

CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

INTERVIEWER: DR. JAMES M. DENHAM

PLACE: LAKELAND, FLORIDA

DATE: MAY 12, 2008

D= DR. JAMES M. DENHAM

R= ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

D: It's, May 12, 2008, and I am once again here with Armando Rodriguez. We are here at his home. We're going to resume our conversations once again. Before we move into the 1963 through 1965 work with the church, there are two very important political events that occurred in Cuba that you would have certainly been knowledgeable about, and that of course is the Bay of Pigs event in 1961, that was actually April of 1961, then the Cuban Missile Crisis on October 22. Armando, can you remember a little bit about the Bay of Pigs? What was that day like, when did you find out about it, how did you learn about it? That was April 1961.

R: Yes. This was a great surprise for me to acknowledge about the Bay of Pig invasion. On this day, of course, I was leaving *Holguín* as pastor of the local churches in *Holguín* and also as the superintendent of all the *Oriente Province*. Of course in that time, we had many different struggles or problems with our government. This day, when the people arrived to Bay of Pig, I was in *Santiago de Cuba*, the capitol of the *Oriente Province*, because there was our pastor in *Marguerite* that was in jail in *Santiago de Cuba*. And I was doing some gesture to put him out of the jail. So when I was there, more than 200 kilometers from my home, I understood of this event. This was a little hard for me because I knew that this was a very difficult moment and I was very far from my home and my family. Then I went back to *Holguín* and, thanks be to God, the problem was in the center part of Cuba in *Las Villas Province*, very near where I was born. This was about 15 kilometers from the place where I was born.

D: So you were familiar with the terrain, the landscape and what it must have been like?

R: Of course, of course. Many times I was with my father fishing in the Bay of Pig area, in the sea. So then in *Yaguaramas*, in front of my sister's house, was a Cuban government tank, in the struggling against the invasion. So this was the occasion. But what around this reality is very interesting for me that even in that occasion and in spite of the government and *Fidel* declare the movement as a communist or socialist movement, there was I would say a good number of Cuban people in favor of *Fidel* and the Revolution. And they saw this as interference from the American government. They were very hungry for that.

D: So in your opinion, it was extremely counterproductive and it hardened the termination of the Cuban people to resist?

R: Well, there was in that moment a divided reality in the Cuban people. There were many different groups of people struggling by themselves against the *Fidel* government. But on the other hand, there was a good amount of people thinking that *Fidel* and his Revolution will do a good thing for the future of Cuba. This was a very difficult time in that aspect and I think if, this is my personal opinion of course, but I think that if in this moment they will win a battle, this will make *Fidel* and the Cuban Revolution one idealistic person and movement because in that time, I will repeat there were a lot of Cubans thinking that *Fidel* and this Revolution will be the solution for all the Cuban problems. But after that, in 30, 40, 50 years of government now, the Cuban people in the majority they think that the Revolution and *Fidel* don't fulfill their promise, their offer, their idea. Why? Because we have now difficult situation, for example, in the first time, *Fidel* had a good action to eliminate the prostitution in Cuba. But now they said that the government has developed the jungle in Cuba for the good of the people who come as tourists in Cuba.

D: Right. So the government is supporting the prostitution and profiting from it?

R: And then they for the Cuban people, *Fidel* and Raul and the Revolution, they are taking the money that they received, they don't accept the reality right now that, for example, the Cuban people who work with the other, the European, Spain enterprise, this company must pay in our currency in dollars to the government and the government pay in Cuban pesos to the worker. And this meant that the Cuban workers are receiving more or less the five or ten percent of their salary in high currency that the Cuban government are receiving. And for that reason, and many other reasons, that we are in Cuba all the people are the same. They are on the same level. But in the level, in a very low, low level. And this was the idea that they expected from this Revolution.

D: If we go back to 1961, do you think that the destruction of the invasion or the successful defense against the invasion strengthened Castro very strongly, made him almost impossible to overthrow by that time?

R: The understanding that now we have is that the invasion was planned by President Eisenhower.

D: Right.

R: And then when John Kennedy took the power, he didn't agree with that kind of struggle. And many writers said that originally the invasion must go to Trinidad, very, very near to the *Escambray* Mountains. And the way that they can go to the mountains and escape from the Cuban Army but Kennedy changed the plan to go to Bay of Pig without any defense, natural defense and some people said that Eisenhower planned the invasion to defeat the Cuban government but Kennedy sent the invasion to Bay of Pig to defeat the *(indiscernible), the people, the campaign. Do you understand?

D: So he intentionally botched the invasion so that he would get rid of the Cubans, the anti-Castro people?

