

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Poland United Methodist Church  
150th Anniversary Project

History of Methodism in Poland

O.H. 182

Louise E. Donofrio

Interviewed

by

Wilfredo Rivera

on

April 30, 1981

LOUISE E. DONOFRIO

Louise Elisabeth Donofrio was born on October 26, 1910, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George Saywell, in Hudson, Ohio. She attended Shaw High School and graduated in 1927. She continued her education by attending Oberlin College from which she received her A.B. in Education in 1931.

Mrs. Donofrio, after graduating, was employed by the Hudson Board of Education from 1931-1936. She later was employed by Youngstown State University as an instructor from 1960-1970 when she retired.

Louise has two children; she is a member of Poland's United Methodist Church and is also involved with the American Association of University Women. She enjoys gardening, traveling, music and sewing.

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INTERVIEWEE: LOUISE E. DONOFRIO

INTERVIEWER: Wilfredo Rivera

SUBJECT: Church relocation, values, family, ethnicity,  
events, interfaith council

DATE: April 30, 1980

R: This is an interview with Mrs. Louise E. Donofrio for the Youngstown State University 150th Anniversary of Poland's United Methodist Church by Wilfredo Rivera at 239 Sheridan Road, Poland, Ohio on April 30, 1981 at approximately 2:30 p.m.

Mrs. Donofrio, can you tell me something about your parents and what stories you recall about their past?

D: Well, my father came to this country with his parents when he was three years old and they landed at Ellis Island; they had sailed from Kent County, England. He remembers that his cap blew off his head as they came into the harbor in New York and he could see his red cap floating down there on the waves. He probably put up quite a bit of objection, but there couldn't be a thing done about it. His younger sister was just a babe in arms.

My grandmother tells me that when they vaccinated people at Ellis Island it often caused a very severe reaction. She rubbed her arm and probably washed it if she could because she knew she was going to have enough trouble taking care of a three-year-old boy and baby girl, and the vaccination didn't take. She was a hearty woman. She had three more children after arriving in the United States.

Her husband was a fairly good gardener and orchardist. He worked mainly with grape vines and fruit trees, and he was rather steadily employed. First temporarily in Cleveland at Market Gardens out in the Glenville area and then he got a job in Hudson, Ohio a little village down in Summit County, and they lived there the rest of their lives.

They built a very solid frame home with about eight rooms in it, which now belongs to the Board of Education, and it cost all of \$1,000 to build that new home. They lived in it the rest of their lives and raised their children there.

My mother's parents came from southern Ohio. Her mother was the daughter of German immigrants and my mother's grandfather fought through the Civil War and came home rather badly wounded. We have a good record of that because he was awarded a pension. He had been a blacksmith and served with the Cavalry and when he died, his widow in turn received the pension and lived up until 1900. She went to Iowa to live with her older daughter out there.

My mother's father was fortunate to be hired by the Pennsylvania Railroad as an engineer. This was down in Wellsville on the Ohio River. When Wellsville began to fall behind the march of progress, the Pennsylvania moved the roundhouse to Cleveland, and that necessitated the family moving because his job depended on being in the right place at the right time to drive an engine between Pittsburgh and Cleveland. So, they located up in Hudson, which is near Akron in Summit County, and he would have at least one run a day from Pittsburgh to Cleveland and then came back to Hudson where there was a junction with the "Doodlebug," an old suburban trolley that went from Hudson to Akron.

This family brought up four daughters in Hudson, and my mother was the second of the four. She met my father in a church organization in Hudson in the Congregational Church. They called it the Christian Endeavor in those days because it was social and religious. And I was fortunate enough to inherit the family Bible from my mother's family. It has helped me and my daughters to trace the family back several generations because the dates of birth, the names of children, and the place where marriages took place and that kind of thing are recorded in the Bible.

My father worked his way through Western Reserve Academy in Hudson and then went on to Cleveland and

graduated from Western Reserve University and got a law degree from Baldwin-Wallace, which had a night school in Cleveland. He became a patent attorney and was always determined that any child of his or anyone he had anything to do with would have a good education. So, it was fortunate that my sister and I both enjoyed studying.

I went to elementary school in Hudson; then we lived in Cleveland for several years because my father's business was in Cleveland, and I graduated from Shaw High School in East Cleveland. I started college at Western Reserve and had two years there. The family moved back to Hudson in the meantime because transportation was somewhat better. My dad had an old Studebaker, which would be an antique today, but he managed to drive from Cleveland to Hudson, at least in the good weather, and he took the train in the bad weather. I transferred to Oberlin College out west of Cleveland and graduated there in 1931.

