, but that was not to be. So, in many ways, our nephews and nieces were a center of our energy and now three of them are married. So, an extended family is the other thing that I inherited.

Extended family.

I moved out of family life and then was very much involved again.

Well, it was not very long from that major, significant event in your life to another, yes?

That is right. We had an unusual first year of marriage, because Bishop Jim Moodey had become bishop by then, succeeding John Burt. He had not talked much about calling for a suffragan Bishop. In fact, it is interesting, when I had my interviewing conversations with John Burt, he made it clear that I was called as archdeacon and he was not going to call for suffragan bishop. And, I told him I did not come to be suffragan bishop, I came to be Archdeacon. But, Jim Moodey decided that he really wanted, instead of assisting bishops moving in and out, like John Burt had, he really wanted

another bishop. And, so, early on in our marriage, Jim called for the election of a bishop suffragan. And, I was nominated and went through that whole search process.

But, you had said earlier, because of the Michigan experience that this was not something that you were interested in entertaining again.

That is right, but I had healed a lot. That had happened, let me see, fifteen years before. So, I had had fifteen years really, to heal from that. And, I was in a totally different situation and it was a different time in the life of the church. And so, I did not look back much at that, at that except I knew I would be asked to expose a lot of myself one way or another, through questions and all. People who did not really much care about what I said and thought about a lot of things, suddenly would be interested in my values and thoughts about the church and the life of the church and the community and all those sorts of things. So, I knew all that was going to come up. I was nominated with three others and then one of those persons was elected in another diocese. So, we went into the election with three nominations and I was elected on the first ballot. And, so if there was anything more to heal from that last experience, that election kind of capped it.

But, Lynette and I look back and laugh, because it was such an odd first year of marriage. As we were adapting to one another and coming to know one another in different ways, all of a sudden we were in a fishbowl.

Well, a very abnormal way of living for a while, that is how Episcopal searches are.

That is right, that is right. Going through all of that and going before the search committee and then the walk about. Lynette went...

MZ000066

...around with me to the various parishes in the diocese, and occasionally she would even get questions. A lot of people knew Lynette by that time, because we had for a whole year visited all the missions and aided parishes. That was part of my work as Archdeacon. And, so she would go with me. She said she always felt it was like I was bringing her home to the family every Sunday. She said she felt like people were asking, "who is it this person marrying our archdeacon?" And so, she went through that and people came to know her. And, I remember one person saying to me, , "Okay, we have seen, we have interviewed now, we had the walk about." And he said, "I have not decided who I am going to vote for bishop suffragan, but I have decided who I am going to vote for the bishop suffragan wife."

[Laughter]

Lynette was really in many ways cut out to do that, and really made her own ministry. But, it was an odd first year. I was consecrated in October of '86. I did not know how this would affect Lynette. But, the first confirmation schedule came out, which scheduled me for three years to visit 100 plus parishes. So, I received the schedule and I took it home and I just said, kind of lightly to Lynette, "Guess where you are going to be on your birthday in 1988?" And so, she said, "Where?" And so I told her. I said we are going to be at St. such and such church in such and such a place. She said, "Well, how do you know that?" And so, I told her. And, she really was taken back that she would live, suddenly finding herself living scheduled three years into the future. But, she adjusted beautifully to it.

So, I was elected suffragan and I was married and I owned my first house all in one year. So I bought my first house then, right after I was married. Up until then I lived in a high-rise in downtown, Cleveland.

So, how was it different being the suffrage bishop, than it had been being anything else you had been over the course of your ministry?

That is a good questions, because it was quite different. One, thing that was very much in my favor, was that the Diocese of Ohio had never had a suffragan bishop. So I did not have to think about what does a suffragan bishop did, because the answer was, a suffragan bishop does what I do. And, the other thing was that I moved around, to the great variety of churches. The Diocese of Ohio had churches of all sorts, corporate-sized churches, and suburban churches, and the city churches and congregations for the deaf,

MZ000067

There was one church out on an island in Lake Erie, and little churches not quite in the middle of wheat fields. But, in the small towns and five major cities, I learned a lot about congregational life, more than I learned as archdeacon. And, whenever I visited the churches, I had a regular routine besides celebrating. I would celebrate everywhere I went. I would preach, if there were baptisms, or confirmations, I would do that, and I would meet with the vestries and talk about their vision. And, I was taken very seriously, because I was a bishop and pastor to the clergy and their families. When you are a bishop suffragan, whether it works or not depends on the relationship you have with the bishop. Jim Moodey, when he looked at that list of four, (he did not say much before, but he told me afterwards, and I heard from his family, too,) that as the election drew near, he began to be anxious that I would not be elected, because he really wanted me to be. We worked very well together. And, so that helped make the job as well.

You know, in the consecration service, The Presiding Bishop is, just before he lays hands on you, asks the question, "Are you persuaded," words to the effect, "Are you persuaded that you are called to the ministry of bishop?" And, the liturgical answer is, "I am so persuaded". But, if you are really honest, you would say something like, "So far." For instance when I went to seminary, I knew at that point that I was doing what God was calling me to do, and it was a very fulfilling place to be. And, it felt like so much in the past had brought me to that place. Over time, as I exercised the office of bishop, I realized that that is really what I was called to be a Bishop. It called mostly on my gifts and my skills and it energized me in new ways for ministry. And, as I said, the sense of that was not immediate, but that did indeed, it grew over time.

The other thing I became convinced of is that I was not called to be a diocesan bishop. I had the opportunity, when Bishop Moodey's, successor was elected to put my name in for that, and I really wrestled with the question, Am I called to be a diocesan bishop? (My name came up in another diocese), and I concluded that in the life of the church, I was called to be a bishop suffragan. And, that was a very freeing thing for me to know. There are some people who really do feel that they are called to be diocesans and are suffragans for a while. Or they discover that after they are suffragans that they really want to diocesans (that was not true in my case).

So, the bishops changed above me and when they came and went, my job description, if you will, was changed. So I changed [Laughs] and remained in very same place and same office. So, I

worked, once I got to Ohio I worked for John Burt and then I worked for Jim Moodey, then I worked for Clark Grew, and now as Assisting Bishop I am working for Mark Hollingsworth.

MZ000068

Four different, very different kinds of personalities, four diocesan bishops. But I was able and am able to work with them. And, they have all, in their own way, valued the office and my work and me as a person.

And, you have had this long continuity in this diocese, even while the diocesan of Ohio has changed.

That is right. I was in Ohio, as archdeacon and bishop suffragan. I retired when I had been there 25 years. The only reason this would be a good time, so I worked until I was 67 ½, and that coincided with being 25 years in the diocese. And, so I retired. I gave them a year's notice and I retired in December, 2002. And, really, Lynette and I, did not move. We became a presence in the diocese. We had hardly went to any activities, and decided to lie low. We went to some 8:00 oclock's in the neighborhood, neighborhood churches and some work outside the diocese. When the work was over, it was over.

What was it like to enter the House of Bishops?

Well, when I entered the house, I entered as a Bishop Suffragan of course. At the House of Bishops, the Suffragan Bishops form a separate group, because of our particular calling. And so, early on there was that support group in the House of Bishops. There was a small group of black bishops and whenever the House of Bishops met, we black bishops would meet for lunch or dinner. So there was always that support group. I never felt that when I came into the house, when Bishop Ed Browning was presiding bishop, that I was welcomed and by that time I had never served on some national bodies. There were some contacts of some people from General Convention and I think I was on programs on budget and finance. I was on for eleven years and I really appreciated. It was a result of Ed Browning's trying to have diverse representation on the committee. So, he was going to appoint me one more time, and I just said, "Ed, it is a very hard-working committee and I was ready to retire from it". I was also on Executive Council for six years, before I came to the House of Bishops. So, there were people that I knew there, and so I did not feel like a total stranger. When I had been in the house about five years, Bishop Browning was still presiding, but the house really in some ways restructured itself.

And, you also might think back and it does not have to be for this moment, what sorts of issues were there in the House at the time that you entered.

That would be 1986.

Okay. So, you were saying that the House of Bishops restructured not too long after you became a member?

Well, when we met in Phoenix in 1991, the House of Bishops, because of the energy around differences of opinion, the stress became so much in the House that the Presiding Bishop, Ed Browning, set up a special committee, so the House could deal internally with its issues. And, so

what came out of that was we would meet twice a year instead of meeting once a year. One of those meetings would be to build community, and we would meet around tables. In fact, the House of Bishops used to meet in numerical order, the most senior bishops were in the front and the most junior bishops were in the last row. And, when I first went into the house in 1986 that is the way it was structured. And, so they decided in order to have maximum mix of diversity of opinions that we would begin to meet around tables of discussion. We would stay in those table groups three years, and then we would move into a new group. When I was Vice President of the House of Bishops, I got to set up those table groups. And, so that was always fun.

So that changed the relationships in The House. We were not dealing with people of like mind. And, that was more my style, and so I was pleased that we moved into that structure.

What was your last question?

I asked you about issues within the House, so you named this major one about an internal issues of how you were relating to one another. And, I was wondering about issues in the church as the House of Bishops dealt with them, or issues in the society that came to be dealt with within the House.

Well, certainly one of the issues was the issue around human sexuality. When I was a Deputy at General Convention, I was on the Committee on Ministry, and they received the first legislation on sexuality. And those issues continued to move more and more to center stage. And, so by 1991 this issue was very divisive. That subject affected people to where they could hardly talk to one another. It did not come to calling names across the floor, but close to it in 1991.

MZ000070

So, that was one issue. Another issue we were wrestling with was the issue of racism. Barbara Harris was in the House by then, and so she and I chaired a committee of the House which produced in 1993 a letter to the church entitled, "The Sin of Racism," and called the church to redemption and certain actions. That was a major issue in the church. And, those are two that come to mind. I need really to think about the other issues.

The General Convention of 1988 was the convention that called for a revision of Lift Every Voice and Sing. Harold Lewis was the staff person for Black Ministries at 815. And, he asked me if I would chair the committee.

What year again?

