Speaker 1 (00:00:00):

And full of the truth. We ask also that as you care for us in this time, when we do these things that you will provide for us, the kind of insight and understanding that it's important to bring these purposes about, we pray that you would grant those 10, this project, all that is necessary so that they may be successful in the doing of it. And that from it all may come the glory and honor to your name that is desired. Now, bless us as a people. We pray for the purposes for which we chosen. Amen. And then why don't we start off? Would you mind telling me some, anything, some details about sharing your personal history, your early life early career? She'll be happy to. I was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1,928 in January. Uh, and, uh, my life, I think, uh, even though I didn't know, it got off to a rather fast start.

Speaker 1 (00:01:03):

Uh, my, uh, grandfather was pastor the new Mount Zion Baptist church in Detroit at Shane and Mac, uh, is where it was located. Uh, that church was bombed at that time, uh, in 1,929, uh, by people, uh, who did not want a black church, uh, in that particular neighborhood, that was at a time when transitions were being made in neighborhoods. And as in most communities, many of the times they're begun by churches and such was the case in his situation. The earliest church had been a store front church for a time, uh, located on Leland street, which was a, uh, more, more populated black area of the city of Detroit at the time. And of course, with, uh, the kind of racial climate being, what it was, it's understandable that there were those who were against the presence of a church, a black church, uh, in that community.

Speaker 1 (00:02:04):

However, I'm sure it was not expected that that edifice would be bombed, uh, as it was that a revelation of, of things of life. Uh, as I grew up remained with me and remains with me today about how extreme we can be as human beings, uh, as it relates to maintaining our status quo in whatever neighborhood it is. I don't believe that that has totally left us at this time. I attended the public schools in Detroit and, uh, uh, got, uh, what I feel is a pretty good education from those public schools. And I highly endorsed public schools because of the opportunity they give to us. And particularly those of us, uh, who may not have been fortunate enough to have the silver spool like others have, uh, I think, uh, that they do an excellent job. And that's why I'm so involved with public schools today because I feel the importance of supporting them.

Speaker 1 (00:03:08):

Um, I came to this part of Michigan, which I had not known before. Uh, I came here, uh, because I came to substitute for a friend JW Webb who was minister of the Mount Vernon Baptist church in Detroit. At that time, I was a young minister who would, uh, begun a pastorate in Inkster, Michigan, uh, and, uh, uh, I was in my second church at that time. And I came to fulfill, um, an appointment that he had made for a friend of his who couldn't come. The friend was from Memphis, Tennessee. And, um, not knowing all the things that would follow. I came in and preach for the Bethesda church, this congregation on that Sunday morning. And that began our relationship that was in 1,963. And of course, for the most part of my life, uh, I have, uh, been a part of the Muskegon community except for a brief hiatus of six years when I pastored in Albuquerque New Mexico.

Speaker 2 (00:04:16):

Okay. That's all very interesting. You, you, you mentioned the, uh, the Trish bombing in 1928 as a reaction to that was 29, 1929. Okay. The, uh, as a reaction to the changing of neighborhoods, the

transition in neighborhoods, and that would, um, would, would you say that was also that that transition was all part and parcel of that migration of black people that were moving from the South at that time in greater numbers into the North that was causing part of that?

Speaker 1 (00:04:44):

Absolutely. So with Detroit being the motor city, uh, beginning to be the motor city, uh, people moving from the South to the North found Detroit attractive. My grandfather, uh, had been in Chicago Heights. Of course he was a Mississippian, uh, married in Arkansas woman and they moved, uh, uh, to, uh, Michigan, but they had a stop in Omaha, Nebraska, where my mother was born. Uh, and, uh, um, when they came to Michigan, uh, they came at a time when in Detroit, uh, segregation, uh, was a part of life, even though it was not South, uh, maybe there was no, uh, nothing written on the walls, but there was certainly the attitude of people that nonacceptance of, of, uh, persons of color.

Speaker 2 (00:05:37):

So from your recollection in what you heard growing up, did the people consider the segregation that they experienced in Detroit and in the North in general, to be as restrictive as it was in the Southwest or something different about it?

Speaker 1 (00:05:50):

There was something different about it. Uh, and, uh, segregation in the North and South, even though it existed had its own peculiarities. Uh, it wasn't the old Portland, uh, like, uh, it is, or was in the South. As a matter of fact, my grandparents used to tell me as I was, when I was a teenager, at least, you know, what's going on, uh, in the South, you don't really know what's going on in the North. So you have to be very careful about your associations and the kinds of places you visit and the things you say, because you're not absolutely sure what the responses are going to be.

Speaker 2 (00:06:29):

Right. It was generally understood that in the South, the violence toward blacks and other minorities was pretty much a, it could be very overt and obviously very lethal. Would you say that same, that kind of thing, that the same kind of risk factor existed in the North?

Speaker 1 (00:06:43):

I would think so. I would think it existed. And, uh, perhaps, uh, um, not in the volume, uh, that it was in the South because of the, kind of, of upholding of the unwritten laws of the South, uh, that, uh, we did not have in the North, but I think that those who had, uh, uh, the misfortune of becoming involved, uh, uh, with, uh, anything that had to do with police or other things where, uh, there was reprimand and disciplining and whatnot, that there was certainly a difference between the races.

Speaker 2 (00:07:18):

Did anybody ever tell you about it? Did you ever hear anything about how the segregation and other socially restrictive practices in the North were associated with the KU Klux Klan or organizations that had a similar objective of social control?

Speaker 1 (00:07:34):

Certainly we've. We heard those stories, uh, during our lives, uh, my life, uh, in Detroit, uh, by parents and others who brought stories, uh, and told those stories about things that had happened. Some of them, uh, I couldn't say that I could verify, but at least, uh, as I was growing up, they sounded true. And there were the things that did occur in papers, uh, every now and then Detroit papers about things happening, uh, around the country and happening, uh, in our own city. Uh, certainly the, the, uh, desire was to that they would not be. So, but then in your own personal, um, uh, meetings with people and their actions, you would find out that, uh, those feelings did exist and were quite possibly very true.