I went on and did some graduate work in three different schools, at Oberlin, Western Reserve and Westminster College over in Pennsylvania. I taught in public school in Hudson five years and later I taught at Girard High School and at Liberty Township High School. When the Korean War came along, I had retired and was bringing up two children. I wasn't teaching except as a substitute, but some friends of mine told me that I could teach part-time at Youngstown State University. There was a very critical shortage of teachers who were willing to work about three days a week. So, I applied there in 1960 and taught ten years at Youngstown State, mainly freshmen in communications, which included writing, reading, and speech.

It was a rather broad course, which all the freshmen needed, some of them being very lacking in communication skills. Some would tell me that they had never been expected to stand and speak to the class in all their school days. That's hard to believe, but there were some who came rather poorly prepared and then there were some who were excellent students, especially those who had served in the Army or Navy and had the GI bill to help them.

I enjoyed that teaching very much indeed. I got to know some of those young students very well and I still know some of them. They'll come up and speak to me downtown or in a gathering, and I have to rack my brain to figure out who they are. But it is very pleasant and flatter-

ing to have young people remember who you are.

R: Well, when did your parents come to this town here, Poland, in which year?

D: Well, my parents died and were buried up in Hudson, but I had married before their death and my husband was hired to teach in Girard. So, we moved to Girard with a son and a daughter, and my husband taught there for about five years. Then he was hired in the Youngstown School System and taught in three different high schools in Youngstown. We moved to Poland in 1948.

Both the children graduated from high school here in Poland. We built a home out here in Poland, a little south of Poland on Lee Run Road. My daughter went on to Kent in the elementary education. She graduated over there in 1960 and Bill went to Hiram College and graduated in 1964. He was very much interested in history--the whole family has been, as a matter of fact. My dad was a very good historian.

Bill majored in history in college and then at Hiram, which was the college he graduated from, he met a very inspiring professor who wanted him to take a more varied course, not only history, but American speech, sociology, art, and economics. It was quite a broad course and it gave him excellent preparation for teaching by reading all the assignments and writing the papers that were required.

He got a Master's degree and then a Ph.D. in a course called American Studies. Not every university offers it, but it has turned out to be very practical for him because he can work in several disciplines. He hasn't had any problem finding a teaching position, even though there are sometimes too many teachers for the jobs available.

I did a considerable amount of substitution when the children were at home, and I got a broad view of public schools and of private institutions because Youngstown College then wasn't a state school. It was about the middle of the 1960's before it became a state university, and there was a decided change in its appearance, the attitude of the administration, and particularly in the amount of money available to finance the school when it became a state university. There is just no comparison today with the buildings and the kind of curriculum that we had back there in the 1960's. There has been a whole new generation of professors in the faculty

and of course, several new generations in the student body.

It has been very interesting to me. I went to the planetarium last Saturday and saw the Wonders of the Universe production, which was beautifully done. There wasn't anything of that sort available when I was there.

R: When you were a child, Mrs. Donofrio, which values did your parents stress the most, hard work, religion, education or a career, and why?

D: Well, they certainly stressed education. There's no doubt in my mind that that really came first. And hard work would come second, because they had had to work hard to get their own education. My mother taught school at least five years, and she was fortunate to have some schooling beyond high school. Many girls didn't even complete high school. She went to Wooster College for a year or two and was very much in demand as a teacher. Not many married women carried on a career after marriage in her day, but she was called a substitute there in Hudson and taught school frequently.

My father managed to pull himself up by his boot straps, you might say, by means of an education. He was the oldest in his family of five and the income of a laboring man in a village in Summit County wasn't very large. I can imagine that they just paid the bills. In spite of that, by dint of hard work and saving every nickle they could, my father graduated from college and the other son went through pharmacy school. My father saw to it that his next younger sister came up to Cleveland, went to high school at East High in Cleveland and worked at least part of the time in his office. So, she had the equivalent of a high school education in a day when most of her friends and sisters wouldn't have had nearly that much.

The religious background was there too. I've had different religious experiences here as part of my heritage. The English family, the Saywell family, was Episcopalian, but the Congregational Church in Hudson did a lot more for the young people and that's the way, of course, to attract new members. The parents of the young people often go with the children.