That was 1988. And, we hoped that we would have the new revised hymnal finished by the convention of 1991. It was interesting that I told Lynette that I had accepted to be chair of the committee, and I told her we thought the book would be done. She had published while she was at the Cleveland Museum of Art, and she just knew how long that kind of work would take; even though it was not music but in the field of art. And she said right off "Mark the spot you are standing on," "Because, what you have just said, I do not think that is going to happen." [Laughs] Harold Lewis, asked me to chair that committee because he knew of my background in music-- and therefore, he said, "I knew where middle C was." He really wanted me to chair the committee because of my training and background in being able to move a group to accomplish a task while at the same time maintaining the life of the relationships within the group.

And, there were eight musicians on the committee. Harold was the staff person, and there was a representative for the church publishing company. And, then we had one other staff person who dealt with nothing else but copyrights. And, so we proceeded. Horace Clarence Boyer, who just died by the way (there is going to be a celebration of his life and ministry, last Sunday in February, at the Diocese of Massachusetts), was the chair and the editor of the book. Harold had appointed all these people already, and really asked me if I would accept to be chair of the committee, to put it together, and I agreed.

So, we had, we had the old book, Lift Every Voice and Sing, but we greatly expanded that. We put out a notice that we would accept new music, and so it was quite a task. Well, we did not finish it, the book was published in 1993, and then we presented it officially to the Presiding Bishop in a special service. That really brought together my interest in music and my commitment to celebrating the culture and history of black people in the Episcopal Church. So for me it was very fulfilling task to have accomplished.

Were you aware of, with the first Lift Every Voice and Sing, were you aware of controversy of what that process was like to actually get that published?

No, I really was not. I did not know much about that history. I was not in contact with Frank Turner who oversaw the publication of that book. He was staff Officer of Black Ministries at that time. And, he and Irene Jackson Brown had a major part in that. And, I do not know much about that process.

Was there any more controversy or why are we doing this in this church, why is this needed kinds of stuff to deal with when you were working on Lift Every Voice and Sing II?

Yes. First of all, a lot of people did not know we were working on the project. It was not widely known in the church. When the book was published, interestingly, in some white churches, the title put people off - Lift Every Voice and Sing II, and an African American Hymnal. And, so they would say, "Well, if it is an African American hymnal, then why would we use it in our church, because there are no African Americans." So, for them it was not a sense of the celebration of African American music and culture. Interestingly also, that in some of the middle class black churches (although less so that it used to be) a lot of folks had come into the Episcopal Church and had really put aside music in that tradition. They did not want to sing from it. And so, in the Diocese of Ohio, the first parishes to buy the book, even those that could afford it, were not the black parishes, but, two or three white parishes bought them first. But, so there was some resistance to it, but the resistance was minor compared to the success of the book. And, it is widely used.

One place where it was not received was in The General Theological Seminary which had an organist who was an African American. But, the blacks students there over time insisted that it be used, and I think David Herd reconciled himself to using it. It is interesting that the representative from the church publishing company said that he thought what the church needed was more service music. We did not have any music for Morning Prayer, because for most black parishes, that was not the main service of worship. So, we concentrated on new music and other things that had already been written for the Eucharist. He predicted that that would be a section that would be widely accepted. That turned out to be true. We had some new music written by people on the committee and other people submitted new music, and some people submitted poetry that was put

to music. Some of the music was traditional music; some of it was new music. So, overall after several editions I it was very successful.

You are quite glad that you had a hand in it.

Absolutely. And, there were some difficulties. It was a very representative committee; they were academics, musicians and a couple of choir members, those that had strong backgrounds in black music tradition, like Clarence and Carl Haywood who had already published. And, so this mix of people were brought together. As they say, it was like herding cats-- And, musicians are a special breed of cat, if you will. [Laughs] But, the thing for me personally is, I learned a great deal about the black music culture in America. And, I chaired the meeting and kept it moving forward, but every meeting I came away having learned more about our music, and that was a thrill to work with those people. We had two resignations, but we survived them.

So, when we finished we wrote those introductory articles that the committee approved all that was written, and then off it went to press. We were very careful about copyrights. Some of the music is in the public domain, but a lot of it was not. And, we had to be sure to be clear what was and was not, and get the permission to use the music in our book. And, some places did not give us permission, and in some, there was some cost to it, not major cost, but some cost. That was one of the reasons that Lift Every Voice and Sing, the original, had to cease publication. It ran into copyright problems. And, the agreement was that a particular company would not carry their legal concerns any further as Lift Every Voice and Sing did not publish any more. So, we were very, very careful about copyrights.

But, I would think that you would also be concerned to honor the black musicians, whose music it lost, and unless you are careful about the copyrights and the compensation, etc., then the you are doing the musicians themselves a disservice.

Exactly. And, then the Father of Gospel, Tommy Dorsey, he died just before the book was published, and we had used some of his music. I am trying to think of, well, there were several.

So, then did you have to redo things because...

No, it was just interesting that when you look at the book, the book was so up-to-date that we had to close the parenthesis and put his death date in the book, just before it went to press. And, one of our staff members died. He was in charge of the music of the liturgy. Curtis Cisco, He died, and we dedicated the book to him because he made a major contribution to the book. Horris Clarence Boyer and Carl Haywood and Curtis Cisco and Harold Lewis made particularly strong musical contributions, as did other people on the committee, Debbie Hines and others made significant contributions as well. The committee members really complemented one another. And, we dedicated the book at the National Cathedral in a special service.

People from all around the country came for that?

Well, I would not say all around the country, but a wide representation. The National Cathedral has a great chancel, so we did not have the service in the nave, but it was in the chancel, and the chancel...

...is as large as some of our small Episcopal churches. So, we filled up the chancel pretty much, and Bishop Curry, Michael Curry, preached. So it was a great day.

What did you get to see of the reception of Life Every Voice and Sing II as the Bishop Suffragan of Ohio, and as one who was traveling around, or being part of various national committees and etc. Did you get to see some of the process of, well, first, you know, black churches did not want much to do with it, some of them. But, then obviously, there was a wave of acceptance. Do you have a sense of how that happened?

Well, certainly the Union of Black Episcopalians completely supported the book and Curtis Cisco hosted the Union's Annual Meeting in New Orleans at Xavier University, I think it was, because they have a big chapel. And, it was a major liturgical celebration (one or two), and it is on tape. And, the music of Lift Every Voice and Sing was used exclusively. So, people who came from all around, all over the country experienced all that music and could be included in worship. So people were very excited about it and would take it home. Other meetings of the black church around used the hymnal, and people discovered that it was a kind of balance. So many black churches are Anglo Catholic and can you really be, have that formality of Anglo Catholic worship and sing spirituals and music in the black tradition. People discovered they could do this.

And, in fact many people really wanted to sing those old hymns that were not in the Episcopal hymnal. And, in fact, I remember early on giving a gift to a bishop and his wife, The Bishop of Northern Indiana, and she wrote back and said, "Thank you for this gift." She had become an Episcopalian, and was a convert from the Methodist Church when she was young, and it was a joy to her that we could now officially sing these hymns in the Episcopal Church again. Even though there was new music, there were three or four traditions we took them from. A lot of black people were in the Baptist Church and in the various black Methodist Churches, and many had become Episcopalians from those traditions, and could sing all that music again. [Laughs]

And were glad to be able to do so.

Right. So that was a major contribution. Lynette and I went down to The Virgin Islands when I retired and we took a ferry over to one of the other islands. I can never remember the name of it, but it is under British control. It is an English island, and the American Virgin Islands were under the same bishop. So, anyway, we went over there and we stayed at a small hotel. And, the bishop put us in touch with an Episcopalian over there. She took us to her church, St. Mary Magdalene. It was up on the hill, a lovely little church. We went in the church and there in every pew was Lift Every Voice and Sing II. So, I could not resist telling her that I chaired the committee that put that together. She was so excited, she had me...

MZ000074

...autograph several of them and told her rector that I had been there. And, in thanksgiving and appreciation for her hospitality, expressed in so many ways, I sent her a copy and autographed it. I went back down there for the consecration of the present bishop, and she came up to me and she said, "Do you remember me? You sent me the Lift Every Voice and Sing." I said, "I remember you." [Laughs] I know they use it in other parts of the Caribbean, as well as across this church.

MZ000075

It is October 21st. We are at Virginia Theological Seminary for the African American Episcopal Historical Collection. I am the Reverend Melana Nelson Amaker. I am here with the Right Reverend Arthur B. Williams, Jr., and we are winding our way through the story of his life and ministry for purposes of preserving it for the church. And, so, Bishop Williams, I again thank you for giving your time and sharing yourself with us for these purposes. And, as I was reflecting back on some of our conversations yesterday, one of the things I wanted to ask you is, I know that you had been in Ohio serving for a while. At the time that you were elected bishop, was there excitement for you with that process of being consecrated and stepping into the Episcopate?

Oh, absolutely; after having gone through that discernment process and then moving around the diocese and being asked to comment on all kinds of questions that I had not been asked to think about before, and to have people respond to that affirmatively. I was affirmed enough to elect me on the first ballot. That was very exciting. I had been archdeacon for nine years, but to work in this new capacity and to work with the bishop James Moodey. There is no doubt about that this was a high moment in my ministry. And, then I had the opportunity because of my flair for liturgics, to put together the service based on the Prayer Book, but to kind of do it with my own imprint and my own values about liturgy. That was also exciting. You have a copy of that liturgy in the archives. And, so that was, no doubt, a high moment.

Twenty bishops acted as my consecrators. My chief consecrator was presiding Bishop Browning. But, including my consecrators, they were 23 bishops came to my consecration- bishops that I had known, some of them when they were priests. Retired Bishop Burgess was there from Massachusetts. All my bishops who were former bosses came. It was exciting. My father sat in the front row with my brother and his wife. And, the only relatives I have living in Rhode Island now are my mother's first cousins, and they were there with their husbands. Many friends, who had nothing to do with the church per se, came, just because they were friends. Lay people and ordained people from the church, from my ministry and friendship all the way back to Rhode Island were present.

Also present was the priest from when I was at Brown, who said to me at the end of my freshman year, "Why don't you come to the Episcopal Church with me. A lot of the questions he was asking had been answered for him by the Episcopal Church." And, so that Sunday I went with him to St. Stephens Church in Providence. He was there, and had the role to assist me in putting my Episcopal vestments. And, interestingly, he died...