Speaker 2 (00:08:27):

Once you move to the Muskegon Lake shore area, what was the environment like? What did you find upon your arrival?

Speaker 1 (00:08:34):

A very conservative community, if I can use that terminology, uh, but certainly, uh, a community that as I, um, spent my years here, I found more and more to be racist, uh, depending upon what, uh, the involvement you, uh, got into as it related to community, uh, in the sixties, uh, I had the fortune, uh, to be, um, selected, uh, to be a part of the housing commission for the city of Muskegon, uh, and in the sixties and seventies, I, uh, there was a great struggle to get, uh, better housing, uh, in the Muskegon area. Um, the, what we call Jackson Hill or [inaudible] neighborhood, uh, where you are on the fringe of it now across the street from us is the Marquette neighborhood. But the rest of it is what is called Jackson Hill and the federal neighborhood. Um, uh, this, uh, has been a depressed area of place, uh, where, uh, Rose as they will call them, uh, began to move into this area, did move into this area and a large, uh, um, uh, segment of the population lived in, in this kind of area.

Speaker 1 (00:09:52):

You know, the terminology you use, the ghetto, um, uh, the same situation happened in Muskegon Heights, where there was a concentration of, of blacks. We weren't called blacks then, but colored people and, uh, um, uh, in these areas, uh, people wanted you to stay. And when housing came along and there was, uh, the renewal and redevelopment program that the city had adopted for the city of Muskegon, which included trouble, they wanted to buy up housing in the area and move blacks out and move others in. Uh, it didn't quite happened as was expected, but it was a period in which, uh, uh, we had the opportunity to push that we would not, uh, reconstruct ghettos, but that there would be the opportunity for people to live anywhere that they wanted to even in public housing. And so therefore, uh, we made the effort and we were successful with it, uh, to get these public housing units, redo these developments built in all of the areas that we possibly could, whether they were white or black, this created some concern in our community, but I'm happy today that when you go through Muskegon, you can see the effects of, of that struggle.

Speaker 1 (00:11:14):

And, uh, uh, I think it has meant so much to make this a better place for people to live.

Speaker 2 (00:11:20):

You mentioned that this, that your involvement with the housing commission started in the sixties, in the seventies, and exactly what it would have been the mid or late sixties

Speaker 1 (00:11:29):

Even been the late sixties. Um, this was, uh, during the, during the height of the civil rights struggle, uh, it was, uh, um, a time when, uh, tempers flared quickly. It was the time of, uh, the riots. Uh, it was a time when there were, uh, many, uh, uh, confrontations in the Muskegon area, uh, having to do with law enforcement and other things. Um, so, um, that period in the late sixties, uh, which was a time that I was very much involved in that aspect of the city's, uh, life, uh, was, uh, a pretty turbulent time, uh, in terms of attitudes, racially,

Speaker 2 (00:12:17):

Um, when you say involvement of different confrontations, even with, uh, police units and so forth, right with those confrontations have included, um, I guess you're talking about between of course, generally citizens, but what about organizations like the Klan or people using symbols associated with that organization as an intimidation? Was that all part of the general environment as well?

Speaker 1 (00:12:41):

I would suspect that many of the people who became involved in those things were influenced by the Klan. I have, uh, no living proof that it was the Klan, but certainly the actions that took place represented Klan attitudes. Um, and of course, uh, I guess among, uh, blacks, there's the term redneck, uh, referring to those who were Southern in their attitudes. And, uh, many times in conversations that took place with people who were involved with NACP and other, uh, action organizations, uh, would remind the people who were at those meetings and rallies, uh, that in our own area that we had, um, people who were rednecks, who had the attitude of racism, uh, and who were finding ways, if you would, uh, to advance those attitudes that were there

Speaker 2 (00:13:40):

Prior to all the changes that you, which, you know, you correctly can celebrate today. Um, you mentioned housing specifically, but what about other areas like job opportunities and access to public accommodations, uh, plays or recreation or restaurants?

Speaker 1 (00:13:55):

Very difficult. As a matter of fact, on Western Avenue of back in the early sixties, I can remember struggles. We had just to get blacks, a job working in a place like the 10 cent store. Uh Kresge's uh, um, her purse, hardly herbal shine was, uh, places of that nature. These had all white employees and the NACP, uh, in, uh, and also the ADC, uh, AMA MADC, which was a group of whites, um, that had, uh, changed, uh, the name of the chamber of commerce of, uh, James cipher was the person who was leading that, so that some of the focus of that organization might be to understand the need to change, uh, uh, the attitudes where red lining was concerned, uh, where, uh, uh, a change in the, in the idea of how, uh, education is approached in the, in, in the community and things of that nature that would change the complexion and make it possible for us to be a growing community economically. Uh, this was the, the, the center and focus at that time.

Speaker 2 (00:15:14):

Would you define the term red lining?

Speaker 1 (00:15:17):

That is when a black face goes into a bank for a loan and the banks have already determined the perimeter for the area that blacks will live in. And at that point, then credit is no good. They cannot get

the loan that they would like to have in order to purchase a house, um, that, uh, um, has disappeared in large part. Uh, but we still feel the effects of difficulties where minorities, uh, seek loans and cannot get them out of this generally, uh, because there is still the attitude that in certain neighborhoods, they will not provide a loan for housing.

Speaker 2 (00:15:59):

It's also been said that that same practice was occurred in the insurance industry as well.

Speaker 1 (00:16:04):

I would, I would think so. I think they would go hand in hand.

Speaker 2 (00:16:08):

Okay. Okay. So there were, there were difficulties in seeking jobs and housing and in public accommodation. Um, and this was during the sixties. What do you think it was that draw that, that drew black people to Muskegon? Or did you already have a resident population here? Do people arrive here looking for better opportunities and get slapped in the face with a different reality?