R: Kennedy liked to have this group of Cubans out of the States. And of course, he didn't bring the support that was planning to have and for that reason, very easily and in a short time, *Fidel* can defeat the invasion.

D: How did you learn about the invasion then, did you learn about it that day? In what way, just people talking or radio?

R: By the radio.

D: Radio?

R: Yes. All the mass in Cuba was telling about that reality.

D: Now, the aftermath, the days after, what was it like the few days after the invasion was defeated? What was going on the few days after that, was there celebration, were people happy, were people celebrating, was Castro going around saying we've defeated the *Americanos*, etc.?

R: Yeah, in the moment that invasion came to Cuba, the government put in jail a lot amount of people that they thought were against the Revolution and they put them in baseball stadium and many other places and so this was a very hard time for many Cuban families.

D: Did you have any parishioners that were caught up in that?

R: No, no, because as I was in *Oriente*, in the east part of Cuba, 600 kilometers from the problem, we didn't have so big problem in that way. And then your question was?

D: Several days after, was Castro on the radio talking about how they had defeated the Americans?

R: Of course, and there was a very important picture that *Fidel* was in a Cuban government tank directing the defense of Cuba. And so he made a lot of publicity about that reality and he call this battle of the first defeat of the American in Latin America.

D: That was in April in 1961. Could you tell after that point leading up to October of 1962, that things were accelerating, the repression, was the repression getting worse based on the need to protect the Revolution, were there visible signs of harsher measures that were being put in place?

R: Of course. They made a great campaign against the people who were against the Revolution and bad situation was in that in that time, Cuba was completely isolated from all the world. What this mean, they can put impression they can segregate all the people that they want and nobody around the world know that situation. And they make of course a big campaign in that way. And of course we ask Christian people, religious people, if they said we had also our good part of repression because they said that we, the evangelical churches and the evangelical Christian in Cuba, we work together with the CIA and the American government. And this was a very, very hard time for our normal life, our reality.

D: Okay. October 22 is the Cuban Missile Crisis. Before that though, Castro had come out in favor of encouraging the Soviet Union to be more involved in Cuba. Did *Nikita Khrushchev* come to Cuba before October? I'm trying to remember did *Khrushchev* come to visit Cuba?

R: I think that the visit that we have in Cuba was the visit of *Mikoyan*.

D: Okay. Yes.

R: In the '60s, in the end of the '60s, he was the first Soviet leader to visit Cuba.

D: I knew there was somebody, yeah.

R: And he visited many different places and so there are a lot of jokes about his visit. Somebody said that *Fidel* was with *Mikoyan* in airplane seeing all the Cuban territory and *Mikoyan* asked to *Fidel* when he was in *Camaguey* and the places where they lost a lot of farms of cows and he asked to *Fidel*:

“¿*Todo esto es ganado ?*”

We call *ganado* the cow. And *Fidel* said:

“No, this is not *ganado*, this is *robado*.”

D: *Robado*?

R: They take it. And also in general in Cuba the people said, “Oh, we are having the visit of *Mikoyan*.” But the other people answer, “No, no, no, this will be *tu-koyan*, no *Mikoyan*” because *mi* is mine.

D: Right.

R: And *tu* is you. This is a combination of the word *Mikoyan*, *mi-koyan*, no, no, *tu-koyan*.

D: Okay. So in October 1962, October 22, 1962, we have the scary frightful experience of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Can you remember when you first learned of that and what you thought about it at the time?

R: This was we, the Cuban, understood a more dangerous situation than the invasion of Bay of Pig because for example, we were living in *Holguín* as I working there and *Holguín* was one of the bases that they were preparing for the missile. And we understood that if the American Army attacked Cuba, *Holguín* will be one of the destroyer places.

D: Now were you told by the government, were the people of Cuba told by Castro that we are planning this missile site and it's in *Holguín* and then we have others that are planned as well? Were you informed of that by the government or did you learn about that later on?

R: Well, we learn about something was happening because before this crisis, when *Fidel* and the other high-level leader of the Revolution spoke to the Cuban people, they spoke with a sense of security and power. We did not in that moment know why was that, but when we learn about the crisis of the missile, we learn that they thought that they will have the missile and so they will be more strong against the United States. And there are some general comments in Cuba that the U2 that was destroyed for the Soviet Army, that was because in that moment, *Fidel* was in the center of power of the Russian Army in Cuban. And he asked the person who was managing this equipment, "Oh, let me see how this work." And so when the person put the American U2 in the control view, *Fidel* was the person who pushed the button and destroyed the airplane and many people said that this was a very hard confrontation because *Fidel* did it, what they don't like to... And so other comment was that when Khrushchev made the agreement with Kennedy to finish the crisis, he was very, very, very angry with the Soviet because he don't like to finish this crisis. And then was very difficult for the Cuban people, a lot of fear and of course the Cuban government was transporting different arms in Cuba and some person said that this was one fact for the way that the American view of Cuba so a lot of military transportation from one to other place but the people said that there was the same equipment that they send from western to eastern and eastern to western, north to south and south to north to give the impression that they have a lot of equipment for the fight.