MZ000076

...just a couple of months ago on July 4th. And, we had maintained our friendship over these many years. And, in fact, our friendship really went back before college. He and I had the same piano teacher, during my last year in high school. So, he was probably my oldest friend present. My avocation, as you know, is music, so it gave me a chance to plan the music of the service with an excellent music director at Trinity Cathedral. So, all of that is a loud yes to your question.

All right. Would you be willing to share with us something of what your own spiritual life is like? I mean, because, you know, when the number of confirmations and nations and the offices of this and the committees of that, etc., are written up, we still often do not get a sense, neither in the sermons either of what the personal spiritual life of someone is like.

Well, I will be glad to say something about that. That experience I had re-finding the Episcopal Church was at the end of my first year of college, and then in a more concentrated way through my sophomore year. I was first attracted to the Episcopal Church because of its Catholic and sacramental life. And, even in that first service I went to where I did not really understand what was going on, I was caught up in the transcendence of God, given the nature of the worship, being very much in the Anglo Catholic tradition. So, that all spoke to me, you know, spoke to my spirit and that is something I have not really moved away from. I mean, it is really still very important to me. And, so I entered into the spirituality of what that represented.

The discipline of making my confession and attendance at Sunday Eucharist on a regular basis, I think I hardly missed a Eucharist on Sunday. I started to go to go St. Stevens in my sophomore year. In fact, Lynnette makes a joke about the fact that we had our wedding and Eucharist on Saturday, the nuptial Eucharist, and spent our wedding night together and got up and went to Eucharist on Sunday morning. [Laughs] And, we went to a local parish in Ohio. And, people kidded us afterwards, because they saw us so early, they want to make sure we were still getting along all right. [Laughs] But, Lynette and I just thought that was the thing to do. At least I did, to go to church on Sunday.

All of that was very important to me even when I was in the Navy. That is when I really centered in on the Eucharist. It was important to have that service....

MZ000077

...I think I mentioned that aboard ship, it turned out that the Navy chaplain aboard ship was Episcopalian. So, I organized a Eucharist. And even when we were at sea, we celebrated the Eucharist together. When the ship would go into some port somewhere, wherever I could, I would look to find where there was an Anglican church or a church that the Episcopal Church was in communion with. So, it was the Eucharist that was very important to me. But I think the next development I think was as I came in contact with people that were charismatic and had a more, for want of a better word, more fundamentalist approach to the scriptures, or I should not say fundamentalist- evangelical would be a better word, approach to their spiritual lives. And, I was impressed by their personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And, so that gradually became a part of my own spiritual life. I really had to ask that question that Jesus asked of his apostles, "Who do people say that I am." I just personalized it, you know, "who do you, Arthur, say that Jesus is for you, crucified and risen?" And, so that personal kind of search and commitment grew, and so that became very important to me as well.

And, then when I went to Detroit, there I was a member of a congregation in a community with all the social unrest. I became more acutely aware of racism and other injustices in our society. I realized that the church in many ways, instead of being in the role of redeemer of society, was in the role of reflector of society. So my discernment and my spiritual life led me to understand the church as an advocate for those who had no voice. An advocate against injustices and all of the rest. And, so that was kind of the next stage in my spiritual growth.

Even before I went to seminary, the monastic communities in our church were always meaningful to me. So I would go first, primarily to Holy Cross up in the western part of New York. I would just go there for some time away and some retreat. And, that has continued to be important. In fact, right now I am the Episcopal Visitor for our Benedictines in Three Rivers, Michigan. I have been their

visitor since they elected me in 2000. But, my own spiritual director, is Curtis Almquist who is now – he was not then, when I chose him – but, is now the Superior of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist at Cambridge. And, so from time to time I still go either to the house there on Charles River in Cambridge, or to their, to the farm in Emory.

MZ000078

I had to fall back on that foundation and was glad that it was there and is still developing. Most recently before I retired I went to the Bishops Credo and shortly after that I was asked to join the faculty of the credo. So I am on the spirituality faculty so I have done about two a year (have probably done about 14 of them). I make a major presentation during the week. It is always a growth time for me because besides the presentations we also do consultations with anyone who wants to do that. Each credo stretches me and in that role I am also responsible for the worship with another spiritual director for the worship over eight days. And we do spiritual reading. James Cone and others gave a theological interpretation as a foundation as my spiritual life was developing in the area of the church and its role in society. Some of those theologians enhanced my thinking as well. The discipline of my life is prayerful. I am a person that does not just pray in structured ways, although there is some of that. I just have a sense of the presence of God with me and saying prayers from time to time depending on the circumstance.

Thank you, if I recall correctly it is in part of the consecration service that you were consecrated as a bishop of the church and we do always know that an ordination because you have a local place in which to exercise ministry but you are always part of a large structure to which you answer to. So can you tell us something about the things that you have done and the church outside of the diocese of Ohio at other levels of the church?

My involvement in the church at the national level began while I was still in the diocese of Michigan. I was elected by Province Five to represent Province Five on the National Executive Council and I served on the Executive Council during the transition time between Presiding Bishop Allen and Presiding Bishop Ed Browning. Bishop Browning and I became good friends and (I am jumping ahead a little now) it was in 1992 that the telephone rang, at that time I was in Ohio of course and it was Bishop Browning, who said are you sitting down and I said not but I will. And he said I am calling to ask you if I can nominate you to be Vice President of the House of Bishops. It is the Presiding Bishop's nomination and then the House Bishops must select and you are elected from general convention to General Convention.

MZ000079

And so I served from 1992 until after I retired to 2003 when Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold asked me to continue.

What is that role about?

Well it really is Vice President which really means Vice Presider and so the primary role is to preside at the meetings of The House of Bishop either our interim meetings or at the meetings of General Convention when the Presiding Bishop cannot for some reason be the chair. Essentially it happens at General Convention because the Presiding Bishop is called away for photo opportunities

or to give an introduction or make a speech. So I move into the chair so he can do that (so that is one thing that happens). Another is, because I am in the position of Vice President, I am also on the Committee of Advice to the Presiding Bishop which is made up of the Presidents, the Bishop Presidents of all the Provinces, and they act as I say as a committee of advice to him so there is that role. There is the informal role of advice and sounding board. Shortly after Bishop Browning asked me to be Vice President he became ill and so a very important role that I had which a Vice President would not normally have- and that is the Presidents of the two houses before the general convention (this happened before the general convention of 95). The Presidents of the two houses review all of the legislation that the general convention is going to consider and to make a decision about which house it would initiate and in which committees. Bishop Browning was not able to do that particular role. I also represented the Presiding Bishop when he had a calendar conflict; so I served to be chief consecrator at consecrations of Bishops around the church. So I had an opportunity to do that eight times. Bishop Browning was ill the first time. I did it when the Bishop of Indianapolis was consecrated and really tried to be present- that was a very high priority for him. When Bishop Griswold became Presiding Bishop he asked me to take some of them for him. So that led to the eight consecrations. The last one was Bishop Gayle Harris, Bishop Suffurgan of Massachusetts and so those were special occasions. So that is some of the work.

Other things outside of Ohio you chaired some committees did you?

Yes, I was on the Committee of Advice at the Black Desk. When Harold Lewis sat in that chair, I chaired that Committee of Advice, I forget what it was called officially but it was a committee to work with Harold developing programs for the wider black church. In the house of Bishops I chaired the committee on racism with Barbara Harris.

MZ000080

Besides developing programs for the Bishops to work with their own racism internally, our committee produced a letter sent out to the whole church on the Sin of Racism on how we would move to repentance for that sin and to move in such a way to eradicate racism in the church so far as it was possible. So I chaired that committee with Barbara. For 11 years I sat on the Standing Committee program on Budget and Finance.

For the whole church?

For the whole church. This is the committee that functions only at the General Convention and sets the budget for the church for the triennium. It was a very hard working committee and still is, but the advantage in being on the committee is a learning experience because every program, every committee, every agency, every board of the Episcopal Church has to have their monies approved by General Convention and this is the committee that makes the proposal to the General Convention. And so Presiding Bishop Browning who makes those appointments, appointed me to this committee twice and was about to appoint me for another term. I thanked him for the honor but that I thought that it made for very busy General Conventions and so I asked him if I could just not accept that last appointment, which he obliged me. There was some reorganization at the national church level. They reorganized and set up a new committee The Integrity of Creation and Peace, and so I chaired the reorganization of that part of the program of the national church. So those are some of the committees I served on. When I retired Presiding Bishop Griswold was very concerned about what was happening in the division of work called Ethnic Congregations and Development, that is the national committee or committees that minister to and brought resources to support the

work of Asian Americans, African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans. That work had fallen into, well it had come upon hard times let's say, and it they were under a tremendous amount of criticism that was directed toward Bishop Griswold and some members of the staff on how appalling that work was being administered. So when I was about to retire toward the end of 2002 he asked me if I would in retirement become part time on his staff and to take over that work which I agreed to do. He told his Chief Administrative Officer that might work would take about six months. But when I talked to her the first time she asked me how long did Bishop Griswold say that this would take, how much time did he want, I said he said it would take six months and she shook her head and she said it is going to take longer than six months and I said I thought so.

MZ000081

She asked how much time a week did you agree on including travel from Cleveland to New York. I said two days a week here. So she said that she thought it was going to take more time than that. So she just smiled and she said I think the Presiding Bishop was afraid you would say no. But, with the advance of the technology that we have, I was able to indeed do the work either by flying to 815 and be there two days and the rest of the work I would do from home, either by telephone or by computer. So it took about two years. Then at the end of two years, the Presiding Bishop asked if it was going well. Why fix something that is not broken; so, we agreed I would stay until he retired, so I stayed four years and I stayed another three or four months after the election of our present Presiding Bishop. In that time I really had to appoint directors of all four of the desks and in some cases the support staff. In all four cases a national search was held. So then once we brought them together they were good appointments.