Speaker 1 (00:16:31):

I'm told that during the war, uh, that, uh, blacks were actually sought and brought, uh, to the Muskegon area, uh, to work in the foundries here. Uh, this was a hair heavy, durable goods industry area. And so blacks were actually brought from the South and, uh, uh, given a job here and the stories that I have heard, uh, relative to, uh, what the neighborhoods were all about is that, uh, barracks and whatnot in the Muskegon Heights area were used for housing for those persons who came men came without their families. And, uh, uh, some members of my own church have told me about the fact that those who worked in the, in the foundries, uh, had rooms, but they had two or three people in a room. And the way those rooms were rented, uh, one person worked in the day, one person worked afternoons and another person worked late at night midnight. And so one person would use the bedroom, uh, during, uh, uh, the night while another person was working. Uh, they did not have, uh, the kind of accommodations that you would expect, uh, an individual to have, who was working, earning a living and able to take care of themselves. There was not available housing for those persons. That's the story that I I'm told. And I believe

Speaker 2 (00:18:01):

That pretty much, uh, that, that pretty much parallels though, a lot of what happened with wartime industries that, uh, in that whole environment, uh, economically there are a lot of opportunities, but also those kinds of issues socially. Absolutely. Okay. Um, was the impact of the civil rights movement on the city of Muskegon? We kinda, we kinda touched upon that, but specifically major, major events, like, uh, the 1963 speech where dr. King talked about, you know, he, he, he stated over and over again, that I have a dream and the passages of 64 voting, I mean, a 64 civil rights act, the 65 voting rights act. Did the time respond to that at all? Or was it slow to change?

Speaker 1 (00:18:40):

Oh, yes. And those of us, Mike was a, was a personal friend of mine. And those of us who were in areas like this, who, uh, uh, talked about him much and, and even tried to get him to come here, this was a small area. So there wasn't the attraction for a smaller area like this. We did have, uh, his father here, uh, during that, uh, that time. Uh, but it affected us greatly. There were people here who, whose hopes

were increased and live in the, because there was the expectation, uh, that the movement that was taking place would ultimately a new, uh, for the benefit of everybody. And, um, though it is much slower, uh, than, uh, we would have wanted. We still feel that, uh, uh, that which was initiated by Rosa parks and by Martin Luther King, uh, and, uh, the many who were in the South at that time who were willing to take the hits for what is taking place. We, we, we, we believe that that has been, um, a very wonderful thing, uh, for America as a whole, not only for our people, because we are to a degree, a change nation of people, uh, because of the civil rights struggle.

Speaker 2 (00:20:03):

Right, right. Agreed. And just as a matter of, uh, of opinion, many people, sometimes, um, people, we naturally focus upon what was going on in the South and Rosa parks in the Montgomery bus boycott. And of course everything was going on in Birmingham. And of course all the emphasis is necessary, but would you say that what, what happened in Thailand, Muskegon, what's going on in Detroit, that might be still the, the, the undertold story of the civil rights movement and the whole story of race conflict in America or racial tension in America?

Speaker 1 (00:20:36):

I would think so. I think Muskegon is a microcosm of, of any city, uh, in America, uh, where there has, and is still conflict. Uh, we still have racial conflict and lend in a, in a different, uh, kind of setting, uh, than it was, uh, 20, 30 years ago. There are people who still do not accept, uh, minority. Um, they still have a ways of excluding, um, we've, we've talked about the glass ceilings, uh, and those things, these things indeed do exist.

Speaker 2 (00:21:16):

Okay. Yes. Yes. When you say that they have a, when you say racial conflict, there are many people who would challenge the use of the term conflict. Is it in your mind a conflict or was it just a, just a former friction?

Speaker 1 (00:21:30):

I think it's, I think it's a conflict just as we speak religiously of the conflict between good and evil. I think it's a conflict. I think we struggle against each other. And I, and, and, um, uh, I guess I would, uh, pose a, um, the, what that struggle is all about, uh, in the fact that we have our spirits involved and we have our strategies involved while we may not have guns and knives and those things that we raise up, uh, for the battle, we are still intellectually, very much involved in the struggle.

Speaker 2 (00:22:09):

Okay. What was the reaction of people and particularly in the African American community to the 1968 assassination of dr. Martin Luther King jr.

Speaker 1 (00:22:20):

Uh, it was a devastating time, a very devastating time. A number of us from here went down to, uh, Atlanta for, for the funeral. It was, uh, a time of, of leptin. And, uh, um, I think at that time, while it was, uh, devastating to us as a people, it was also devastating, uh, to whites and, and, uh, others as well. I think that that particular, uh, incident caused us to see how much there had to be and needed to be leadership, uh, that would, uh, bring us, uh, from the doldrums of hatred and, and, and, and, and those things that make life difficult. And the question was, who's going to take the place of, of this dynamic

person, um, who was so articulate and, and commanding, um, that he could stir the emotion, uh, uh, of not only blacks in the South and in the North, uh, but he could, uh, uh, cause Washington to pay attention to what was going.

Speaker 2 (00:23:34):

Do you think that in the, in the wake of his death a year, two, three years later, that the momentum that he had achieved with the civil rights movement, did it continue to surge forward or did it begin to slow down in your,

Speaker 1 (00:23:46):

I think for a time there was a surge, but then, uh, I believe that it began to slow down. Uh, I think that it takes a particular kind of, of leader, uh, to keep a level of enthusiasm and zeal, uh, with large numbers of people in order to keep moving. Now we have, we certainly have people who have stepped into the fray and have taken leadership in California and New York and, and Pennsylvania in, in, in Georgia. We have people who have stepped in and, and done marvelous things in terms of leadership, but there has to be a central dynamic. Uh, uh, when you talk about the big struggle, someone who is able to claim the attention of the troops and, and, uh, uh, caused them to, to catch on fire, uh, for whatever the cause is at that time, and be willing to, to go, uh, with abandoned, uh, to, to meet the fray in order to get there

Speaker 2 (00:24:50):

Victory. Yes, yes. With the advent of the 1970s, there was the beginnings of what we now call affirmative action, which is one of the outgrowths of the civil rights movement. Where, how, how did those programs initially manifest themselves in this area as, from, from what you can recollect? And then do you have any kind of idea of how people reacted and what eventually became the backlash against them and why?

