

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Sheet and Tube Shutdown Project

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O. H. 165

Reverend Richard Speicher

Interviewed

by

Philip Bracy

on

March 31, 1981

RICHARD SPEICHER

Reverend Richard Speicher was born in Holsopple, Pennsylvania on May 19th, 1924. He attended Windben High School where he graduated in 1941. He went on to graduate Manchester College in 1949, receiving his B.A. degree and went to Bethany Theological Seminary where he graduated with a Masters of Divinity in 1952.

Reverend Speicher is married and has four children. He is employed by the Mahoning Valley Association of Churches since 1970. The role of that organization is to address issues confronting all sectors of the community since individual congregations could not. Reverend Speicher is presently with the Church of the Bretheren. He is known in church circles as a quiet man who gets people together and things done. He is a member of the Interfaith Home Maintenance Service, the United Way, and serves on several Advisory Boards among which is the one for E.D.T.A. Reverend Speicher's hobbies include hunting and fishing.

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INTERVIEWEE: Reverend Richard Speicher
INTERVIEWER: Philip Bracy
SUBJECT: Ecumenical Coalition
DATE: March 31, 1981

B: This is an interview with the Reverend Richard Speicher of the Mahoning Valley Association of Churches for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program in relationship to the Shutdown of the Youngstown Sheet and Tube, by Philip Bracy at the Mahoning Valley Association of Churches offices on Wick Avenue on Tuesday, March 31st, 1981 at 3:30 p.m.

S: I am Reverend Richard Speicher serving now as the Executive Director of the Mahoning Valley Association of Churches. My work in the ministry began early in my experience. Our church is an informal kind of congregational experience. I was simply called by the congregation to be a minister. They were placing that option before me.

I responded to the call and received a license as a first token of that career choice. Then, of course, upon graduation from high school and college went on to our seminary in the Church of the Brethern, located in Chicago, and was ordained, in fact, before graduation from seminary. The college was Manchester College in Indiana, graduating in 1949. The seminary, Bethany Theological Seminary in Chicago, graduating in 1952.

I served a pastorate in Indiana, in Kokomo, for eight years, then came to Youngstown in 1960 and served the Woodworth Church of the Brethern for ten years. At the end of that, in 1970, I became Protestant Chaplain at Youngstown State University and then eventually

Director of the Association of Churches,

B: Okay, what I'd like to ask you first of all is, if you could tell me how you found out about the shutdown of the Youngstown Sheet and Tube?

S: All right, that was a very vivid day for most of us. I was sitting at this very desk in this office on that day, September 19th, 1977. In the course of my after-noon contacts, I called Ron Garmay at Saint Elizabeth's Hospital. He and I have worked together on a number of goal-orienting projects. He had just gotten the news from another caller directly from the radio and was lamenting the fact that this would be a serious blow for the Valley. So, Ron shared with me that fact that Lykes had made the announcement that would eventually terminate 5,000 positions in the Valley.

B: Okay, starting from the events of September 19th, 1977 with the shutdown, could you kind of tell us how you were approached or you know, how you initially became involved in the Ecumenical Coalition?

S: I will, Phil. It did occur now almost four years ago and yet much of that remains vivid, although some of the details begin to get away from us. We, each of us among the clergy, and I dare say among any serious-minded person in the Valley, began groping right away for answers to a very critical economic problem, wondering what we could do.

The first tangible opportunity to do something grew out of a message from the Bishop's Office of the Diocese of Youngstown calling us to a breakfast. Now with the closing on Monday of September, I'm thinking that that first breakfast call was the next Monday. I'm not absolutely sure of that, but I think it was just one week later. This call and the convening of about twelve clergy at that breakfast, of course, came out of the original contact of Bishop Burt in Cleveland with Bishop Malone in Youngstown asking what could be done about the situation. The response was to get a representative group there together.

Now, included in that early group were, of course, the Bishop and Father Stanton from the diocese and myself as Director of the Association of Churches here. But a number of our leading Pastors, like Reverend Ed Wiesheimer of Central Christian Church, Reverend Morris W. Lee, the leading black pastor in the community, and

the Pastor of Third Baptist, the Reverend Eugene Bay at First Presbyterian, Charles Rawlings out of Bishop Burt's office in Cleveland, head of the Church and Society Division there, Reverend Robert Campbell, who is Assistant Pastor at First Presbyterian and Reverend John Wigle, who was then Pastor of Saint John's Episcopal Church. Three or four others who would have been logical ones to have been called to an early meeting like that.

As I remember, we held two such breakfast meetings, probably three or four days apart and began to grope for the first kinds of activity that we could do.

B: Okay, what were some of the discussions, the focuses and discussions basically on organization or just was there anything you could do period?