Both my mother and father attended the Congregational Church in Hudson and we were brought up there in the Sunday School. I've been a Congregationalist, a Presbyterian and a Methodist. I have three different church

backgrounds, and of course, my husband is a Catholic. So, I've had quite a bit of experience with the different faiths, and they are very important in our American Heritage. The religious background is there even when many of our young people seem to turn their backs on it. I think it has set our attitudes toward life.

Jimmy Carter was interested in human rights, not only because it would do this country a great deal of good, in many cases he actually hurt our standing among nations by insisting on human rights, but that was part of his religious training and I don't think he could weed out that early influence. I think if you are brought up to respect the values of honesty and being on good terms with people of all kinds of backgrounds, you won't change your mind about that later in life. The older you get the more you see that the really fundamental values are in the range of tolerance and helpfulness and loving those who aren't always lovable. At least we give everybody justice.

- R: Mrs. Donofrio, in your family right now or while your children were young, which value did you stress the most and why?
- D: I certainly stressed the idea that they should respect their teachers and their relatives. I don't believe they ever got away with being selfish or indifferent or rude to other people. I didn't use much physical punishment, I didn't really need to, but I can remember a slap here and there if I heard some derogatory term or something that didn't sound very respectful. But certainly, in their cases, I know I was fortunate because others haven't had that much luck. I never had a complaint about the behavior of either child. And I know I was fortunate because some other families that tried just as hard had plenty of problems later in life, even when children grew up in a very good environment. We never heard of this drug problem when our children were in school. They've been out of college nearly twenty years now, so there's a whole generation of difference.

The problems of young people today are really frightening to me. I just don't understand why parents seem to lose control. Some of them don't know where their children are, even though they're fairly young children. And I'm shocked to know that children just don't respect their elders today. It's sad because they don't respect the government either and many of them get into trouble. Their parents just can't imagine how this kind of thing happened, but it begins when a child is

very young.

Psychologists say that the attitude of a child is pretty well set by the time he's six or seven years old. Even in a store when you see parents bringing children with them to shop, you can tell very quickly what the relationship is between that mother and the child. Some children will grab something which they think they want. They probably don't even know what's in the package, but the mother will scream, perhaps slap the child, but it's going to happen again unless she explains to that child why he can't go through the store grabbing something.

R: Mrs. Donofrio, what motivated you to convert to the Methodist faith?

D: Well, it isn't exactly a conversion. When you move from one Protestant faith to another, it's a very simple transition because the background and the beliefs are so very near the same thing. The Presbyterian and the Congregational Churches are almost the same, except that the Presbyterian has a little more Scotch background, a little stricter discipline about beliefs perhaps, and they have a synod, which ties them together so that they have a connectional system.

The Congregational Churches are individually organized and it's up to them to locate a pastor. If their minister or pastor is called to another church, it's up to that individual church to find another one.

In a connectional system, like that Methodist, if our pastor is moved, the bishop finds another pastor to move to our church so we're never left without a pastor, which is a blessing. It's hard, particularly for the smaller churches today, to finance the church building and the pastor's salary, and all of them have to contribute to a district and a conference. It takes a good bit of money just to keep the church alive and well. Many people find it difficult, no doubt, to include the church in their budget; they have so many other demands for their money.

My church membership was partly a matter of which church was available. In Hudson, as it happened, there wasn't any Presbyterian Church when my mother's family came up there from Wellsville, so they attended the Congregational Church, which was the nearest thing. In Peninsula, where I lived briefly, there was a Catholic church and a Methodist church, so if you were a Protestant, you would probably become a Methodist. It was forty years ago that I joined the Methodist Church in

Peninsula, Ohio. So, when we moved to Girard we went to the Methodist Church.

It has advantages in size for one thing. The Methodist Church is one of the largest Protestant denominations. There's usually a Methodist Church in a town of any size. They tell me that during the Civil War, the Methodists allowed lay preachers. If they didn't have an ordained Minister, a lay person--who was qualified to preach--could hold the pulpit during the war because there weren't many active men left at home; most of them were in the Army.

The Methodist church has a very good educational system. They back a good many colleges financially and morally. They support Ohio Wesleyan in Delaware and Mount Union over in Alliance and Baldwin-Wallace up in Berea and a number in Pennsylvania near us. They have always held education in high esteem. They believe strongly in education, and they have children's homes, like the Berea home. A number of hospitals have Methodist help; St. Luke's is one of them in Cleveland. There's an old folk's home in Elyria and another one over in Sebring, Ohio--Copeland Oaks. They are partly financed by the church. It makes it easier for people who are retired and elderly to find a convenient and comfortable home in their later years. Housing the elderly is a big problem today.