Speaker 1 (00:25:17):

Well, uh, people in, in positions of hiring did not necessarily choose to recognize, uh, affirmative action. Um, the, the NACP was very, uh, uh, forward in the struggle to get people to accept what affirmative action was really all about. Uh, uh, testing that took place was sometimes, uh, not what it should have been because people were trying to keep people out of jobs. So, uh, uh, the civil rights commission right here in Muskegon, uh, for firemen and policemen and those jobs, uh, that, uh, are civil service jobs, uh, it was difficult to move minorities in when you considered, uh, the weight of an interview where the, the, the verbal interview would, would be sufficient to override some of the, uh, things that were weaker in the written test and whatnot, all of these became, uh, of issue. And they all had racial overtones and had something to do with the acceptance of affirmative action.

Speaker 2 (00:26:28):

Would you say in your opinion then that the resistance to affirmative action or any, any other kind of leveling sort of program to make things more, if you will equal or opportunities in more equal society? Was that the, would you say that the root cause still was, was race based? Yes. Okay. And

Speaker 1 (00:26:44):

Still is today, when, when, when you talk about putting everybody on an even plane, um, our selfishness still comes out.

Speaker 2 ([00:26:54](#)):

Is the town still divided today, or is there any, is there any kind of, you say the things have improved, but is there, is there still a sense of division in the community?

Speaker 1 ([00:27:04](#)):

I would think there is some division in the community. Um, I think we, we, we, we couch our conversations with each other in a little different way than we used to. Uh, we're not so open with our inner feelings. And so therefore we kind of tiptoe around some things and we don't have the explosion, uh, that we once had.

Speaker 2 ([00:27:30](#)):

There's a, there's a movement today and people use for, for multiculturalism and people use terms like, or phrases, like, uh, words like, uh, tolerance. And do you think that's the, do you think that should be the objective where we simply just strive to tolerate each other or should more be done?

Speaker 1 ([00:27:48](#)):

Oh, I had some communication from DS down in Georgia, just recently about being one of the honor rolls for the people of tolerance, where you get your name, put on the wall, if you give $50 or whatever it is. Uh, and, and I don't think tolerance is the answer necessarily, uh, promoted in that way. Uh, I think that we have to go to the core of what is, what is our need, and that is that we have to accept people, um, all that they are and recognize that, um, there are some optimums, uh, as it relates to what humans ought to be the nobility of the person. And I think those are the things that we need to be concerned with rather than talking about tolerance, because there's always going to be a right and wrong. And, uh, uh, to talk about being tolerant with the wrong is what this promotes in my own mind. Then that's not acceptable to me.

Speaker 2 ([00:28:51](#)):

There's a lot of, uh, when it maybe not allowed, but every now and then we hear report of some incident either in, in some community along the Lake shore. And there may be some type of a statement that says it's related to KU Klux, Klan activity, difficult to pin down, but the mere fact that someone may burn across a traditional symbol of, uh, of Klan intimidation. What does that say to you about how far things have progressed since let's say 1968 relative to the environment?

Speaker 1 ([00:29:28](#)):

Well, I don't think that we're as open with it in, in the days now. I still think that that the influence of it is still present. Um, how, how it's promoted. I'm not sure because I don't have any personal contact with people of the Klu Klux that at least that I know of, uh, I may have contact every day and not know it and that, and that has to do with, with, with the way that we do things now, uh, uh, there was a time I can remember a time. I visited Jacksonville, Florida, and I stayed in a hotel there. Uh, and I was attending the national Baptist convention. That was, uh, that was back in the early, very early sixties. And the Klu Klux man Klan gathered outside of the hotel that we were in. They didn't have pistols, but they threw down firecrackers and, and, uh, they disturbed all of us who were in the hotel with fear because we didn't, we didn't know what was there. We were from the North. And we were living in, in, in this hotel. And, and of course, uh, we had not lived in hotels that much it at that early stage of, of, of the movement and things going on. So when we were quite frightened and, uh, I think the influence of the Klan is still very,

very, very much a part of, of, of, of the philosophy of, of non, uh, of, of people, uh, against nonwhites today

Speaker 2 (00:30:55):

When people were upset with things concerning, um, progress in Muskegon. And they got the sense that maybe black people were getting little bit too far ahead, too quickly. How did they've wasted this pleasure? What did members of your own congregation say about things that they were encountering?

Speaker 1 (00:31:13):

Well, I believe, uh, they expressed that it became more difficult in the workplace. Uh, the associations that, uh, they had, uh, uh, with people who were white, who they worked with, they could tell when something was happening in the community, uh, when they did not agree with the progress that was being made, the job became, uh, tougher. Uh, there were, there were people of influence who would speak out and, uh, um, they would use terminology that, uh, indicated, uh, that they were, um, speaking, uh, denouncing really, uh, people, um, um, dr. Howell and persons who were outspoken as it related to NACP then, uh, uh, were really spoken out against, uh, uh, by, uh, uh, the other race, uh, that these were people that were not good for, for black people. Uh, these were people who were hurting the cause. It's interesting how, when progress was made, that the black person who was involved in leadership in some way was always hurting the cause because they spoke so openly, uh, where those things were concerned.

Speaker 1 (00:32:33):

We had the same thing to happen, uh, as it related to police brutality, uh, uh, back in the sixties here, we had a young man who was a shot in the back who had been seen running from, uh, one of our neighborhood schools. Uh, and, uh, the great issue was excessive force at that time. Um, and, uh, all the city hall was jam packed, uh, with police as well from neighboring, uh, places around Muskegon who, who said nothing, but their very presence was intended to be intimidating, to let them know that they didn't care for what was taking place. Uh, as it related to standing up for the rights of this family and this boy that had been shot by this policeman,

Speaker 2 (00:33:26):

This is one incident, but would you say that during that time that, uh, among other issues police brutality was prevalent? Yeah.

Speaker 1 (00:33:35):

Uh, I think, uh, there were times that it didn't become a part of the paper, uh, but there were families who could tell stories about, uh, how they had been wrongly treated, uh, for simple things, uh, uh, by police in the community.