S: I think the earliest discussions were philosophical to the extent that we were zeroing in on the immorality of the situation, that a large company based in New Orleans could make a unilateral decision to affect the lives and security of a basic 5,000 people here plus another number of thousands through the ripple effect. The immorality of one company laying that kind of a disruption and that kind of insecurity on one community without the community being able to do anything about it.

The unethical dimensions of large corporations seemingly making policy without any respect to what happens to the people who are involved interested us. We very early began to grope for the kinds of statements or the kinds of activities or the kinds of work that would begin to right that situation. Whether it affected this one particular instance or not, we felt that we've had enough of that kind of frustration that a community confronts economically.

B: Okay, in October, the 28th and the 29th of 1977 you had a steel crisis meeting. In that interim between the first meeting, let's say following the shutdown, was there kind of a coordinating body that helped keep everybody informed as to, you know, possible options or a discussion of ongoing dialogue?

S: Very, very loosely formed. I recall out of that second breakfast meeting, that I was the one suggesting at that point that Bishop Burt release Charles Rawlings to put some staff time into this in the Valley. They were most willing and gracious to do that. So, Charles Rawlings became an early unofficial coordinator for that

conference. I know that our office assisted and there were other pastors whose secretaries and so on were co-opted to begin making contacts all over the country. We called the national office of these denominations. We called particular people who were heads of church and society divisions within their denominations and within councils of churches.

So, these calls went out all over the country. We had set the date. We began to get registrations and commitments for that conference aiming it for October 28th and 29th. That kind of activity went on, but no other formal organization then, simply a call to come together and discuss the ramifications of this shut-down and what the church ought to be doing in the light of the adversity that was coming.

B: What groups, besides the religious, were you looking for as far as participants in these particular conferences?

S: We had early contact with the Center For Economic Alternatives in Washington. They were a part of that planning very early. I think this comes naturally through friendships that had existed much prior to this. Charles Rawlings and Gar Alpervitz had been friends and would bring in the name fairly soon of Dick Fernandez, who is also a friend, a close friend of them. They had worked together on other civil rights or society-changing efforts. So, here was another opportunity for them simply to be together.

Staughton Lynd, the attorney who was much involved in the Coalition, was also a close friend of that particular group. So that, this is the way that the communication began to happen, because there had been previous tracks, previous experiences of working together on projects of this sort.

B: The formal conference itself, the components of it, was that put together by this informal committee or was there, let's say, one or two individuals who were responsible for setting up the agency for this thing?

S: I would think that we have to go back to Charles Rawlings and indicate him as the key figure in setting this up, a brilliant mind and an organizer, so that he alone with a person like Ed Stanton of the Diocese and perhaps Robert Campbell were early involved in an informal way in setting up that format. There were some other people who came in from the outside eventually, but really were

not closely involved until they actually got to that conference and were a part of the deliberations there.

- B: In the conference itself, were there any real, okay kind of give me an idea of what the focus of it was. Were there any specific things that you were looking to happen or the group was looking to happen?
- S: Well, that was a key conference because it did provide the impetus for the formation of an Ecumenical Coalition whose purpose was originally stated within the conference as being; to find a way to reopen the Sheet and Tube mills and provide employment and sustain employment for these people. But secondly, to provide a way for the church, that is the church as a whole, to speak to the moral and the ethical issues that were involved in large corporations acting like this. This was the thrust of the pastoral statement that was issued not long after that conference to which some 220 local pastors subscribed and signed.

So, those were the two main thrusts. Certainly a third one was to gain nationwide recognition of the problem that existed here and to rally the support of church and other interests in opening the steel mill in reclaiming industry that seemed to be slipping away from communities. There were other communities like ours that were subject to the same kind of difficulties.

- B: Okay, following that conference of October 18th and 29th, was there a formation meeting or something that would put the future Ecumenical Coalition together and how soon after that did that involve?
- S: Let me just admit that's a bit vague in my mind. At the closing session of the October 28th-29th meeting, we needed to form what we came to know as a Steering Committee. We'd be staff persons released in part by their offices to do this. That foursome eventually represented the four denominations that primarily funded the whole Ecumenical Coalition through its lifetime. Those persons would be: the Reverend Edward Stanton from the Diocese of Youngstown, Reverend Bert Campbell from First Presbyterian Church, Reverend Chuck Rawlings from the Episcopal Church and the Reverend Don Walton, who was District Superintendent for the United Methodist Church. Those four served as the Steering Committee.

They held early meetings of which I was not a part, but which began to call for the formation of a coalition of

all these interested parties, centered in the clergy, of course, and these continued to meet. At some point after that, I'm not clear, but there continued to meet a larger group of Bishops, denominational representatives and interested pastors and staff persons and so on. A group that reached as high as twenty, twenty-five or maybe thirty people. This became known as the Executive Committee.