There are a number of advantages in the Methodist Church over and above the enjoyment and the feeling of accomplishment that you get from belonging to an organization like that. It was a branch of the Episcopal Church in England in its earliest days. In the Eighteenth Century it became a very active organization, more or less against the wishes of the Episcopal Church, which was the established church. But it seemed to survive in spite of poverty and the chapels, as they call them, werewell attended, particularly by working people. It wasn't a rich man's organization by any means; they were laboring people, and they wanted more freedom than they had in the established church of England.

So, there's a background there that carries on to a considerable extent in the American church. One of the Wesley's even came to America to attempt to convert Indians. I doubt that he converted very many, but he made his mark. He set up an organization here in Baltimore at first and there were a number of circuit riders and preachers who traveled throughout the eastern part of the United States and into the Midwest.

One of them, Reverend Joseph Badger, is associated with the Presbyterian Church here in Poland and the Congregational Church over in Hudson. They date back to about 1803, both of those churches. One of the very early itinerate preachers was responsible for getting those churches under way. I can imagine it was a log cabin or even the home of one of the members where they met. They didn't have anything elaborate, I'm sure.

Our church helped finance one young woman over at Mount Union. She's a teacher in Poland, a very fine teacher. And we have helped a number of young people get started in the ministry. There's one young man now, Ken Gifford, who's over in the Theological School just south of Delaware, between Delaware and Columbus. We have helped buy his books and pay his expenses to go through the seminary. He is preaching now part-time every Sunday; he has a pulpit over there in that area. I think he has two years yet before he would be ordained; it's about a four year course.

Another young man, who worked with our youth here, is in charge of the First Methodist Church in Warren. He was a student over at Westminster in Pennsylvania and came over every weekend and worked with the youth in Poland.

We've had, thank goodness, a very active youth group and that keeps the church alive. The old-timers have been the backbone of the church, but the youth are its future.

In some of the snapshots I have here, there's a group of youth attending a meeting over at Berea Children's Home. They would often take a worship program and go to one of the homes. The home in Berea is fairly well known. There's a branch home of about eight or nine young men up in Warren. The idea today is to keep them as near their home as possible so that their relatives can come visit them. We have been up to Warren to visit that group home--the Washington group home.

There's a widespread field of work for any church that's willing to work.

R: Mrs. Donofrio, in what year did you become a member of this Methodist Church and what church did you first attend?

D: Yes, it was Peninsula, Ohio in 1936 that I joined the Methodist Church and then in Girard, in 1940 because

my daughter was two years old. In 1948 we moved from Girard down here to Poland. I can remember the old church over here where the bank is now; it was an interesting old building. It had beautiful stained glass windows that were pretty much ruined when the building burned, except for one round one.

The organ was responsible for the fire that destroyed it. The electrical system in the organ shorted and before anyone seemed to realize what was going on, the fire had spread and had gone right up through the roof. The whole roof was pretty well burned and I have a hymnal right here that came from the old church. It's one that was in the pew at the time of the fire. This was the first of April in 1957.

A good many of us heard the fire siren and gathered in front of the church. The firemen were doing their best with the fire hose to get the fire out. The whole building didn't actually burn, but the top of it was pretty well gone, and the debris fell right down through the church into the basement. It was really a charred mess by the time that fire had been there, even an hour and a half.

R: What were the first reactions of the members of the congregation?

D: Well, they were rather shocked of course; they were discouraged. It wasn't a large church or a wealthy church. We had increased the insurance on the building; that was one great blessing. We had known for some time that we had to have more room for parking because everyone came in cars with the exception of a dozen families near the church. The homes right in the area were so expensive that it would cost too much to buy those homes and move them and use the lot for parking. So, we were at a standstill on the building proposition. Before more than a week had gone by, I think people began to realize that maybe it was a blessing in disguise--that now we had to rise to the occasion and do something about building. It had been discussed several times.

Since we knew the old building wasn't going to be enough room for our people, we added a new brick wing, which was dedicated in the early 1950's, so it wasn't really an old building. The brick wing is now used by the bank. Fortunately, the new wing was still there, even though we had to put up a big canvas to cut off the doorway between the new wing and the old building. We used it throughout the summer for worship; we could meet there, and the Sunday school classes met in private

homes. There just wasn't very much room. By the time we had a church service in that wing, we didn't have much room left over.