Speaker 2 (00:33:52):

I recall some of my own relatives talking, you know, uh, referring or campaigning the one time that Dick Gregory the activist comedian had referred to American justice as just us. And would you agree with his assessment?

Speaker 1 (00:34:06):

I sure would. I sure would. Well, you know, we, we still have that problem for instance, when you consider, and this is a pet peeve of mine, when you consider how much we spend, um, to keep our prisons going. And of course that's major in Michigan now, uh, uh, our economy depends a great deal on, on our, our prison system. Uh, we spend 40 some thousand dollars to keep one individual in prison and then consider how many of those people who were in prisons have black and then go back and research and see for what reasons they are there. And generally, uh, they're there because of drugs or something like that. Um, it's obvious then, uh, that we don't have equality as we should, nor is there a real effort, uh, to make our society better. Um, with, uh, our young black men, uh, the other ones who are loading up the prisons, they are the ones who don't have the jobs. They're the ones, uh, who are minus the kind of education that they have. They are the ones who were minus the inspiration for that education. They're the ones who ended up with no hope. And who ultimately are those who, uh, I would think sometimes depend upon that being as a place to live, because there is no place in the society, uh, that open to them

Speaker 2 (00:35:34):

From, from the peer we're talking about, do you recall members, prominent members of the white community who stood side by side with organizations like the NAACP or maybe the black church and spoke out along with the, those organizations for what was going on and at that time relative to social injustice, and if so, did they suffer any reprisals?

Speaker 1 (00:36:01):

Yeah, so we've had, uh, some, uh, pastors of note, uh, in the Muskegon area, white pastors, uh, who stood up, uh, in, in the fray. Um, I can't talk to you about the reprisals that they had in their own particular congregations or in their own community. I was not privy to that. Uh, I did talk with some who would express some difficulty and at times, uh, after one has spoken out a game, something, uh, you could tell the change in them after a week or two or a month, because they were not, uh, as ready to speak out again. And so you knew something had happened. Someone had called him on the carpet or something was taking place that made them reticent about being as open as they might have been. Uh, these were things that took place in Muskegon.

Speaker 2 (00:36:59):

How much, how much participation between the black and white community was there and making change, or was it primarily a situation where black people were standing alone?

Speaker 1 (00:37:10):

No, no. There were some whites involved, uh, in the effort. Uh, we had, uh, we had, uh, times in Muskegon. Well, um, the writer of like, uh, like me, I believe it was, I think his name was white. Uh, he came and spoke for a brotherhood event that took place, uh, at, uh, uh, at the arena here many years ago. And, um, uh, his presence, I, I think, uh, brought a real, a renewed sensitivity to people in the community of what it meant to be a black person in the society at that time.

Speaker 2 (00:37:49):

Okay. Second, relative to the fact relative to there being outward signs, uh people's um, displeasure with things that are going on in the community or just every now, and they want it to want it to make their presence felt. Do you recall seeing anything that, uh, show definitely how people felt about changes going on in the community visible signs? Yeah.

Speaker 1 (00:38:14):

Uh, during the early days when a scattered housing was being discussed and pushed and opened up to some degree, uh, in, in blue Lake, uh, there were some people who moved into what was, uh, a white area, uh, and on the face of, of that house was printed n****r, uh, go away and, uh, disappeared. Uh, I believe I'm not sure that it was a Chronicle one, but in one of the papers at that time, with the picture on the wall of the house, showing that this had been done, um, this I believe was, uh, wasn't influenced, uh, of the Klan. Again, I would hasten to say, I did not talk to a Klan member who said, this is what we did, but it was obvious that this was the kind of thing that the Klan exposed and pushed people to do. Not only did that happen, but there, there were crosses that were painted. And I understand one that was burned in a neighborhood at that time, uh, where people sought, uh, uh, and did get some housing, but where it was understood, they would not want it there. And these were the means by which people let them know that they were not welcomed in that particular neighborhood.

Speaker 2 (00:39:35):

So even though you yourself never actually encountered a Klansman or had any direct contact with somebody who had been face to face with such an influence, there was, there was no doubt that, that the mindset that influenced the spirit of what the Klan was about would manifest itself on occasion.

Speaker 1 (00:39:53):

That's true. I think seeing it, the deduction was easy in terms of who would be pushing this kind of thing. I don't think it was, uh, uh, teenage pranks or, or things like that that sometimes people would want to relegate that kind of thing, too. I think it was adult action and adult action with a purpose. And that was, uh, to destroy, uh, any efforts that were taking place to integrate neighborhoods.

Speaker 2 (00:40:23):

When you say an adult action with a purpose that was informed, given that given the choice of words and the symbols they use,

Speaker 1 (00:40:30):

Given the choice of words, I would say informed yes,

Speaker 2 (00:40:33):

Yes, yes. Okay. The Detroit race riots of the 1940s, is there any Klan involvement? What can you say about that?

Speaker 1 (00:40:42):

Well, um, from what I heard and understood, uh, living, uh, on the East side of Detroit, not too far from what was called black bottom, uh, attending a school, uh, uh, near, uh, Verna highway and the area where, uh, poor whites were moving also from the South, um, and living where there was a concentration of blocks over at Mack and Shane st. Auburn and Dubois, those areas over there, where there were concentration, uh, of us, I would have to say that it was a struggle of territory, a struggle of deciding that this is mine, and we're better than you. And nobody's going to take this away. There were times that I heard that people were there to come over on the other side of Woodward Avenue. And if you read any literature about that time, you would know that Woodward Avenue first, second street.

And those were the streets where the division was made, where, uh, poor white people live right there on the edge of town.

Speaker 1 (00:41:51):

And, and blacks lived on Hastings and ride Pell and Russell street and all through that. So the concentration of, of the conflict was with people who lived in those particular areas, who were poor people, uh, Jewish people own the stores on Hastings street and whatnot, and hired, uh, blacks. And it was obviously, uh, all of us were in what was considered a poor neighborhood. Um, I think that all of that is, is certainly an indication of the spillover of, of, uh, why the neighborhood that I lived in at that time, uh, was a place of conflict early on. I mentioned, uh, the, uh, the bombing of my grandfather's church, um, as far as the opinions were, it was thought that Polish people, uh, were actually the, uh, the means of the perpetration of, of that. I don't recall ever hearing any story where anyone was actually charged or convicted, uh, of what had taken place, uh, where the church was bombing was concerned. But through the years there was a conversation about that. And even until the day, uh, uh, my grandfather died, uh, there were people who would refer, uh, to that particular time in the history of that congregation, uh, there on Mack and shape.