D: Okay. One other thing I want to ask you about politically here before we move on to your life in the church in '63 and '65 is *Operation Pedro Pan*. Did you have any familiarity with that activity, that is the process by which young children were taken out of Cuba and brought to the United States? Did you have any personal experiences with that project at all?

R: No, even in Cuba in general, we didn't know about that. I suppose that this was a project that the Catholics develop in their own parish with their own families.

D: I wasn't aware that it was primarily a Catholic thing.

R: Yeah.

D: Can you tell us a little bit about your work in the church beginning in 1963?

R: Yes. In 1963, of course, after the invasion of Bay of Pig, after the Missile Crisis with the United States, etc., we had very hard time in the church because we were considered an ally to CIA and the American government. And we had a very hard situation with the authority. For example, we lost different churches in different places, we lost not only the school and the clinic, but we lost also some sanctuary, some parsonage and some other property, as cars. Some cars that were used by the missionaries and we were using in our church, the government men took in different ways. For example, in *Holguín*, I had my car in the work shop doing some work and came some government leaders and they took without any premise and so we were only in the hand of God. And of course, we had the situation that after the missionary, American Methodist missionaries leave the country, continuously they were leaving the country, national pastor, lay leader of the churches in the --

D: So everybody's leaving if they can?

R: Leaving. And this was a very uncertain time.

D: Now as I understand it, as long as you could keep the churches occupied and people living there, there were no guarantees but at least as long as there were people there, you had some chance of maintaining your operation, correct?

R: Yes.

D: So one of your greatest challenges was trying to get people to come in and maybe take the place of others who had left?

R: Yeah.

D: And so that was probably a never-ending battle, would that be fair to say?

R: Yeah, we have in that way, you are mentioned correctly, two kind of battles. The first battle was of course to have preacher in every church, every Sunday, to have the door open in every church every week. And, thanks be to God, we had a wonderful group of young people that we training for ourselves and so we appointed them as lay preacher in different churches. We had very wonderful case for example, one young people of only 16 years old, I appointed him to the church in *Antilla*. That was one of the biggest churches. And in that way, thanks be to God, we had a preacher for every church every Sunday but not only the preacher, we had people living in the parsonage in the way that nobody can come and take by themselves the Methodist property. And the other side, we had this reality, not only of the people who left the country but also the people who had great fear to come to this church because in that way, the socialist and the communist people they work very good to put fear, intimidate the people. And, for example, they come to a wonderful Christian family, Methodist Christian family and said:

“Oh, I know that you are a Christian, you are Methodist and I am not against that reality, this is your business, this is your personal decision but I like to advise you that if you are going to the church, you are doing a bad thing for the future of the children because they will not can go to the university.”

And in other case, they come to the Methodist person and said the same thing:

“I am not against your faith, this is your own business, but I must advise you that if you like to have your job and even to have a promotion in the work, I think that your faithfulness to the church will affect your future, your salary, your work.”

And so in that situation, we had three bad situations, the people who left the country, the people who left the church because they thought this illusion will be the Kingdom of God for Cuba and the people who remain in the church but other make them to send fear about their *Fidelity*. But, thanks be to God, we have never feel fear and we said we will be here with you in the bad times and in the good times. And we challenge them if they like to be obedient to the Word of God to maintain their faith and their fidelity to God and one of my biggest recognitions is for many

women that they were wives or people who were members of the party. And then the Communist Party spoke with their husbands and said:

“If you like to be a member of the party, you must stop your wife coming and your children coming to the church.”

And then many of them spoke with their wives and tell them:

“Oh, my wife, I love you, you are the mother of my children but you must decide, the church or myself. If you continue to go to the church, I will separate you, I will divorce.”

But, thanks be to God, a lot of these women, they answer to their husbands:

“Oh, my dear, I love you, you are the father of my children and so but who you are, who need to take the decision. If you like to be my husband and to be at home, I will welcome you and I will appreciate but if you don't like my way of life, my faith, my faithfulness to God and the church, I am sorry but you must leave.”