We rented the North Elementary School up here on Johnson Place. We rented that as soon as the weather began to get cold in the fall, and we met there all through that winter. That would be the winter of 1957 to 1958. By the time that spring came around, we were inspecting the new building which was under construction. I can remember scrambling through that new building.

The Ernest Withers family gave us a big part of the site of the church and we bought another piece of land right on Route 224. It was desirable because we could come in from the front or we could come in from Wendy Lane at the back of the lot. It's important to have enough driveways to get in and out comfortably.

I don't think anyone doubted that we had to build after that old church burned. I never heard any objections, although there probably were some, but it seemed as if that was the path ahead of us; that we just had to have a little more room and better facilities to use for our church. The town was growing and the church was growing.

There were pledges, of course, a good many substantial building pledges. We went through quite a bit of trouble to get the plans drawn. We had a very well-known architect here who, I think, did a beautiful job with the plans. I have pictures of him at the ground-breaking ceremony. He was a member of Trinity Church.

We couldn't complete the whole building at one time. Even then, building cost a lot of money, and these plans were drawn for the future as well as for the present. We went into the sanctuary when it hadn't been plastered, when the building blocks were the walls, and the chancel was decorated with huge lengths of white muslin because there hadn't been any plastering done up in the choir loft. That was a pretty primitive-looking building for a while. I can remember meeting there one evening when there were no lights available. One or two people brought lamps and plugged them into the electric socket around the bottom of the sanctuary wall and we held a prayer meeting in the sanctuary without any electricity available in the building. It was being wired, but there were no fixtures, no chandeliers. The meeting was during Grace Marston's illness.

There's a fellowship hall on the same floor as the sanctuary, which is really the first floor of the building, and for quite a little while we used that

fellowship hall for meeting because it was easier to heat. The sanctuary was quite a big territory to heat and there wasn't much insulation without plaster. The first winter, I know we were in the fellowship hall instead of in the sanctuary, but we figured out that we had to make some more money in addition to the pledges.

It happened that I was president of the Women's Society at the time and someone came up with the idea that we could run a cafeteria out at the Canfield Fair. So, we contacted Miss Jones, the secretary of the Fair, and rented space at the Canfield Fair. Mr. Dammann contacted a tent company over in Pennsylvania and we rented as large a tent as we thought we could cope with and the work began on the Fair.

It had to begin about two months before the Fair started. We needed all kinds of equipment. People would donate an old stove or an old refrigerator. We took chairs and tables from the church out there and a number of things we bought for the Fair and then we could use them in the church through the rest of the year. But a lot of that equipment had to be stored in the basement of the church from one Canfield Fair to the next.

I believe it was ten years that we operated that Fair and it grew like Topsy. We started with hot dogs and hamburgers and gradually we worked into serving a full meal: breakfast, lunch and dinner. We opened a day or two before the Fair opened because there were a lot of people working there: the policemen, the construction people and those who were bringing in the school exhibits. And we would be serving breakfast two days before the Fair opened. People were always hungry there. It must be something about the air in Canfield, but you never saw so much strawberry shortcake and swiss steak disappear in your life, and we needed everybody we could lay hands on to help because it was a big operation.

A lot of people came and helped that didn't belong to our church and maybe didn't belong to any church, but this work was quite a challenge; it was quite an operation. The young people were very helpful in serving and clearing tables and the minister would be there working with the rest of us. We'd have a church service on Sunday morning out there because more people were in Canfield than were here at home. There would be an early service at Canfield then the regular service here at a quarter till 11:00 a.m.

Sunday was a big day. The bands would be there; all kinds of outside talents would come in to put on a production. Sunday was really a harder day than Labor Day because by evening of Labor Day, I believe by about nine or ten o'clock, we could begin to take things apart. You don't dare pack up anything and go before the fair ends you see. You're obliged to stay with it until nearly the end and the show at the big stadium there wasn't over until about ten o'clock and then everyone would want pie and coffee. You could expect quite an influx of people about ten o'clock, who were also hungry.

Some of the young people would stay there through the night. We had one big trailer--the kind that a moving company uses--a huge trailer that we used to take the equipment from the church out to Canfield. And of course, there were boxes and packages and huge restaurant cans of all kinds of food. Someone had to be there through the night and the young people would scramble for the chance to stay because this was an adventure for them. Many of the young folks have stayed there overnight. They'd get into some mischief, inevitably, but at least one adult and some of the kids would be there ready to get started in the morning, too.