Speaker 2 (00:43:18):

Well, if you didn't hear anything about anybody being charged or convicted, does that mean then that whoever bombed the church got away with it?

Speaker 1 (00:43:25):

I know you gotta always scot-free

Speaker 2 (00:43:28):

Any rumors about Klan activity or a clamp perpetration in that one

Speaker 1 (00:43:32):

I'm, I'm, I'm certain that there were, uh, at that time, uh, in, uh, uh, um, the transition that was taking care of placing neighbors, I'm sure that in the North, they were, when they were pockets where Klans, uh, Klansmen, uh, were active. Uh, I can't, I was too young to really know, and I can only assess that and the depth that from stories that I've heard with people, uh, who lived back there and who lived in the neighborhood

Speaker 2 (00:44:05):

Regarding the riots of the 1940s in Detroit, um, you mentioned that the, you have the poor whites who are moving to the area from the South to the North, just like a lot of black people were at that time. And the black people in that community were also poor. So there's a lot of people struggling for a few resources, and then there's the reason element as well. Anything, any, any, any indication there as to whether or not there's any Klan activity that might have instigated, what was already a somewhat tense situation? Well,

Speaker 1 (00:44:34):

And as you say, it somewhat tends to the situation, just the combination of things that you've mentioned says that this was a volatile area, uh, that any little thing could cause somebody to blow off.

And certainly when you look at economics and somebody always wants to be better than somebody else, if there is this sense that I'm white and you're black, and because I'm white, you are less than I am. And it seems that you are moving along on the turf that I believe is my turf other then certainly there's going to be some, uh, some opportunity for conflict.

Speaker 2 ([00:45:09](#)):

So Klan activity, or not, at least the attitudes were deeply embedded to lead to the kind of conflict that did occur.

Speaker 1 ([00:45:16](#)):

Oh, yes. Yeah. Okay. Yes. Yeah. Okay. Yeah, it was by and large joiners really never did much of anything. I was going to ask about that, but it wasn't. How would you respond to that? I would say it's insane to even think that kind of thing myself, uh,

Speaker 2 ([00:45:55](#)):

The, um, for some people in the North, given that we, I think it's pretty, it's been well publicized that the Klan was definitely an agent or an advocate of violence against minorities in the South, whether it be ethnic, racial, religious, et cetera, in the North. And some, in some areas, people saw the Klan is a social organization, something of a fraternal order where almost performing a social function for bringing people together. So even though they may not have had that direct association with outbursts outright or over violence, what's your response to people who would see them as being something of a, even though they're part of the same general organization, a KU Klux Klan, but they, but they assert that there were nothing more than just a social organization, a club in the community.

Speaker 1 ([00:46:47](#)):

I would think that they don't understand the strategy of making friends for purpose. And I think that, uh, when we look at that situation, when it seems like a social club, we have to recognize that when people infiltrate, they infiltrate for a purpose. And sometimes that purpose is not made known immediately, but later on when we have become friends and we have found a bond together, then that increases for the purpose that we originally sought. Tell us something about, uh, Elijah Muhammad. Well, Elijah Muhammad was my uncle. Uh, he was, uh, my dad, uh, was, uh, one of the pools, um, from Georgia and, uh, they moved to Michigan and to Chicago. Um, Elijah, uh, as were other blacks were disturbed about economics disturbed about what they found in the North in Detroit. And, and, uh, certainly, uh, the opportunity, uh, uh, uh, to mold a, a religious movement because they had become disenchanted with being Baptist. Uh, uh, his father was a Baptist, uh, uh, minister. Uh, he was a Baptist minister who would become disenchanted, and then they moved off into something that, uh, made them feel that there was a better way that there was indeed a messenger that had a different, uh, uh, message for, uh, people who were black, religious, who happened to be Baptist in that family.

Speaker 2 ([00:48:36](#)):

Was he seeking something that, uh, sought to not only make a difference, but be more active and working for social justice for black people?

Speaker 1 ([00:48:46](#)):

Oh, I feel sure that his purpose of social justice, uh, for black people, uh, to give us an identity that we had worth, uh, uh, that, uh, that worth that we have had to do with a real sense of what family is all all

about and, and what the, the, the value of, of, of a design acknowledge, uh, divine acknowledgement is all about and how we are empowered by that divine power, um, that it, uh, that power in his own mind, I believe was that it does not do for us. So what he would see or did see as the white man's religion, that, that we had some standing and an opportunity. And he believed that that the best indication of our standing and our opportunity was for us to come together,

Speaker 2 (00:49:46):

Believing that there were power in numbers,

Speaker 1 (00:49:49):

Believing that there were power in numbers that was power in numbers are not, not only the sense of being together, but the opportunity for economic power,

Speaker 2 (00:49:59):

Economic power, empowering numbers, social power as well. Right. Was it, was it, uh, ever his intent as far as you aware to be like to become a political force?

Speaker 1 (00:50:08):

I never had that impression as a boy. Um, you know, um, when you're in a strict Baptist family, my mother married Charlie Charles, my father, uh, who was the brother of Elijah. And when the movement began to, uh, really gain momentum, uh, with my grandfather, my mother and my mother's father being a Baptist preacher in Detroit, then it's understandable that they had some differences in, in religious thought. And so therefore we as children, uh, were not allowed to be exposed to the struggle between, uh, the families as it related to what their beliefs were as much. So we were, we were kind of sheltered in those early years. Uh, but as I grew older and became a minister myself, uh, I was sought by members of my father's family, uh, to become a Moslem. And my first church I pastored was in Inkster, Michigan, which was the second Baptist church. Uh, and, and John, um, uh, one of the brothers used to come regularly to my church, uh, in Inkster, Michigan, uh, to try to influence me to come and become a part of the movement.