This was a policy-forming, policy-deciding group and the Steering Committee became the working group to carry out those policies and to do the actual tasks involved in forming the Coalition.

B: Okay, what I'd like to do for one moment, return to that October 28th and 29th meeting. On the agenda, it appeared that there seemed to be three proposals presented. I'm not clear if I'm reading that right, but there was the National Center for Economic Alternatives presenting a proposal, The Western Reserve Economic Development Agency with Mr. Sullivan, and I'm unclear as what the third one was. I don't recall.

S: Out of a number of proposals that were presented at the conference by representatives of the economic agencies that were there, like the Center for Economic Alternatives out of those proposals and out of the ensuing dialogue of the full day of Saturday there grew four initiatives that were central to the clergy participation in this crisis.

First, they decided that they would draw up a pastoral letter, which would treat the moral and ethical issues that were involved in this question and then publicize and distribute the copies of the letter.

Second, they would begin studies relating to the feasibility of a community-worker takeover of the Campbell plant, so that the idea could be promoted.

And third, they would advance the formation of a national policy to retain basic steel jobs in communities where steelworkers live.

Fourth, they would try to focus a national interest on Youngstown as a developing model for retaining these jobs on a local basis.

Those four thrusts were the outcome of that conference that weekend.

- B: Okay, if you could elaborate on how you communicated among yourselves internally as far as like, if there was a necessity for meeting, whether the Steering Committee or whoever was responsible for getting all of the various components together?
- S: The actual work and the early dialoging on organizing the Coalition at that point really took place among the Steering Committee people we have mentioned before, those four staff people. I would need to indicate that I was not a party to a lot of those meetings and discussions at this point, but the communication was very keen and intimate between them. They would make some decisions that had to be made at the time in terms of forming the pastoral letter, getting some consultant help on that from as far away as Washington through the National Catholic Office there, then calling meetings of the larger group, which came to be known as the Executive Committee, for further help in terms of policy and directions they had to know.
- But, the communication was really between those four offices representing those four denominational bodies.
- B: Okay, then on February 2nd, I believe, 1978, you formed an external communications network. Could you tell us a little bit about that and the Director who was appointed and what you know of his appointment?
- S: The Director to whom you're referring is the Reverend Richard Fernandez, who had been formerly the Executive Director for the Clergy and Laity concerned about Vietnam. He is a trained person in terms of mobilizing communities for action in face of issues or concerns that may be important to a large number of people. Richard Fernandez was available. He was known to a number of the people already involved in the Coalition and was asked if he would come and indeed he did. He was the first staff person then called and paid by the Coalition to begin this formation.
- B: His actual recruitment, do you know who was involved in getting him to come?
- S: Nothing more than the name of Charles Rawlings again. Knowing that he had been a close friend and was known to Charles. I think the actual recruitment came through Charles' office.

B: The Save Our Valley Committee, how did the Executive Committee, or whoever, arrive at, you know, the need for a Save Our Valley Committee? Was there a particular meeting prior to February 16th or were there a series or was that handled by the Steering Committee?

S: Well here again, I think most of that was handled by the Steering Committee. They were committed to developing the kinds of programs that would begin to get the project on the map, so to speak. So, the Save Our Valley idea came out of the working of those staff people.

Now, all of this was reviewed before the Executive Committee. We remember that it was made up of the Bishops and the denominational executives, and so on, ones who are basically interested in this and from whom the resources came for carrying on the project. Each of these major decisions like starting a Save Our Valley Campaign would be reviewed through them, but the actual working and setting it up would be done by the Steering Committee and the staff.

The Save Our Valley Campaign was seen as simply mobilizing the community behind the worker-owner community concept in getting people to actually, tangibly, begin to indicate financial funds that they would deposit in the account to amass a considerable figure that would turn heads in Washington.

I know we used that phrase advisably. We thought that if there could be as much as \$12,000,000 that would be invested, still a part of their own savings, but would be invested by individuals, and by families and groups in Youngstown to save the Valley, that this would have a tremendous impact upon Washington, upon the kind of decision that would be made there to offer loan guarantees and to provide the resources for a giant steel plant to continue to operate.

B: That was the main thrust of the campaign?

S: Yes, yes.

B: Could you kind of give us an overview of the goals and objectives of the Ecumenical Coalition? We've mentioned so far up to the Steel Crisis Conference. Kind of trace from there through the May 24th decision in 1979. You know like the ups and downs and decisions and so forth, but the overriding philosophy was focused in the four

stated goals at the end of that conference. Were there any other additional ones that were kind of added along the way?