Some of the stoves were electric and some were gas and we had to have a water supply. We washed dishes by the ton. We had the church dishes out there. We used paper when we could, but to serve a chicken dinner or any meat dinner, you really have to have a respectable kind of plate. So, we washed dishes in great big buckets like that. We had to have a drain, of course. The fairgrounds was pretty well set up for that kind of thing, except when there's a bad storm and then you're kind of in trouble.

One terrible storm hit on a Sunday afternoon that blew down some of the smaller tents and the people from those tents would take refuge in a larger tent because it was really wet. This big trailer was parked just to the west of our tent so that things could be easily unloaded and I think it protected the tent from the worst of that wind because the tent didn't collapse, but we felt as if we were in Venice.

R: Mrs. Donofrio, could you tell me a little bit about the previous leaders of the church or ministers and a little bit about their background and also, some of the contributions they had toward the church?

D: Well, Reverend Bob Ebhoff was here when we came, our old pastor.

R: In what year?

D: Oh, 1948. Bob Ebhoff was just completing his pastorate here and he had been a very inspirational leader. He had an active group of young people, I remember. His interests were on interdenominational work. He had served as Chaplain during the Second World War and had very nearly been killed and he credited his church helpers, his church background, with the fact that he had survived the wounds he had during the war.

He left to go out to the State of Washington when we had been here only a rather short time and the Reverend Norman Parr succeeded him. He was a very fine organizer and pastor and he later became Executive Head of the Council of Churches in Youngstown. We have been fortunate, I think, in having leaders that weren't narrow in their outlook. Many of them had had experience in other areas besides church work and possibly in other denominations. Reverend Parr, who passed away within the last year, headed the Council of Churches here in Youngstown for a while.

Then Reverend Dean Marston came and he was an excellent pastor and organizer. He was here when the old church burned and fortunately for us, he had had an experience [with] building up in Chagrin Falls, so he knew what was expected when you had to add to a church or build a new church. He had had quite a bit of experience in that field. He was here seven years during the time when we got the new church built and gradually completed it.

Many of our own people worked in the church because the mortgage was so large that we couldn't have afforded to hire the whole thing done at one time.

After Dean Marston, Reverend John Hess came. He was a very vigorous kind of person and he made it possible for a lot of people to join the church who might not have joined if he hadn't been as inspiring a leader. He was interested in music; he was interested in scouting. He had four daughters and two sons and he was very active in the scouting organization.

Camping, all kinds of opportunities are offered to young people in our church, particularly camping. Lakeside, up here beyond Sandusky, is a Methodist camp ground and many of our young people have been there for at least a week at a time in the summer. The women used to go to Lakeside for at least a week

of studying and training. It has gotten to be too expensive to rent cottages at Lakeside and pay for our women to go to the training up there, so we have a week at Mount Union. In the summer months there aren't nearly as many students at Mount Union and many of our women have gone over there for a week at a time for training.

That old stand-by of education and training stands in good stead because you need to keep the younger people informed about what's going on and many of our younger people have come from other areas of the country. We may find today that not so many are coming in as are going out, but many of them haven't had very much church training, so we try to keep that available for all of them, regardless of what church they may have come from.

After John Hess, a very fine pastor came for about a three year period. His name was Glen Lockhart, and he has moved up to Ashtabula; he is now at Astabula First Church. He had a very musical wife who was very helpful in the choir. Methodists are great singers. They love to have a good choir and an organ, of course, and often we have young people from Dana School of Music come down, particularly at Easter and we'll have several trumpets or other instrumental music, which is helpful. Music is quite important to us.

Reverend Al Hubler was the next pastor and he was here at least seven years and he's now over in the Akron area. He's the District Superintendent in Akron. He was one of the most spiritual leaders that we've ever had and his use of English was so perfect that I never detected any error of any sort in his speech. I can't say this of any other person that I've ever met. Not only the perfect use of the language, but the way he can get his message across in the very best possible way. I've never heard him use language that was less than desirable. No slang, no shortcuts, poor image of some kind, never did I hear anything of that sort; and his life was just about the same, as far as his conduct toward the people. He would never fail to appear in a home where there was trouble, sickness, and death and fortunately for us, it was possible to find another pastor when Reverend Hubler moved two years ago.

We were fortunate enough to have a new pastor who could fill his shoes, and that would be rather difficult for most pastors to do. This is Reverend Joseph Santomen who is here today. You may have an occasion to talk to

him. He has a very active interest too. He has four daughters and luckily again, some of them are musical. His wife and one daughter sing in the choir now.