There was one and I will not mention who that was, who had some problems adjusting in her role as missionary. Shortly after I left 815, she left, but all the other persons, even with this major cut at this last year's convention, all the other persons that I appointed have survived and are still working at the national church level. Those four years were my major effort, my major piece of work at the national level. And you mentioned the international level. Of course that is represented primarily at the Lambeth Conferences. Which as you know, brings all the Bishops of the Anglican Communion together every ten years. Up until 1988 the Suffragan Bishops were not invited- only Bishops with jurisdiction. In 1988 they decided to invite the Suffragan Bishops and their spouses as well and so we were invited. Interestingly for that invitation, when they made the decision to invite the Suffragans, they did not complete the logistics and so they told us we were invited but we had to find our own housing and all sorts of things. So finally there was enough criticism about that Suffragan Bishops ended up staying at a small hotel in downtown Canterbury because the other Bishops were in dormitories at the University of Cant. Our accommodations were quite nice in 1988.

Did the differences that were made affect the number of black Bishops from this country that went to Lambeth.

Yes they allowed really all the black bishops to come.

Because at that point there would have been only maybe a couple of diocesan?

Yes Bishop Walker of Long Island would have been there, Bishop Thompson of Southern Ohio was there and that may have been it for diocesan Bishops in 1988. Bishop Barbara Harris was there in 98, so it did allow those of us who had been elected to go. But, we dealt with many international

issues. An important meeting that took place both before the 1988 and the 1998 was that Harold Lewis and others but primarily the black desk of the American Church sponsored a pre-lambeth conference which brought together Afro Anglican Bishops from across the globe and primary agenda was to educate Bishops in the process of Lambeth. American Bishops had to be educated too because the Lambeth Conference does not use Roberts Rules of Order as we understand them. There was a different kind of decision making process and so there was that education that took place.

So it would be up to speed by the time it started.

Exactly. There was a black Bishop from London and there were black Bishops from Africa and the Caribbean and the United States and Central America. Even more important than the orientation to the process was to have the black voices heard at the Lambeth Conference. The Lambeth Conference was a very English affair and the agenda of the Lambeth Conference has always been set before the opening of Lambeth Conference and it was given to you when you arrived. And there was very little input from black Bishops. So we at the orientation meeting established some of the agenda that we would want to see discussed. Representatives took that to the Archbishop of Canterbury and it is the only time in history that the agenda of the Lambeth Conference had been altered. Black voices were heard regarding the relationship between first world and developing countries, remaining aspects of colonization and racism and all those issues were introduced into the agenda. So that 1988 meeting was a very important meeting. By the way I was mistaken when I said that Bishop John Walker was not there, he was present.

How long did you meet together?

About a week at one of the colleges in Cambridge. Then we all were bussed over in mass together. Most of that meeting was economically supported by the American church and scholarships were provided for some black Bishops who could not come.

MZ000083

And...

And did that money come from the Office of Black Ministries; did it come from the Presiding Bishops?

It came from the Office of Black Ministries. The Office of Black Ministries made contacts with certain well healed lay people and some bishops and clergy.

Sounds like it changed the face of Lambeth.

It did. The experience of Lambeth was a marvelous international experience as you can imagine. But the sense of Lambeth was that you were worshiping and having your meetings in the context of the Church of England. That changed in 1998 dramatically. I remember one time I happened to walk in on a rehearsal for one of the Eucharist that was being held at Canterbury Cathedral. The Bishop of Ecuador was speaking in his own language, which was Spanish. He was the gospeler and I remember him asking shall I read the gospel in Spanish, and he was told no!

This was 88 or 98?

No this was 1988 and he was told no, read it in English. The whole service was with all that international representation, was in English and most of the music was in the English tradition. Still glorious in its own way because we worshiped not only at Canterbury Cathedral but also at St. Paul's Cathedral, where for London day.

But very British.

Very, the whole thing was very British and even the nature of the debate. The nature of the debate in the Anglican system is very different. The person for the resolution speaks and then a person against the resolution speaks and there are no points of order and there are no Roberts Rules of Order. I remember an American Bishop going to the microphone at one point while the Archbishop of Canterbury was presiding. I remember him very distinctly going to the microphone and saying "your Grace, point of order, point of order," The Archbishop looked down and he said "there are no points of order." So then the debate would go back and forth and then the Archbishop of Canterbury as the presiding officer would come to a point and he would say that is the end of debate and he said it is now time for us to vote and then we would vote. I think there were many issues, many international issues that we discussed. The structure is to have small groups- bishops meet in small groups and then come to plenary sessions in four different areas and then those groups would bring the resolutions to the plenary sessions of the whole conference. There were many issues. The primary issue was the ordination of women and the Reverend Nan Peete addressed the Lambeth Conference about her own experience as a woman priest. There was a lot of theological discussion about that. Following that was a special committee setup to deal with primarily The American Churches' move how the Lambeth would respond to the ordination of women because most of the provinces at that time did not ordain women. By 1998, the prevailing issue was homosexuality. We were structured the same way in how our resolutions are brought forth.

MZ000084

There were 54 Bishops on the committee that dealt with the issue of homosexuality. I ended up on the steering committee of that group. It was amazing, that group was absolutely divided. In fact there were Bishops in that group that said if we even discussed homosexuality they will leave, for to discuss homosexuality "is to bring Satan into our midst". So then you had people across the continuum on that committee. Finally we were able to come to a consensus, except for two Bishops, one on either end of the continuum. The rest of the Lambeth Conference (and there were 700 Bishops plus), did not have the experience of discussion in all of that give and take. So by the time it reached the plenary, it was our work at least the major part of our work, which was rejected by the plenary. But one thing that was accepted because they spent so much time wanting to say that homosexuality was contrary to scripture and was morally wrong. There was not a lot of attention paid to the other parts of our work of which was to institute a listening process so that the voices of gay people could be heard.

And so the listening process was not debated and prevails today. The whole listening process is being taken more seriously by the Anglican Consultative council. So our work in that small committee was not all for naught. It was a great experience working internationally, working with those people from all over the world. The other thing I want to say about that Lambeth conference was that they had received the feedback from 1988 and they created worship that was created to reflect the community. The very first words at the opening of the major Eucharist out of the mouth

of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the new one, were in Swahili. The preacher was the person that was the Archbishop of Tanzania. Before The Gospel there was a model of ceremonial dance by the Anglicans of the South Pacific. Spanish was used for the gospel. And there were African drums for the prelude. So it was a very different experience.

Highly different climate.

Highly different climate. There were two major issues at this Lambeth Conference. First of all was human sexuality, but as important I believe, was the whole issue of third world debt. The President of the World Bank was brought to speak to us. We talked about the economic weight of third world debt on the developing countries and came away from that Lambeth Conference with resolutions that spoke to all of that. And in the United States that voice was heard very strongly. President Clinton called a meeting of religious leaders around the issues of third world debt. Presiding Bishop Griswold could not attend but because I was the Vice President of the House, I represented the Episcopal Church around that table. President Clinton was a supportive voice and so there was already a movement in Congress to speak to that and to help alleviate some of the debt of the third world countries.

But you were able to speak to it because you had been with your Lambeth brothers and hearing what it was really like.

Right I could bring a global...

MZ000085

Perspective or the perspective of a global church where all the Bishops had met just a few months before. Indeed our Congress did affect legislation that changed America's stand on that. So that was some of my work on the international level.

What are some other things you were glad you were part of? That is for anytime over the course of your life, you have gotten to mention a number of things that you got to do so...?

One thing I would mentioned that a special arrangement was made for me in my first year at General Seminary so that my roommate would not be offended that I was an African American.

Yes yes.

During my first year of course I made friends in my class. My second and third year I roomed with another white student, whose name was Jack Tench. One thing that we decided to do since he had spent some time with the Yale School of Drama before he came General. So he suggested that he and I take one of Malcolm Boyd's plays called Study In Color. It is a short play done with masks (which we had made by one of the artistic seminarians). It was a brief kind of presentation that presented the contradictions in the nature of racism. The characters are a white person and a black person. We put that together and rehearsed it ourselves with a little bit of direction. Then almost every weekend we offered ourselves to go around to the youth groups in New York and some in New Jersey. We would make our presentation and we would open it up to discussion. I was blessed to have been a part of that because we were talking about The Civil Rights Movement which was well on its way. We are talking about still in the early 60's. And then during my last year another

thing that I was glad to be a part of was the support in 1964 Voter Rights Bill was before the congress.

There was an ecumenical interfaith witness. So a friend of mine who was a junior at General Seminary, Robert Tyrell went down to Washington. I had known him from Brown University so he became a longtime friend and still is, so that was our experience that I had told you about. So that is one thing that comes to mind.

Good, you mentioned this in the context of The Lambeth Conferences, how very different it was between 1988 and 1998.

Yes.

You mentioned that 88 was took up the degradation of women and so just with those brief slices we are talking about major changes in the church. You know you have served this church for a long period of time, are there other changes that you think of when you look over the span of your ministry and see what it used to be like?

Well certainly...

MZ000086

One major change is that the liturgical movement in the church which finally lead to Prayer Book [00:00:11] revision. You know we went through that long period of prayer book revision, which would allow the person in the pew to have the experience of new liturgies. Then through their liturgical commissions would give feedback to the national liturgical commission.

How long was that period about?

Well let me see, there were all these books...

Supplemental this and that.

Absolutely, I would say let's see, I had two courses with Boone Porter at General Theological Seminary who had made major contributions to the initiatory rights. So it seems to me that those liturgical changes, certainly the conversation was beginning in the various academic institutions. Charles Price here in Virginia, Boone Porter at the General- those are two people who began to write about some of the things that were happening on the continent, particularly in Germany as I recall. So those writings were beginning probably in the late 50's, early 60's but I do not really remember when our own Standing Commission took that on but they did indeed do that. The church went through this revision of the liturgy and a lot of people thought it was just modernizing words but there is no doubt about the fact that the end result of the revised liturgies (especially the rite two liturgies) were a different theology of the Eucharist especially and baptism and the theology of the ministry of all the baptized. Resulting in a less hierarchical structure. There was an Emphasis on community, the role of the church in outreach, concerns about environment, creation theology, all of that.

All reflected in...