- S: One that I think of that was advanced considerably during the latter part of the Coalition's existence was a new atmosphere for labor and management relations. There was a committee appointed and actually some top labor and some top management people were brought together in a very serious effort to develop a kind of an atmosphere here where negotiations could go on a lot better and would enhance the Valley image as being a good labor situation.
- B: You're speaking of the Labor-Management Conference held, I believe, in 1979 sponsored through First Presbyterian Church, I think.
- S: Yes, that was an outgrowth of that. The Reverend Gene Bay was named Chairman of that committee, and found it natural to conduct the conference in his own shop there, so to speak.
- B: Was that an outgrowth of the Coalition do you think, or was it more from their church in society?
- S: No, it was an outgrowth from the Coalition. A suggestion made directly through this policy-making body of the Executive Committee. They furthered the idea and gave it encouragement. But, I do have to say that it was not a main theme or main thrust of the Ecumenical Coalition. Because as a matter of practical experience, all auxiliary kinds of thrusts and ideas, other than reopening that steel plant, were not entertained closely by that Coalition, because they did not want to detract from the main goal of reopening the steel plant. So, there were numerous kinds of by-products or side issues that were explored and talked about and furthered. But, the main issue was to reopen the steel mill.
- B: Could you outline for me your particular role within the Ecumenical Coalition?
- S: I'd be glad to. My personal role came to be as the official Treasurer for the Ecumenical Coalition group. I was asked in one of the early formative meetings by Bishop Malone of the Diocese whether our office would keep an accounting of the funds that were contributed and pay all of our accounts through our office. This we did.

We set up a separate account in the bank. We hired a very proficient bookkeeper who kept all of the records and paid all of the bills. They were authorized through the Reverend Charles Rawlings, again of the Steering Committee, who gave authorization for payment. But, I oversaw the work of the bookkeeper and signed the checks and then cared for that end of it.

Actually, as a matter of record, I was an ex-officio member of the Executive Committee because it was again made up simply of the Bishops and official denominational heads.

So simply as Treasurer and providing that kind of information, I did this as an ex-officio member of that committee.

B: Would you like to see, you know, more church efforts in this area?

S: Yes, in fact, I'm involved in more church efforts in this area. But, I think that in terms of the Coalition itself, we found that we could not reach the goal that we had originally set in terms of reopening the steel mills. That it become a matter of record that basic steel was not going to be a major industry in the Valley.

Our effort has been toward a diversification and certainly toward employment. Creating jobs in the Valley that would rehire many of those who are unemployed and provide jobs for others as they came along. We have an Employment Task Force working through the Association of Churches, which combines all the economic agency heads in the Valley with the Chamber of Commerce and with the institutes at the University that are involved in employment.

This Committee is deeply involved in the kinds of surveys and the kinds of information sharing that is helping the diversification of the Valley, creating an atmosphere where small businesses can get funds to expand and grow to add new jobs. We think that by the tens and by the hundreds this kind of development is going to make a difference in the Valley down the road.

B: I have one final question. Could you elaborate a little on the Committee you were mentioning as far as employment and so forth?

S: Yes, I'd be glad to because the Economic Task Force has been in existence now for about one year. It brings together some leading economic figures in our Valley,

including Don French, who is the Director of the Mahoning Valley Economic Corporation, Wes Johnstone of the Chamber of Commerce, John Spagnola of the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services, Mike Connelly, with CETA, someone like Dr. David McBride of the Cushwa Institute for Economic Development and seven or eight others including Chuck Saulino, who is the City Development Director. Now more recently, some members of the City Council who are determined to look into the ways and means of providing a better economic atmosphere for Youngstown, so that companies will be interested in staying here, in the first place, and new companies coming in.

Out of that group, which declares that this is the only forum they have for really sharing their economic concerns and their information, comes now a survey that will touch three or four hundred of the most viable small businesses in the Valley and alert them to the help that is available to expand, to redesign their product, to find new markets and lead them into the kind of development that will create new jobs by the fives, and the tens, the twenties and by the hundreds in this Valley.

We have studies that prove that the best source for re-generating employment is in small companies that have a good chance of growing through the next seven, ten, twenty years. So, this group is eagerly at work creating a better atmosphere, looking at the advantages of the Valley. They're determined to get that kind of word out throughout the Valley and throughout the state and nation.

B: Have you been getting a lot of good response as far as business and the City Council?

S: Yes, there's an interest in developing the positive factors that are there. We have been delighted most recently with a press release from the Mayor that begins to point out the kind of things that we can brag about in Youngstown, including transportation, educational facilities, a skilled and stable work force and so on right down the line. The Valley is a good place to live and work. We have to tell people about it.

B: I'd like to thank you very much for giving us your time this afternoon.

S: Glad to.

END OF INTERVIEW