He has really kept us on our toes, and that's what we have to have it seems. If we aren't challenged to do things, I'm afraid we'd get sleepy and lazy, but we don't have any opportunity with Joe Santomen. He has thought of new things that we ought to be doing and that's good, because one of the worst problems with church people is that they are content to follow through with the routine that they've been accustomed to.

R: What has this new leader to the church been doing in preparation for this 150th Anniversary that's coming up shortly?

D: Well, he has spotted the people in the congregation that will be able to cope with this. That's probably what a leader is expected to do, isn't it? To find out those who are able and willing to rise to the challenge and do something appropriate and, of course, Dr. Viehmeyer is one of our outstanding lay people.

We've been fortunate, somehow or another, to attract young people and keep them. Those who move on from the Poland Church often come back to visit and they'll say something like, "I hope you appreciate what you have here because we aren't finding it in the new city we're in. We're trying; we're looking, but we haven't found a church home that suits us yet." Maybe they're just complimenting us; we wonder, of course. But the key is finding the right people to do the right job, and that's what Joe Santomen seems to be able to do.

R: What does this celebration symbolize to the people of the community and the congregation of this church?

D: Well, it is something to find that an organization like a church can hang together in spite of various problems. The church isn't free of difficulty and the more active you are in a church, the more you realize there are problems there, because different people want different things. I know Bishop Malone is having a problem with a gentleman down in Canton, and there's a difference there that doesn't seem to be readily able to be solved, but sooner or later you have to compromise on various ideas about what a church should do.

We try hard to have all the different groups represented in the trustees and the different commissions of the church. We try very hard to see that everyone has his chance to put in an idea or two so that no one feels

left out. It must have succeeded somewhere along the line just to keep many of the same families. I'm in the older generation now, but I can point out families who have been there 35 to 40 years or more and of course, there's no compulsion to keep people coming to church. They can pack up and go somewhere else very easily, or they can leave entirely, but if they stay with it for that length of time, they must feel there's value there for them and for their family.

R: What is your knowledge about this interfaith Council and what is their involvement with the Methodist Church in regards to the preparation for the celebration?

D: Now, I wasn't aware until you mentioned it that the Interfaith Council would have any great amount of involvement in a celebration of this kind; I'm just not informed that well. But of course, the Interfaith Council would be interested to know that any churches in the area had been the same organization over that period of time.

We have helped various inter-denominational groups. Recently we helped the Fish Samaritan House, for instance, which isn't a Methodist organization at all. There has been a rather generous amount of money given them to help with their expansion. They're adding to their headquarters and their store, and there were pledges made here to help them.

The Protestant Family Service gets a steady amount of help from the church and the United Methodist Women, because that's a social need in our area, a desperate need. They help emergency cases that aren't here long enough or that can't qualify for the regular relief services. They offer aid when someone is thrown out of work or when there is serious illness or people have to move and they don't have any equipment to help them set up housekeeping. Many of us try to keep the Protestant Family Service supplied with canned goods, emergency clothing, baby food--the sort of thing that they might need. Those organizations aren't necessarily affiliated with the Methodist Church, but we help them anyway.

There are others too. There's the Protestant Men who have a Chaplain who visits all the sick in the hospital and our pastor gets to the hospitals, I think, almost every day of the week because, inevitably, we have someone there too. But the Chaplain reports back to the church. If a patient comes in and says, "I belong to a certain church," the chaplain will call that church and make that report so that the pastor doesn't fall

behind three or four days before he knows someone is there.

R: Mrs. Donofrio, where do you see this Methodist Church being in the near future?

D: Well, I hope it will be just as active and as interested as it is today. I rather think it will be, because our membership at least holds steady and often it rises, which is what it ought to be doing because, of course, the population is increasing. I hope it will take a continuing interest in the community for that's one of the main purposes of a church of that kind, to make its influence felt in the community.

There is an organization within the church, a very informal group, that is going to try to help people who meet problems unexpectedly, the kind of thing that can happen when the father of a family dies or when a child is very ill and must have immediate care. That is a new idea which has been presented just in the last few weeks--that we should have a small fund available for an emergency. I can imagine Reverend Santomen is responsible for that idea too.

There are times when it seems as if the government just isn't able to reach. You can't expect too much of the government when you think of all the demands upon it. I don't expect it to do everything, I'm sure. The neighborhood and the church has to take some of that responsibility, and I hope we'll be able to do it.