And all that was included in the new Prayer Book, which included the addition of The Baptismal Covenant. I do not know any other part of the Anglican Communion that has The Baptismal covenant included in their Prayer Book. That has changed, our understanding of what ministry and commitment to our baptisms mean. I also remember the resistance in the congregations. So the church went through that adjustment from the mid 60's.

And what do you think of the impact? What do you think of the changes that brought about in the church?

We never had a liturgy that explicitly told us that as baptized persons...

MZ000087

we were responsible for the integrity of every human being and for issues of peace and justice. The whole role of what it means to be a Christian who repents. I think that putting the liturgy in modern English made it something that had to be dealt with and was very much of the present time, of our present language and of our present practice. Formally we were much taken up by the beauty and there is a beauty to a 16th century Elizabethan English.

It became a bit more immediate then.

That is what I am saying, it was more immediate and it was of this time and then there was also an introduction of one of my favorite liturgies that my favorite Anglo catholic parish in Providence has done. So now the Easter Vigil is commonly done all over the church and all of the symbolism and meaning of that. The new Prayer Book also made it clear that the Eucharist was the central act of worship on Sunday. Many of the so called low churches would have often have communion at eight, but the Eucharist was celebrated only on the first Sunday of the month. There was a great emphasis on Morning Prayer. I think it brought us closer to the churches in the liturgical tradition. It became obvious when we sat down to do liturgy and revise liturgy, we sat down with Roman Catholic and Lutheran Scholars. It was kind of convergence that happened around liturgy in the liturgical churches primarily. It is interesting also that in those days that I spent in the Methodist Church when I was a young boy, The Methodist Church did not use the liturgical year or special liturgical practices or even communion other than the first Sunday of the month. Now you find the Methodist Churches is liturgical who mention of Ash Wednesday and administering ashes and a growing sense of the rules, place of the Eucharist. Some of the Methodist Churches have really Eucharist now on Sunday, so all of that liturgical study has affected the whole Christian witness in this country I believe.

And for a person who as you describe yourself has been Eucharistic centered from time in memoriam for a person who grew in your passion for social justice for being out in the community, I would think that these changes were ones that you were very glad for?

I felt very affirmed because St. Stephens Church being in the Tractarian tradition, and in Anglo Catholic tradition from its beginnings in the middle of the 19th century, was considered an oddity.

MZ000088

And in fact some of the earlier Bishops writing in their diaries were very critical of the practices at St. Stephens. St. Stephens itself grew and became more Anglo Catholic in its worship. At the

beginning it was just practices like vested clergy, carrying a cross in possession and the choir vesting. So it was not that they were extremely Catholic necessarily. What really happened was the church came to a more centered place.

Are there things that you have seen changed in the life of the church in the course of your ministry?

I know this is another internal aspect and there were criticisms by many of the liberal in the church that thought that our church really began to put all of its energy inward and had lost some of its vision and energy for the church's role in society and having to do with justice. And to some degree that was true. For instance another justice issue within the church is the whole development of concern around women's ordination. Several years before the ordination of the Philadelphia 11 and before the debate at the General Convention. That issue was being discussed in the church and then the ordination took place in Philadelphia, Barbara Harris carried the cross in possession. I was not able to be at the event. Many of my friends went and I knew it was going to happen. There was another thing, and there was some confidentiality involved because they were concerned that someone would try to stop it. So people in the know knew it was happening and were present. I knew it was going to happen but I could not be there. Bishop John Burt, The Bishop of Ohio, who just died yesterday, was an advocate for the ordination of women so he was always on the positive side of the debate. But he was not in favor of uncanonical action which he considered illegal. What happened locally was ironic, that is the rector of Christ Church in Oberlin invited one of the priests that had been ordained in Philadelphia to come and celebrate at Christ Church and John Burt disciplined him...

MZ000089

for breaking the canons. The Reverend Peter Beebe was his name. He went to trial, in the mid 70's and was found guilty. The Bishop was going to move ahead with some discipline, but it was appealed to the Provincial level and on a technicality he was found not guilty- on a canonical technicality. What was ironic about that is that the Bishop of Ohio was an advocate of women's ordination and was disciplining this priest. When it was appealed the president of the trial court at the Provincial level, the bishop on that level was strongly opposed to the ordination of women. But on the terms of canonical interpretation, and as I said the technicality, they threw it out. So that is an example of the kind of energy that was going on. This all happened before I came to Ohio in 1977. But that kind of struggle was going on all over the church. The strongest argument was from tradition and those who were advocates were arguing from scripture and reason. So, there was no reason not to proceed. There was not biblical or theological reason not to ordain women.

I was present at that debate in Minneapolis where the ordination of women was approved. Then once women were approved, then of course if women could be ordained to the priesthood, they could be ordained to the Episcopate so it was all of that debate. And so, that debate extended as I say into the Lambeth Conference of 1988. And shortly thereafter Barbara Harris was elected as you know and I did go to her ordination. In fact she asked me to not only join those Bishop to lay hands on her but to be one of the administrators in that great arena in Boston. It had to be an arena, a closed arena because of the size of the crowd. That was a grand event. Presiding Bishop Browning asked in the service if there was anyone who objected. A person or two read a statement but he listened to them because he knew that was going to happen. He responded to them and said "we will proceed", and he did. So that took a lot of energy in the life of the church. Some members of these dioceses that recently left around the issue of human sexuality were the same dioceses who did not

ordain women. So it was not in some ways human sexuality, which was an occasion for their departure, those Bishops were less and less part of the community of The House of Bishops. Their issues with the church began with the ordination of women. This issue moved us from looking outside and just looking at ourselves.

MZ000089

There was also a whole divestment movement regarding apartheid in South Africa. I can remember in our diocese (in Ohio) the debates against divestment. Ohio finally voted to divest its portfolio from those doing business in South Africa. The national church did the same later. One event that I was asked to be part of was a ten person delegation to represent the American Episcopal Church at the enthronement of Desmond Tutu at St. Georges Anglican Cathedral in Capetown. That was one glorious occasion. I believe by that time the dismantling of apartheid had begun and Tutu spoke to that. I remember hearing Bishop Tutu's name for the first time when I was at Seminary. He was the head of the African Council of Churches I think. Then he grew to be this major leader there. The interesting thing was that shortly after I was there for his enthronement I was elected suffragan Bishop. He came to Ohio just before I was consecrated Bishop because his daughter was at Oberlin College and he was to receive an honorary degree. And when he came for that event to preach at Evensong at the Cathedral in Trinity, at which service I was the officiant. We were being introduced before the service, standing in a circle. As Bishop Moodey, the Bishop of the diocese was going around the circle, when they came to Desmond, Jim was about to introduce Desmond and me, (I could not believe he remembered me), he said "my friend you have gone through a metamorphosis" and he came and embraced me. That was after I was elected Suffragan Bishop. That is why he talked about a metamorphosis and came across the circle to embrace me. Everybody who knows Bishop Tutu said he had an unbelievable memory for names. And when I saw him again at the Lambeth Conference in 1988. He remembered me again, and it was just uncanny. When he came to the cathedral and preached at Evensong, he was primarily moving around the United States and other countries giving thanks for the witness of the American church. He said there is no doubt in his mind that what primarily caused the fall of apartheid was economics. When the churches began to divest and General Motors and Ford and all those companies that were in South Africa began to withdraw. The leaders of the country saw they were heading into economic devastation. And so for some of them they changed because of moral issues. But, for others it was the economic pressure from the United States churches and others.

And so was this a new movement in our church to be thinking about, thinking ethically about the portfolios and what we were doing with our money?

I think it was certainly more concentrated. It really became a church wide concern.

MZ000091

There was a committee established at the National Church level which had to do with the integrity of investments. That was not the exact name of the committee and I think it is likely that that committee grew out of the divestment movement. My bet is that it was not in place before. In the life of the American church our resources and our investments and our portfolio were used with much effectiveness. It developed around our concern about South Africa. So that is another movement that I think of. The churches as we moved into the 80s and the 90s began to renew their efforts around racism. I remember as we began to talk about racism again in the House of Bishops,

I remember hearing a Bishop or two saying we had dealt with that already, meaning that the church had a response to the riots and racism in the life of the church, had been dealt with there.

Over and done.

Right, people really thought we had dealt with racism and was over and done with. That certainly was a continuing movement that was renewed. Many dioceses took it seriously. This last General Convention of 2006 called on all of the diocese to do studies and make reports on how they were inheritors of the profits of racism and slavery. There was some response but not to the level that it should have been. So I think the church is still at work doing that. It is a long time movement in the life of the church dealing with its role in racism and its practice even today.

Now you mentioned back in Rhode Island that some of the founders of Brown University and The Church, you mentioned the Brown family.

Yes the Brown family.

Is that the “Traces of the Trade” family or not?

No.

No. That was the De Wolfe family. A descendant was The Presiding Bishop and the Bishop that was Bishop of Rhode Island when I was born. That Bishop confirmed my mother. That Bishop was the last bishop who was elected Presiding Bishop and continued to be Bishop of his diocese. But I am really proud of my University. Presently, The President of Brown University is an African American woman and the first African American woman to be president of any Ivy League College. Part of her leadership is to enable the university to be honest about its history and its roots. So she setup a commission which has now made a report and it is clear that the Brown Family made its money primarily from slavery.

MZ000092

That family is still represented on The Board of Fellows at Brown University. But what happened in the 18th century two of the brothers were converted and they became abolitionists. The third brother continued in the slave industry. It is hard to believe that Rhode Island was as “Traces of the Trade” has shown us was a major center of slavery and all that was going on between West Africa and the Caribbean islands and the United States- Bristol in particular.

We have sort of shifted gears this morning from straight chronology to talking about some issues, some sort of retrospective kinds of things and it is fine.

So this afternoon we are going to talk about people, talked about my spiritual life.

Ah, you did that already.

Already did.

Talked about some of the changes that you have seen in the church.

Yes, the liturgical movement and the ordination of women, racism and divestments, some of the things that happened in the life of the church.