Speaker 2 (00:51:35):

Can you describe some of the personal qualities of Elijah Muhammad, as you might recall them?

Speaker 1 (00:51:43):

Uh, as I can recall that far black, uh, a lot of discipline, um, um, a, um, a determination, uh, that, uh, the road that he was taking was right. I think that came through in everything that I did.

Speaker 2 (00:52:02):

Do you think that he might've been like that it's just part of his personality, or could, could those features of his personality have been influenced by the social conditions that he confronted?

Speaker 1 (00:52:13):

Oh, I think very, definitely that the social conditions, uh, influenced as it does any of us, uh, when we see that there is need for us to know what our purpose is, and to determine ways by which we can best promote that, which we believe to be right.

Speaker 2 (00:52:31):

How did the movement as a game momentum affect black people? What did it do? And then what was the reaction of the, uh, of the white community?

Speaker 1 (00:52:40):

Well, there were stories of violence in the neighborhood where I lived in the Polish area where I lived Dubois st all around it there. Uh, I remember, uh, uh, very distinctly that there was a funeral home there, and many stories came out of the funeral home that had to do with the Moslem movement. And, uh, my uncle John even tells me today, he's 90 some years old, and I spoke with him. It's been three or four, maybe five months ago. And he still in his reflections, uh, talks about the time that whites and blacks got in, in vicious fights in the neighborhood and in Detroit, in round Dubois and st. Auburn and Orland's and those areas, and, uh, these, these, uh, conflicts were about race were about the Moslem position. Uh we're about the fact that blacks had, uh, an identity that others had to recognize. And some of the times they would boast about the fact how they, when they met on the street and there was a conflict how they took pride in whipping the white boy. Okay.

Speaker 2 (00:53:59):

Well, those, those conflicts, you mentioned that was between the Muslims and the Polish community, but were there organizations on the, from the, from the white side of the community, like me of the Klan, again, just looking for the possibility, that kind of involvement, any recollections there, any, any kind of stories you might have heard?

Speaker 1 (00:54:20):

I've, I've heard, uh, perhaps some stories that don't come to me real quickly. Um, we lived, uh, uh, in the parsonage for awhile, uh, and that, uh, was, uh, the other, the opposite corner from, uh, a Polish fellow who owned the grocery store, who ultimately, uh, uh, some of his family went to present prison, uh, because of the things that were being done illegally, uh, in, uh, uh, that community. And my grandfather actually became, uh, the person to whom one of those was paroled to, and our families became our families became great friends because of what he was able to do, uh, and helping the release of this member of that family and being the person, uh, who was kind of a mentor to him after he was released from prison.

Speaker 2 (00:55:15):

So there were moments of, of cooperation. Yeah.

Speaker 1 (00:55:18):

Yes. Yes. I don't think anyone can look at what our situation is without finding some of those incidents where people go beyond what the general view is to do things that are really worthwhile.

Speaker 2 (00:55:32):

And what about, uh, the, the role or the influence of the Elijah Muhammad and, uh, in the Muslims alongside her as working, if you will just circumstantially parallel with, what's considered to be, if you will, the more, uh, formal identification of the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King jr. The Southern Christian leadership conference, where as, as, as we went down, those two tracks, would you say that they both were needed to accomplish what was accomplished or did one do more than the other?

Speaker 1 (00:56:01):

I think they both were needed. I think there's a, there's a, um, a discipline in the Muslim community that is like no other. And I think that was, uh, that was evidenced, uh, with Malcolm X and the group that pulled out with Malcolm X, it was evidenced in the bean pies. It was sold in Chicago. It has been evidenced in, in Muskegon Heights where, uh, those are the Moslem, uh, movement stand on the corners and sell papers. When you see those young men standing out there with white shirts and black ties on and a jacket on and a hat on there's the, it speaks of a kind of regiment of idea, a kind of regiment of respect that you don't find ordinarily.

Speaker 2 (00:56:56):

This is all an outgrowth of Elijah Muhammad's.

Speaker 1 (00:56:58):

Yes. Uh, but the times that I was with him, he was a loving, sincere person. Uh, uh, just as any other member of the family would be.

Speaker 2 (00:57:13):

Did the discussions when you were with him, um, did, did the discussions about the Muslim faith or his organization and what he was doing? Did anything like that ever come up

Speaker 1 (00:57:25):

Are our times together, I was much younger and he would greet us Salama locker and the family would sit down and, and we'd share together as a family, uh, the politics of, of, of religion, the, the, the, the kinds of things that had to do with the movement that he was engaged in were never great subjects in, in family coming together. As a matter of fact, it was almost as if we purposely did not talk about those things because of the separation.

Speaker 2 (00:57:58):

So you, you, you mentioned that your, um, your elders more or less shielded you from what was going on with that organization. It sounds like what you're saying then is that he also respected the fact that there may have been some differences between those two viewpoints.

Speaker 1 (00:58:12):

Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, definitely. Okay. Did he have a nickname for you? I didn't know it, Charles. Yeah. Yeah. I was named after my father and, uh, uh, my father died when I was very young, but he was much loved by them. And, uh, I was always Charles and, uh, to, uh, the one who re, who remains now, John Herbert, he always calls me Charles, as you, as you walk,

Speaker 2 (00:58:48):

You're older and you learn more and more about what your uncle was doing, what his purposes were, the, the drive and the energy and the focus that he had. Did you begin to see him in something more of an heroic light, someone to be emulated or at least someone to be admired?

Speaker 1 (00:59:04):

I think in reflection, yes. But I don't think at that time that, uh, that kind of consideration was really, uh, upfront in our minds. Uh, he was a relative, he was someone that we loved, even though, uh, we were not as close to him as we were other relatives. He was still our flesh and blood and, and we loved him. So we didn't, we didn't think about the heroics of these things at all.

Speaker 2 (00:59:32):

So when you're in your contact with him, he wasn't, he wasn't Elijah Muhammad, this large public thing, he was your uncle?