And this was a great testimony. And we had family with four or five children in that situation and then the husband done left the wife and the family and all of the four children have been worker on the church. And for me, this is the greatest admiration, this is the people who maintain the Methodist Church in Cuba. This was the people who work and establish a new foundation for the Methodist Church that we have now in Cuba. It's a church founded in the faithfulness, in the fidelity to Christ, God and the church and they are ready to do everything and to give even their own life to extend the methods of God for the Cuban people. And of course, it's very interesting that now, in the reality situation in Cuba, as you saw in *Camaguey*, the church has the pretty place in the community, the sanctuary and the parsonage of the Methodist pastor are the wonderful place in comparison with all the community. And now the Cuban people are seeing that be faithful to God is the best way of to have blessing and victory in every situation, in every reality that we can have in our life, in our country. And for that reason, I am thinking that the Cuban Methodist leaders and people, they will do the best contribution with their faithfulness, with their work to all the Christian churches around Latin American and maybe all the world around.

Of course, there are very important occasion in 1963. In that occasion, in July of 1963, our cabinet met in *Santa Clara*, in *Santa Clara* church and Dr. Angel Fuster, who was our great Cuban leader in that time, a very nice servant of God, he read to us in the cabinet the letter that he received one or two days before from the Board of Mission that was the name that the mission agency that now are called the General Board of Lower Ministry, at that time, they called it Board of Mission. And then the Reverend Eugene Stockwell that was the secretary of the Board of Mission for Cuba, he wrote a letter to us telling us that for the love that the Kennedy Administration approve that no dollar not send from the States to Cuba, it was impossible to send the support that they were sending monthly to our general budget in Cuba. And this amount was the 60 percent of our total budget came from the Board of Mission. This was more or less eight or ten days before the end of July, the time when the treasurer must pay all the salaries, all the

bills in the Cuban church. And then he made the question, what we will do. Of course in the letter, Dr. Stockwell told us, we love you, we like to help you, we have the money to send you but it's again the law and we cannot do anything. And then Dr. Fuster asked us what we can do. And we ask him, what do you think that we can do. And he was very disturbed because he had in *Santa Clara* a very nice school and the government had taken one year before and this was a great thing, bad thing for him and so. And he said very upset:

“Well, I sorry, but I think that we must put out a number of pastors. We must finish a number of church worker and so and so because we will not have money for to pay.”

Then other district superintendent, very intellectual, very intelligent, he said:

“Well, I had other suggestion. The government has taken all our schools and colleges and many other properties. We must go before them and ask to give us some hundred thousand pesos for that reality and then we will have money to pay the price, the salary and the bill, to pay the bill.”

But there was a young district superintendent that had himself an idea. We must think that the church belong to God and the promise of God, I will provide, we must take. And by faith, we must go ahead. How? Well, we must write immediately a letter to all the churches in Cuba, to all the Cuban Methodist people telling them what is our reality and then ask them to answer to give more often for food to fulfill our necessity and not to decrease our number of pastors and our church work. The superintendent who said the idea to ask the government for some money and so on said:

“Oh, this is a faith opinion but I need to tell you, I have two children, I need to feed them, I need to support our family and I don't have problem because I can be a professor in the highest school and other place and so but I think that this to live by faith, this is not working.”

But in the end of course, we don't have any real solution in our hand. But the group agreed to ask for some thousands of pesos and to pay the salary and the bill of this month and to ask the local churches and the Cuban Methodist people to do a special effort for to fulfill our situation. And my brother, this was a great miracle. They ask for a loan to pay this month and then all the local churches in Cuba answer, send in to the general treasury of the church their balance in the local churches. Many members gave a very good special offering, and then after two months after this meeting, we were able to pay the loan, and to have a balance for more than two months of our budget in cash in hand. In my opinion, this was after this reality of the promotion that we made for the advance plan after the 1959 Annual Conference visiting different churches and telling them what was their goal and their task. And so this moment was very, very important moment for the responsibility of the church in Cuba because we told the Cuban Methodist people, we told the pastors and the churches if we like to have a church, we must pay the price in every way that is necessary. And this was for me a great experience that confirmed to us that if God is with us, we will not be nothing and nobody against us and against the church. And with this victory spirit, we will do the work in Cuba in any bad situation.

I was in jail, maybe I stole another moment in six occasions. We will explain every one in the future interview, but for me, this was the great blessing. Why? Because the *Oriente* district, my district, my people were in the first place given to the general budget in Cuba.

D: Now this was obviously very important but did this continue over time, did this continue as far as the contributions to keep the churches going?