It is October 21st and the Right Reverend Arthur B. Williams Jr. and I Alana Nelson in our session six, the oral history on our good Bishops life and having enduring several places in terms of things that he has done and interested in we are looking now trying to wrap up. There will always be more of the story to tell. So Bishop Williams we were just earlier in the morning talking about some of the trends that you have seen change over your time in the church and I think that you have probably already spoken to some of these but I am wondering are there other national events or world events that you think of having impacted the life of the church or where there was strong connection with what is going on in the world and what was going on in the church? You already talked about the dismantling of apartheid and how the church is looking at its own portfolios and divesting. All of them had an impact on that political situation, that is a big one, but I do not know if there are other world events or national event that come to mind for you when you think yes this is a place where there was a lot of impact one to the other?

Well I think of the wars. When I was ordained, around that time there was a lot of controversy about whether the United States was involved in an immoral war in Vietnam. I must admit that I went back and forth about the rightness of that war. I became convinced that we should not be there. Interestingly I was moving towards the end of my ambivalence and I was asked to be a part of a radio panel. I did not expect the question. I forget what the name of the radio program was but it was on the air, it was live and the interviewer asked me directly what my view of the war was.

Ah hmm.

And so as I said I had about reached the end of my ambivalence and I said what it was, that I was opposed to the war. And then of course I had to deal with people. A lot of people of course had came to that conclusion but they were not there in 1966. So I remember the controversy about the war and how returning veterans were poorly treated. Presiding Bishop Browning spoke directly to the president requesting that he not move into Iraq but he did. Inside the White House the President was sitting with Billy Graham as I recall, so these issues were major issues in the last quarter of the century. And then of course I think I have already mentioned that all the way through this time right up to the consecration of Gene Robinson we were struggling with war and human sexuality-and we still are.

Yes.

But in general I think that as the society wrestled with who was in and who was out

MZ000096

the church was wrestling with who was around the table, and who are excluded. So in that way these issues that I have mentioned I think all played into that theme if you will. I think another important issue that was happening was the development of the third world. I think that the first

independence movement happened, I think in 1957 in Ghana and so step by step many other countries acquired independence. I think that as Africa was more and more coming into its own those countries really demanding to be treated as an equal from other countries around the world. That presented a struggle I think on the world scene. I do not know that other than the fact that the former British Colonies were mostly Anglican, I think a lot of what happened in Africa did not affect the church a lot. But, a lot certainly was happening on that continent. In 1968 The Union of Black Episcopalians arranged a visit to countries in West Africa. It was about the time that Roots was published and so we were going to look at our own roots since most slaves in The United States came from West Africa. So I visited six countries and not just former British but Ivory Coast and so many French. That was my first insight into Africa at all. Unfortunately when we were there it was the very time that all the Anglican Bishops were in England for the Lambeth Conference so we did get to talk to Anglican lay people and priest around but not Bishops. I had the honor though of celebrating the late Eucharist of the Cathedral of The Most Holy Trinity in Accra. I have some pictures of that exciting event. The African churches had three or four Eucharist every Sunday and all of them would be crowded out the door. We got a chance to really see the strength and vitality of the African church. That was my first exposure. Actually we did go to the very place that roots speaks of where Alex Haley traced his roots back to. Interestingly since then geneticists have collected DNA's in West Africa. So I went and had my DNA sample compared with the bank of DNA's...

MZ000097

from West Africa. Part of my family DNA goes back to West Africa to the Mandinka people who lived in Senegal and Gambia and other countries in that part of Africa. Then I realized that when we took this trip in 1968 that I had actually gone into that very areas, not knowing that my own roots were there.

As you talk about the coming into independence of several African countries during those decades, I am thinking about your talking last time about the changing face of Lambeth between 88 and 98.

Oh yes.

But the other thing that I think of in terms of how the church has changed is just that at this point with such growth in Anglican churches in Africa and South America that what the communion looks like, it is different than it was when you came in.

Yes, there is no doubt about it. You just did not hear in the 60s and 70s about the afro Anglican voice. The Communion was quite silent-with some exceptions of course. That was the big question going into the 1988th Lambeth Conference. With the growth of Anglicanism in those countries in Africa particularly, would that voice be heard. When we setup the African Anglican conference the voice was indeed heard again.

Yes.

When I was in West Africa, one of the countries we visited was Liberia. I knew something about this history of Liberia founded by American slaves, and also about the stress in that society between Americans who had settled the country and tribal peoples. There was every indication that there was

going to blow up. I remember as we were being toured around that I asked if Liberia was still controlled by an oligarchy. The tour guide lead me to believe that this has been worked out and there were agreements now between the government and tribal leaders and firestone which had great tracks of land for the rubber industry. But that turned out of course not to be true. Liberia appeared to be a liberated and peaceful country but much smoldered under the surface.

Underneath.

What finally happened in Liberia of course has affected the American church primarily because of immigration. I was surprised when I went back to Rhode Island and saw the number of Liberians in Rhode Island moving into places like the Cathedral which, when I was in Rhode Island did not have Africans in the congregation at all. One change now about ministry to black people in the United States because we are concerned not only about Afro Americans but also Caribbean Americans. Now we are dealing with those who have come and continue to come from Africa- from Nigeria, the Sudan and all the rest. So I think that is a growing challenge to the Episcopal Church- how to expand even more the ministry to black people but with these varying backgrounds.

MZ000098

And clergy and laity.

Clergy oh yes absolutely across the board. I was amazed when I had a meeting out in South Dakota and was sitting reading the newspaper. There was an article about a Sudanese family that had moved out of Africa and settled of all places in South Dakota. I discovered that is not unique. That particularly Sudanese it seems in lots of places around the country.

So what it means to be black in the Episcopal Church is ever more complex.

Absolutely. In a Diocese like in Brooklyn, NY they have these great big Caribbean congregations and they continue to be grow because when Caribbean people come to the states they go to the church where all the islanders are and they grow those churches. So even though in many places around the country, black churches, particularly those long-standing American black churches are becoming in many places but not in all places a real challenge. It is a challenge which I think is being met in time by this archives project at Virginia Theological Seminary that you are involved in. In those places history is just being lost and so much of it is not written and is in the oral tradition. So I rejoice that even those places where the church is getting smaller that there is an effort to reach out and preserve the history and the witness that has been there over the years.

That might lead us into asking you what you think our church should be doing at this point to continue to welcome and encourage the presence of people of color.

I am glad to see at the last general convention the Hispanic desk has put forth a very rigorous program, which is very enthusiastically received. Even in the face of these major diocesan cuts, the Hispanic program was supported and expanded. So there is the witness of the ethnic desks- the black desk, the Asian desk, Native American and Hispanic, our church has the opportunity to support their work where a strong foundation has been laid. Unfortunately given the economic crisis in our society, which is reflected in the church, with the exception of the Hispanic desk, the others have come up against budget cutbacks. I mean, for instance, I am going to go from here next week

to a meeting of the scholarship committee called recruitment training and development by the black desk. We received a notice that the only persons the national church budget could afford to bring to this scholarship meeting with seminarians were those persons who lived in the greater New York area, the east coast down to Washington and so it cut out people on the committee in the south and in the Midwest and the far west.

MZ000099

And so the meeting is now going to be divided between those present and a conference call. Obviously that is a reduction in the effectiveness. I understand that there has been a moratorium called for all national meetings at this time that would be supported by the national church budget. So in the meeting I just had a lunch with the seminarians. A question one of the leaders in OBES, which is the Black Seminarians Group, was if there was any button I could push so that OBES could have their annual meeting, which is their opportunity to talk about the future of their life in this church. At this point that meeting is not scheduled. All I can do really is to bring it up when I go to 815 next week. So as I sit here and say that the church should bring support to these ethnic desks, I say at the same time that they along with other parts of the national programs are being cutback. Another thing that needs to be done- within the ordination process for discernment, the commission on ministries and all of that process leading to ordination continues to have a cultural bias which is not in favor of people of color. I have heard several times of people who have different culture backgrounds than the dominant culture either dropout or just get chopped up in the process. If the church is serious about continuing to have people of color respond to calls to ordained ministry, then there has to be a hard look at the process and all those canons and policies that come under the whole area that we call ministry. I think this is a serious matter that faces the church, and I am not sure that it takes money to do that necessarily. I think it takes some leadership and the raising of people's consciousness to have some of the skills and intention to deal with that.

Do you think there is anything that African Americans can do about that and what suggestions do you have for what the church at large should do?

Well as far as African Americans, I think that there are a lot of seasoned, competent black clergy in the church. I think that they should offer themselves first of all to evaluate in their own dioceses the discernment process. They can also offer themselves as mentors to those are not familiar with the church as a system. There are people who have survived who can take the opportunity to guide people through the process. So that is something I think that African American clergy could do. I think that there have been fewer and fewer vocations raised up.

MZ000100

One reason that there are not as many vocations as there once upon a time is there are so many areas now that people who want to serve people or help people can move into. So they really have to have a sense of vocation to the priesthood and want to serve people in that particular way. So there is the opportunity in black parishes, where you have role models, to encourage people to respond to their sense of vocation. So that is something else that I see that could happen. Of course the general outline of how commissions operate, the general ordination exams, (which I think are falling more and more into disuse), modifying canons and changing policies around ordination exams will give those committees the opportunity to evaluate and bring their attention to that.

What is some of what you would like to see black churches, black congregations doing in 2009 because we are in this early part of the century? Where might you like to see our focus or our energy, recognizing of course that there is no monolith but...?

Well I think that what black parishes have done traditionally, that needs to be continued, and that is to care for the spirituality, and the souls of black people to continue in that ministry. And so this has always been the ministry of the black church- that is to be attentive to issues around justice and racism that has been part of the American tradition. I think that many of the black parishes are infected with what some people call the seven last words, "we have never done it that way before". I think with some of the young people coming into the church and being ordained, we ought to let go off that mindset. Lots of times our churches tend to be kind of bastions of conservatism, so my vision would be for black churches to move out of that. And I think another thing that we need to do is to enable the white churches to more than know but to celebrate the diversity of our human race.

MZ000101

And therefore hold before the wider church what we value and our tradition, our history, our culture, our joy and worship, just kind of hold that up. So that is some of what I think about.

So as I promised I wanted to give you the opportunity to just talk about some of the people that you have known and worked with in this church that you are very glad have been part of your life.