Speaker 1 (00:59:39):

No, no. Uh, those things were viewed, uh, uh, from looking at what others were saying and on the outside. Okay. Yeah. Did you resist the blandishments to join the movement? Obviously there must've been some attraction to join own.

Speaker 2 (00:59:57):

This is a famous pioneer,

Speaker 1 (01:00:00):

Well, uh, perhaps if my father had lived in might have been different, but my grandfather on my mother's father was also a Baptist minister and quite an influential minister in Detroit and with quite a large church. And, uh, um, my grandfather, uh, really became my father. Uh, I lived with him part of the time and he had much influence, uh, as it related to my religious thought. Um, and, uh, how I should look at the world in which I live and the purpose that I might have for it. Now, he never said, Charles, you need to be a preacher like I am, but it was obvious, uh, that his teaching and his desire to have me to respect God and, and an understanding of Jesus Christ, which is, is, is where the twist comes, uh, was always remember, uh, your Lord and savior. And, uh, uh, that was the influence because I was baptized in that church. Uh, my mother, uh, was his daughter and was a starch member of, of the church. And, and other persons on that side of the family were very starchy members of the Baptist denomination or faith. And so therefore I had that constant, uh, that constant influence

Speaker 2 (01:01:33):

You've mentioned, you've mentioned the discipline and the focus that your uncle had, and also that he imparted to his followers. How did your own faith though, as a Baptist sustain you and other people in your faith community and the struggles that given that, uh, everybody was more or less confronted with the say, black people were confronted with generally the same kind of social restrictions and constraints. How does your face sustain you relative to focus and discipline?

Speaker 1 (01:02:03):

The approach to the discipline was, was a little different. It wasn't a, um, a discipline that was forced necessarily. It was a discipline that you will call to and, and, and asked to accept a voluntary way. Not that you had to be this way to be a member of this particular organization, but a sense that you will develop into what you needed to be, uh, by, uh, having the relationships that you had in a particular congregation or, or community, um, uh, with, uh, the movement. Um, the idea that this must be in spite of everything else, uh, was, uh, more of an overt effort than it was in the Baptist church. Uh, you must do this and if you don't do this, then you might be disowned. That was not. So in, in, in the Baptist congregation, you make a mistake when you were forgiven for your mistake and you were accepted in

the group, but the faith proved to be a, uh, a large component of what you did in the pursuit of social justice. Oh, yes. Very definitely. Um, my, uh, my belief is that the greatest leader of social justice with Jesus Christ himself, uh, he raised, uh, he raised the level of womanhood.

Speaker 1 (01:03:40):

He raised very simply the value of the individual by, by, by, by the revelation of the grace of forgiveness. Uh, he provides for every man, uh, the opportunity of a sense of worth. And I think for me, at least, uh, that's complete that here is something that provides me with the opportunity of a sense of worth that in spite of all of my frailties, uh, that I can develop into being what I dreamed to be. Okay. You had talked about it spiritually in your life. What has the Klan stood for? What has it represented? What has it meant to you?

Speaker 1 (01:04:47):

I think the Klan in my life is I have been given opportunity to understand it has stood for evil, uh, in that, uh, there, uh, is, uh, a little expression of, of the value of a life outside of those who are a part of the Klan blacks, for instance, Jews and other people who they detested and do not feel on an equal basis. Um, I think that, that they represent evil in this world in that, uh, they encourage, um, uh, the kinds of thoughts about others, uh, that destroy the opportunity for society to come together. Uh, the fact that they, uh, uh, for instance, uh, uh, one of the evils, uh, uh, that I think that they helped to perpetrate, uh, is the fact, uh, uh, that, uh, interracial matter marriages are so terrible. Um, and if you went through Muskegon and other places, you will see a rise in inter interracial marriages. Um, I don't know how you can, um, proport that all of us are created equal, and yet when it comes to that level of, of bonding, that we're no longer equal that we have to be separate.

Speaker 2 (01:06:26):

Would you, would you attach that descriptor of the Klan being evil even to those sub units, if you will, of the Klan that had been described as just simple fraternal social clubs,

Speaker 1 (01:06:41):

Their ultimate purpose is evil. That's why I said, you know, we make friends for purposes. We go in, we make friends, and then when we bonded, then I close up on you. Have you become what I am?

Speaker 2 (01:07:02):

What kind of an overall influence that do you think they've been in society?

Speaker 1 (01:07:11):

I don't think that they have been overwhelming. I think that they have taken parts of things that are, that are in our society and magnified them and, and, uh, uh, made them work for them. But I think when, when you talk about good and evil, I think that there's some evil in all of us and, and, uh, uh, some of us choose rather, uh, to spend our lives, uh, trying to dissipate the evil and magnify the good, and then there are others who spend their lives, trying to magnify the evil and dissipate, the good,

Speaker 2 (01:07:53):

Okay. Okay.

Speaker 1 (01:07:57):

Uh, in my opinion, from what I know of them and what I've heard of them and what I've read of them, then they seem to be pushing for the eval.

Speaker 2 (01:08:09):

There is a, there's an author, a political scientist named Carol Swain, who has a study that indicates that a lot of the [inaudible] have been generally described as being the fringe radical racist groups, like the, like the Klan or the Nazis, the area nations, people like that, that in contemporary America and the America of 2002, they're there, they're taking off their robes, they're putting away their symbols and they're starting to repackage themselves in the form of, well, if you will, standard politicians, organizations like the national association for the advancement of white people, there's a growing nationalism that is taking that message and pushing it in an intellectual fashion. Do you see that as just a, is that another manifestation of Klan activity according to her thesis, or is that part and parcel of the same problem?

Speaker 1 (01:09:14):

I haven't read the book, so I am not privy to all of the positions that are taken. Um, but anything, um, that one uses, uh, to shroud cover what their real purpose is until they have gained enough power and influence. I think it's the same thing.

Speaker 2 (01:09:39):

It's interesting that you used the word shroud and cover because now they're, shrouding it with intellectual discussion, whereas before they shared it with sheets, right? Yeah. Okay.