R: How many years have you been a member of this congregation.

D: Thirty-three years.

R: And has there been a substantial increase in the size of the congregation?

D: Yes, I'm sure there has been. It would be somewhere over 1,000 today in active membership. That doesn't include the children in the Sunday school because they haven't actually become members, but yet they're considered part of the church community too. There are a number of people who attend who haven't belonged to the church for one reason or another. Some of them may belong to another church somewhere else. But there isn't a Sunday that there aren't new people showing up there; many of them I can't identify anymore because I just don't get around as actively as I used to. About four times a year, at least, there will be a class of

new people join in addition to the young people, who have a membership training class.

I'm sure the membership will continue to increase because Poland is booming as far as population goes, in spite of the problems of the steel industry. We haven't noticed any great falling off in membership, and I'm happy to report that I don't think we're going to be a ghost town by any means.

R: Do you see in the near future a slight decrease in membership in the congregation due to the fact of these present social factors involved?

D: That's possible. It's always possible and another circumstance is that there are a number of churches here in Poland today. When we came in 1948, there was a Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church and that was it. Now, there are probably five others. Anyway, I think seven or eight is the number of churches, so, that, of course, makes a difference. But I think any active church that makes an effort--people are interested, there's no doubt that they are. In spite of all the sports and the demands of their families and social life that young people enjoy, and rightly so, there is a real need for the ministration of the church. A family that doesn't have any church affiliation I think is an underprivileged family. There isn't any other organization I know of that can offer the same kind of life, and goodness knows we need all the help we can get.

R: Mrs. Donofrio, are there any other events that we haven't covered through this interview?

D: Well, I've attended a good many wedding ceremonies in the church, beginning with my daughter's wedding in December of 1969, which was about the second wedding held in the sanctuary. It wasn't a completed sanctuary then. There have been some very beautiful weddings held there and also up in the chapel. We have, on the second floor, a small chapel for a funeral or a wedding or a worship service for the women or for the men or for the youth. It's up in the youth department. Many of those services I'll never forget, of course, because they were very impressive. That's part of the service of a church.

It will be interesting to you, perhaps, to know that people telephone the secretary at the church--people whose name we don't even recognize, who may not even have been inside the building--and they will telephone and ask whether Reverend Santomen will marry them.

Every bride wants a beautiful church and a beautiful wedding, so as far as I know, he always tells them to come in and confer with him about it. Whether they are members or ever intend to be members is beside the point really, although he insists that he counsel with them about three different times before the wedding, because no one with a sense of responsibility would marry, offhand, a young couple that he had never seen before.

Many pastors wouldn't undertake that kind of thing because it's too much responsibility, but I know on occasion there have been young people married there who never belonged to the church or had any association with it. But if Reverend Santomen thought they were sincere and if they were willing to come in and talk things over with him, he has performed a number of weddings there that the other church members wouldn't have known anything about.

That's just one function. There have also been a number of funerals there, which I'll remember for a long time. That also is important for the family and friends and everyone in the church. There have been a lot of celebrations there of all kinds--conference meetings of the United Methodist Women and district meetings. We have been blessed with leadership. It was partly luck and partly training. We've had a number of women who have served the United Methodist Women beyond the local church and a number of our men have been honored by the Organization of Protestant Men. One of them was chosen Man-of-the-Year not very long ago.

It takes that kind of leadership in a church, I think, to keep it functioning, and maybe we've just been lucky to have people who are willing to give years of work. It's a volunteer work, of course. In some offices your travel expenses are paid, but of course, there's no salary attached to it, and you'd have to be able to finance a good deal of travel on your own and a great deal of time and effort goes into that. But we wouldn't have a church, would we, if everyone had to be paid to go to church? There wouldn't be any such thing. It's a volunteer effort.

R: Mrs. Donofrio, are there any other words that you would like to express in regards to the United Methodist Church?

D: Well, it has meant a great deal to me and my family. I can speak firsthand of the value of active membership because it is probably the most important influence in

my life and it has certainly been worthwhile for friends and relatives, others that I have been able to work with, particularly the wonderful friends I have met there, friends that I have known for many, many years and hope to stay with the rest of my life. That has been an inspiration, really.

R: In conclusion and in behalf of the Youngstown State University Oral History Program and myself, I would like to express my appreciation for your time and effort. Thank you, Mrs. Donofrio.

D: Well, you're very welcome. I've enjoyed doing it.

R: Thanks again.

END OF INTERVIEW