Well I guess I mentioned some of the names of those people as I was growing up, before I really entered into ordained ministry who were forward thinking and reached out to me and prepared a place for me to do ministry in the life of the church. Robert McGregor was my first rector when I was ordained, at Grace Church in Providence. But often what would happen is after these people and I began to work together we became friends together in ministry and so Robert McGregor would be one. When I had that experience with the Urban Pilot Program of the Episcopal Church, which began in the mid 60's, I went to work with Reverend Alan Mason who was put in charge of Church House in Providence in the black community. Again, I became friends with him. I am a godfather to his oldest son and when his wife died I officiated at her funeral. When he remarried I officiated at his marriage. That is how close we became friends. I mentioned the Reverend Ronald Stenning and his work before we knew each other at The Cathedral. Again he and I became good friends and after he eventually moved to Oakwood (which was a suburb of Dayton, OH), and was Rector of St. Paul's there, and we continued to be good friends through that time. And when he died he asked that I preach the homily at his funeral that I was glad to do. When I moved to Michigan I would say that a woman who had a great deal of influence on my life was a colleague on the staff of the diocese of Michigan. I was in urban affairs when I was on that staff and she was in training in education. She invited me to be a part of what was really emerging in the church and that is the whole sensitivity movement, group development and group process. So I learned those skills and she was a very strong leader at that time and the whole area in experiential education that the church was only beginning to take it seriously. Josephine Kelsey was that person and so I would count her among my friends and she still lives in Ann Arbor in Michigan. I had also met Fred Williams in seminary. When he...

MZ00102

graduated he went back to Michigan. So when I was called to Grace Church in Detroit, Fred really was the only person I knew in the Diocese of Michigan. So we were able to continue and build the friendship that we had begun in seminary and so I would certainly count Fred. Fred was part of the delegation that went to Bishop Tutu's Enthronement in South Africa. Fred and I were good friends. Often when I would go to New York he would take me to some fine restaurant that he thought I ought to be exposed to. Although I did not participate in his funeral, I was present at that wonderful celebration at Church of Intercession.

What was he like?

Well my observation was that people either liked Fred a lot or they did not like him at all. This was not true with me. Every so often he would begin to develop a kind of arrogant attitude, which he would do with other people. But what he would do this with me, I would just say "oh Fred, get off it" and he would; and so our relationship was more honest and open. For instance when he was called to The Church of the Intercession (in New York) he asked me if I would come out to St. Clements, Inkster, Where he was Rector. We had a long conversation about the movement whether he was really ready to make that kind of change. I was the chair of the black caucus as I mentioned in The Diocese of Michigan and Fred was always a strong voice for racial justice. Because Fred became very prominent on the national level, and was one of the founders of the unit black Episcopalians, which grew out of the unit of black clergy. Fred was a primary leader along with Ed Rodman and some others, so I always had an appreciation for him and his abilities. He was a fine preacher and he had a good sense of liturgy. It was always clear where Fred was and was part of the leadership in this Special Convention of 1969 held in South Bend, Indiana. I was not really part of the planning group but I certainly was in conversation with Fred and others. When the microphone was taken away from Presiding Bishop Hines and the black agenda was put forward, every black member of the Convention left the floor and did not participate until they were sought out and negotiated with. Fred was involved in all that so this is some of who he was. He had a great sense of humor and allowed me to be close to him. There is no doubt he did have close friends. He did have a few close friends and he allowed me to be one of those persons who was close to him. So he made a major contribution to the church. Later on in his ministry moved to develop associations in the church in Africa. In fact he was Canon at one of the cathedrals in Africa. But you did not want to get on the wrong side of Fred because he could be very cutting; he could be cruel sometimes but in no way did that...

MZ000103

affect our relationship once we got to know each other.

You mentioned that back in the years when you were on a ship in the Navy that apparently by Gods providence the ship would go to certain places where there were people that would be good for you to talk to. And you talked about the Bishop and how difficult that first meeting was with him when he said I will accept you as a postulant but do not expect it to go anywhere because there is no place for you. But you said that the ship went to Boston also and that while you were in port in Boston you got to speak with Bishop Burgess.

Yes. Then he was an archdeacon and I really wanted to talk. I had almost made up my mind about going to seminary but I really wanted to talk to someone who has spent most of his life as an ordained person in the Episcopal Church. I wanted to know what it was like to be an African American in this church of ours. So the ship that I was on, the USS Macon, was home ported in

Boston so I made an appointment to go see Archdeacon John Burgess. We had a very frank conversation about his life growing up. He was from Michigan for a while he was chaplain at the University of Michigan. Now he was there in Massachusetts and he encouraged me to go to seminary. He did not paint some Pollyanna picture; he was very realistic about the difficulties in the church and the relationships of blacks and whites. But he also said that if I had a sense that I was called to the priesthood he was sure that I would not be happy unless I followed my own vocation. That was one of the things I remember he said to me. So as I say I had that realistic picture from him. My Deacon training program was coming to an end and he knew it was only for a year. I got a call from him and by then he was elected Bishop Suffragan. Then in 1970 he was elected Bishop of the Diocese and he was the first African American Bishop of any diocese in the states. When I was consecrated Bishop in 1986, he was among the 24 Bishops that attended. When Lynette and I a few years ago, were on a vacation on the Cape, I said "Bishop Burgess is on Martha's Vineyard. He and his wife have a summer home there". I said "we may not always be able to go and see him so let's get on the ferry and go and see him." So I called Ester (his wife) because I really wanted to do this the next day. That is the way our schedule was and she said come on out, she met us at the ferry, showed us all around the island and told us all the history of black people in Martha's Vineyard which is a long history. I used to go to Martha's Vineyard with my parents and grandparents when I was four or five years old but had not been back there much since. Although that is where I learned how to drive. She took us to see Bishop Burgess whose mind (even though he was probably in his late 80s then, maybe 90), was still good. They were fun to watch as they

MZ000104

bickered back and forth. I asked him if you remember our conversation in 1960. He said "oh yes", and that was the last time I saw him. He died shortly thereafter. The presiding Bishop could not be present at that service and since I was Vice President of the House by I represented him at the Cathedral in Boston at his funeral. And Ester was there in the front row. Shortly thereafter Ester died.

And so this frank realistic conversation with Bishop Burgess at that time left you with?

A sense of what I really had to do as I responded to the call of the priesthood. My last year in the Navy, when that sense of vocation came back again, I was dealing with the "buts". And so Bishop Burgess really dealt with my last resistance. So I came away elated and determined that my next step would be to go back to see the Bishop of Rhode Island. And as I say that is when the USS Macon went to Providence for Providence Day. After it was settled that I would go to the General Theological Seminary, the USS Macon went to New York. So I did not even have to pay for transportation to all these places that was ironic, or as we say in Rhode Island that was divine providence.

Apart from John Burgess' firsts in the church, what should we remember about him? What do you remember about his person, his character that kind of thing that would be good for us to know?

Well I think that to have been the first African American to be a Diocesan Bishop, especially in a place like Boston Massachusetts, I think just because I know some of my own experience in being the first, so I know from what he had to say and from his actions that he had to deal with people who had never had to respect a black person in that office or with that authority. I remember when I was

in the Navy and was stationed at, Currier Transfer Station that I told you about, when I went there because I was the senior officer, even though there was just a group of five officers, I was to be the commanding officer of the unit. I remember that is was an officer there who was from Mississippi. He could not tolerate having an African American officer over him. He never dreamed when he went into the navy that that would happen. And so I can identify with Bishop Burgess knowing that he had to exercise authority and to deal with people all across the society in Boston. Everything from the old Boston families to the smallest rural church, he had to deal with people who never expected that they would be subjected to a black Bishop with that long history in the Diocese of Massachusetts.

MZ000105

Obviously as President Obama says, I was elected so there must have been a lot of people that supported me and that would be true with Bishop Burgess. And he exercised his ministry with a great deal of grace and he was uncompromising in his own identity and in his continuing energy raising up people. We are speaking now especially about African Americans raising up and supporting the ministries of other African Americans. He was a good preacher, and a clear preacher. His churchmanship was different than mine but then his being from Massachusetts and Michigan, so that was alright. He was a person of great integrity and good humor, articulate and a person who you really felt ought to be in that position. There was no reason why he should not be Bishop of Massachusetts and he exercised that ministry well I think. If I were going to use an adjective, one of them would be admirable. From the time of our conversation he always had a particular interest in me and my ministry. When I was finishing up at Grace Church (in Providence) my first place where I was for a year that he called and offered me a job in Massachusetts, I do not know if I said that.

And he really encouraged me. He really wanted me to come and he said an interesting thing to me. I know it was part of his way of encouraging me. He said, "Arthur you really ought to come. This is an opportunity after only being ordained a year for you to be in charge of a congregation and that is important for you to do." And he said something else. "You need to think about that fact that you are a graduate of an Ivy League University, and you spent four years as a Naval Officer and three years at The General Theological Seminary. He said you have to keep in mind that a lot of people are not going to hire you because you would be too threatening.

[Laughter]

I remember how he said that. But, I really wanted to stay in Rhode Island if I had the opportunity. By then, an opportunity was beginning to develop to go to St. Marks Church in Riverside and have a different experience in the downtown metropolitan parish. So, I thanked him for the offer, but it was a straight out offer. If I said yes that is where I would have gone.

I do not want to let you get away without asking you about Quintin Primo because you worked with him also in Michigan.

Well when I first went to Michigan Bob Chapman was the rector of St. Matthews which was the oldest black parish in Detroit. And when he left, it would have been the late 60s. Quintin Primo was called to be the rector; his father was a priest too. And so he used to talk about being a "PK", Priest Kid.

MZ000106

He was a great visionary, and his roots were solidly in the Black Episcopal Church and the black community and he celebrated that with a lot of pride as well as the ministry of his father. He knew firsthand the kinds of hard time that his dad had and that he had in his early ministry. But he was a graduate of Lincoln and brought a good academic background. He had a great sense of humor, he was a great preacher and had a way with people. I remember that when he greeted people leaving the church that he would shake the hands of the men and he would kiss all the ladies on the cheek and the vestry decided that might not be a proper thing to do. So then he said that he was going to continue to do that and he was sure that the good relationship that he was building up between his parish enabled the budget in such a way that he was going to continue. Today he would not do that but in that era it was possible. His great vision in the diocese was a merger. Here was a church in the inner-city where and a beautiful building that needed renovation, where there had been white flight in the middle of the city on Woodward Avenue, the main drag. St. Matthews in the southern part of the city had been from there in its founding because that is where the black population had settled. They were bursting out the walls. And so he made connections with the diocese for support and got me to go up and minister to people that were left at St. Josephs. He became their rector. It remained a strong congregation and remains so through the rectorship and following, so the rectorship of Orris Walker whom he called to be his assistant. Ja Walker and I sat with Quintin when he was making the decision about whether he should respond to those people who put his name forth to be elected as Bishop Suffragan of Chicago. We encouraged him to do that. I remember sitting around his dinner table which I did often, that Winnie, his wife, was saying, "well I just do not know that I want to go to Chicago and if you get elected I do not know what I am going to do. I am really happy here at St. Matthews and St. Joseph's." So Quinton said to her, (they had children that were not out of school yet) "well my experience is that where the breadwinner goes, the bread eaters go."

[Laughter]

I will never forget that he said that and she did not say anything else. By the time he was elected (I think he was elected in 1972), one of the things that I passed onto you was a picture of his consecration, Presiding Bishop Hines was the chief consecrator. There he had black clergy do everything that could possibly be done at the consecration service. So he was surrounded by many

MZ000107

of us as you will see in that picture. I remember William James Walker who was at General when I was there, talking to Quinton about his consecration service. William James said to Quinton, "Quinton I think you should have African drums to begin out your service, in this Anglo Catholic traditional cathedral." And so Quinton said, "well why do you think that William James? Why should I begin my service with African drums?" William James said, "so that the people will have a black experience" Quintin said, "William James, when I walk down the aisle it will be a black experience for the Diocese of Chicago." So he had that kind of humor but also with commitment and clear vision. He was strong in the ministry too; almost to the end of his life when his health began to fail and after he was retired as the Bishop Suffragan of Chicago. He went on to be Assisting Bishop in where he was rector at St. Matthews's church in Delaware before he called to Detroit. That is where he died and I with others went to his funeral there in the diocese. Austin Cooper was a very good friend of his and who was the rector of St. Andrews, the oldest black parish in Cleveland. Austin Cooper Jr., preached the sermon. Quintin was a wonderful colleague and the three of us together, Quinton, and Orris walker and I just had a happy ministry together even though

Ja was his associate but I was on the Diocese Staff. In that parish I really exercised a lot of my sacramental ministering and preaching from time to time. So he would be one of those persons who was important to me as was, Ja Walker. We became fast friends there. I was the deployment officer at that time in the Diocese of Michigan. It was the policy that associates would not succeed to be rectors of parishes. So when people knew he was going to leave and go to Chicago, there was a special meeting of the parish. I was present at it. He began to talk about the future, about the future of St. Matthews St. Josephs. And in the middle of his talk he said “we are so fortunate to have with us today the deployment officer of the diocese. Arthur would you come up and speak to us and talk especially about if there was a possibility that Orris Walker could be called as rector.”

Put you on the spot like that.

That is right, so I talked about the peculiarities and the uniqueness of black congregations and the issue of continuity. So basically I said yes, it was possible to do that and then went back and told the Bishop I had done that. But the reality was that as one looked around the church, there were not many people, although Ja was fairly young in the ministry, there were not many people more competent than he was. This proved to be true. So when I finished speaking Quinton thanked me so much and said perhaps I wanted to leave now and the congregation will discuss this.

MZ000108

Ja was the preacher at my own consecration. It was not often at that time that preachers at consecrations were not Bishops. But, I decided the person whom I felt had something to say who was my friend would be the person I wanted. He preached a very fine sermon and Quintin was one of my co-consecrators at that service at Trinity Cathedral in Cleveland. I had been asked by him and by the planners of that event to come and be one of the speakers at his retirement event. I am the godfather to his daughter and he was one of the officiants at my marriage in 1985. We have talked to each other often on the phone and share a lot personally and what was going on in our ministries. So, there is no doubt about the fact that Ja Walker was and is a good friend. He is thinking about retirement and moving to Detroit. He and Norma have not made that final decision but it is very likely, that is what he said. So it would be good to have him closer. Detroit is only two and a half hours up the road, across northern Ohio and up into Michigan so we would get to see each other more often I expect.

Ah good.

In Seminary a person who was important to me was my roommate Jack Tench. Who is now retired in the diocese of Olympia. We have maintained a strong friendship and ties over the years. I mentioned Josephine Kelsey and her role. Bishop John Burt, who died yesterday at 91, and in his funeral directions he requested that I preach the Homily. So next week I will be going up to northern Michigan to do that. He was a strong advocate for women’s ordination and matters of racial justice and always was a strong voice in those conversations both in the Diocese of Northern Ohio and in the wider church. And when the steel industry began to fail in Ohio and the bottom of the economy dropped away, he made strong efforts in responding to this. Then he was succeeded by Jim Moodey who was the person who called for the election of a Bishop Suffragan and then he was succeeded by Clark Grew and Clark had the ability I think to lead very effectively and share leadership. Ohio never had a Bishop Suffragan but I really felt that the Bishop Grew shared the ministry with me.

MZ000109

Lynette and I became very good friends with them, Jim and his wife and the same with Clark Goodman and Wendy. So I would put them on that list of important people. Of course it goes without saying everything that I said yesterday about Lynette certainly holds true. Lots of people end up saying “and last but not least is my spouse”. Well I would say, “first and foremost but I am not going to say again all the things that I said yesterday about her.”

No you were very clear yesterday.

So those are some of the people I think about. I know that when I go away from here today that I will think of other people.

You know where we are.

I certainly would want to mention the people I became in contact with as I begin to move into the ministry of the national church. Therefore I came to know more personally and professionally Presiding Bishop Browning. Who of course was the person in 1992, nominated me for Vice President of the House. And then when he retired he was replaced by Frank Griswold. He and I still have a special friendship. And it was he that invited me to come to his staff after I retired. I appreciate the fact that he had confidence that I could handle a department which had just fallen apart.

And indeed you did.

Diane Porter who was on Edmin Browning’s Staff in a major role in the administration. I worked closely with her when I was on the Executive Council and she continues to be a good colleague in ministry. So those are some of the people that I think about.

Thank you.

The foundation of who I am and my formation began in my family with my mother and father who were strong and present parents. My brother and I were really like twins growing up (there was about a year between us). Then my grandmothers lived until I was in my early 20's just before I went into the Navy. Then in my mid 20s my father’s mother died. They were very supportive to their grandsons. Their grandsons could do no wrong and they were doting, loving grandmothers. I have a memory of my mother’s father as well but he died when I was about seven. I have very fond memories of his love for my brother and me. So all of them (we had a small family, my father had no brothers or sisters and my mother had one uncle who) did not marry. So therefore I was one of those unusual persons who had no aunts and no cousins, no first cousins. My mother had cousins and so we grew up in a small family and with a lot of support when I was growing up, and this came from my father’s mother’s side of the family particularly.

MZ000110

Her name was Rosa. She was a teacher in Georgia and had a high value on education. That is why I always said in high school I wanted to go to college. And in fact in the yearbook under ambition, other people had specific things. Mine just said college and that is indeed what I did. And it was because of my parent’s value on education that we moved at the age of seven from Providence to East Providence. Primarily my father told me later that it is primarily because of the excellence of

the public schools system in East Providence. He was concerned about the schools that I would be moving into that would be not as high in caliber. So I heard a lot about getting an education when I was growing up so all that formation took place. I have to begin off by recalling very fond memories of my family. My brother and I grew up very close to each other. In our early years up until junior high school we were each other's closest playmates and we got in trouble together and played together. We stayed together until probably junior high school, then we began to have different friends but we continued to be close even today. He is living now in Daytona Beach Florida.

Final thoughts?

Well I guess my final thought would be to reflect on when I received that telephone call from you, followed by the letter which suggested that I do this. Lynette knows that one of the things you asked me either yesterday or the day before on what had been some of the hardest aspects of your ministry; one thing that I did not mention which is related to what we have been doing, is that I really did not enjoy being interviewed by the press especially on camera. So, I have avoided it as much as possible. Sometimes it has been unavoidable. I really did not like that at all. So, when you told me first of all it was going to be audio, and I said well that would be alright. Then the next thing is that it was going to be on camera. So, I said to Lynette, "I need to think about that". So I was talking to somebody about it, that was professionally in the field just before I came here. He said the obvious thing which was just to say no to the whole project. You just have to forget the camera is there. Quite frankly that is what I did. I just have to say that I am glad that the interview has been done with you, Alana. It is what you made it. You have really enabled me to be comfortable, seem to ask the right questions, to let them run to a point where the next question needed to be asked. So I have been very grateful for these almost eight hours.

Oh no, we are probably pushing ten or twelve.

A personal thanks to you for this experience and to just spend an extended time here at Virginia Theological Seminary with Lynette, and meeting with the black students I had a chance to talk to.

MZ000111

I never had celebrated in the chapel and I enjoyed our hour with the Dean to talk about his vision of the Seminary. But mostly, to be honored by being the first person to come and be a part of the gathering of the oral history and to know that this work is going on here at the Virginia Theological Seminary in the Archives of The Black Church. And you can be sure that you have my best wishes and my prayers and support in any way that I can give you for this project. This enterprise will accomplish the vision which so many have for it. I was pleased, When I found out yesterday or the day before, that even with the economic or the budget cutback here at the seminary which was advertised all over the church, that you were able to maintain staff and that Christopher is going to maintain his fulltime work here.

So my final thoughts are just thank you. With so much appreciation for what you and the Division of Archives of the Black Episcopal Church are doing.

Thank you very much Bishop Williams, it has been delightful, it has been instructive and I have always known you to be a gracious man and to have you come to be the first. You're being the distinguished person, I am sure will be helpful to the entire project.

Thank you.