R: This was the spirit that we continued to have, the spirit of victory. But of course, the reality was big and so in that time, we were able to have some help. For example, all the evangelical churches in Cuba were in the same way. And then we received one visit from the World Council of Churches in Geneva and we spoke with them about that situation. Then the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, they made what they call the Cuban Project where they put all the historical denominations in Cuba that had Board of Mission in the state and then they asked to the Board of Mission of different churches to make contributions for this project. The leader of the United Methodist Board of Mission and other mission leaders of other denominations had an interview with a high-level official in the State Department in Washington and they had a pretty good agreement. The State Department told the leader:

“You are free to send all the money that you like to the World Council of Churches and we will not investigate what they will do with this money.”

Under this understanding, they had the occasion of support the Cuban churches.

D: So this was in place by 1963 or '64 maybe?

R: More or less in '64. But this was not for many years, this was for three or four or five years. But of course, with the Methodists, we said that we will not ask for any amount of money that we will not need for our budget. And our asking, our petition from this project was low of many other churches. For example, the Episcopalian Church, they made the biggest amount of money. And this prepare to us the way when we were an autonomous church in Cuba in 1968, we were receiving some help from the Board of Mission but one of the agreements in our autonomy conference was to work with the Cuban Methodist in one stewardship campaign to have complete self-support in three years. In 1968, 1969 and 1970, we must have self-support. But, for the grace of God, we got it, this goal in one year. And then from that time, we have our self-support for all our churches, the seminaries duty, the general administration, the conference, the pastor salaries and so we had by ourselves.

D: Now would that come in the form of offerings or special gifts from well-to-do people or a combination or what? Everything, huh?

R: This was mainly 95 or 99 percent from the offering of people. 95 percent of our membership in Cuba, they were tithers.

D: Tithers, weekly offerings?

R: Weekly offering of at least the 10 percent of their income. And there were many of them that gave more than 10 percent. And this is the key model for the self-support. The church must be supported for the tithes of the membership. We can have other special activities and so but for other projects, social projects and so but for the support of the ministry and the church, this must come from the offering from our people.

D: Wonderful. So that's the financial part of the church pretty much up to 1970 I guess, would you say?

R: Yeah.

D: What were some of the highlights if we go further along, and you can go back to '63 if you want to, but what were some of the things that occurred let's say '63, '64, '65, '66, crises that you had personally, like maybe you mentioned going to jail a couple of times and so forth? And try if you can to try to go from the farther past to the more recent in chronological.

R: For me, the more bad situation was to be in a meeting of our national cabinet.

D: Your national cabinet?

R: Yes, when I met with the other members of the Cuban cabinet.

D: What year was this again?

R: This difficult time, 1962, 1963, 1964 and so. There was a very bad situation because when we met, their concern was about the future, the future of what they must do.

D: How long can we keep going on?

R: Yeah. And so my concern was the church work in *Oriente*, the great number maybe 25 or 30 young people, men and women working as lay missionary, all the advance project that we had and how we were able to support that and so. But when they gave me a chance for my report, all of them said, "Oh, Armando, here you are with your crazy mind, *con tu locuras*," because I was speaking about the group of lay preachers in the churches and how they are struggling with the bad situation, the problem in the church. And so some families that the teacher said to the father and mother:

"If your children continue going to the church, they will not be able to come to the school."

And so there were many other problems with the pastors. Of course, this bad situation in August or September of 1965, when the government started the *Unidad Militar de la Ayuda a la Producción*, Military Unit of Aid to the Production, this was to take a big number of pastors, youth leaders and other Christians to some type of nasty camp of concentration.

D: Work camps.

R: Work camps. Yeah.

D: An indoctrination camp.

R: An indoctrination.

D: Would this be for the youth or for everyone?

R: This was for youth, but some pastors that were in the 40s, in the 30s.

D: Now was this specifically meant for religious people to change their minds?

R: This was one of the goals but this was a place where they could also be lack *social*, the antisocial person. And then for that reason, they said we have here the antisocial person including the pastors and the Christians and the leaders. Also you must know that *Cardenal Jaime Ortega y Alamino*, the Catholic cardinal, he was also in that work camp in Cuba.

D: So were you put in there?

R: No. For the grace of God, why? Because in June 1965, two or three months before they started this work camp, I was moved from *Holguín* to *Marianao* in *Havana*.

D: By the church?

R: By the church, yeah. They appointed me from *Holguín Oriente* to there. And then the Revolution work in the level of province or state work and then as I was transferred from the *Oriente* province to *Havana* province, I was out of the authority there. How I learn that? Well, in that time, when any Cuban liked to move from one place to other in Cuba, they need three special permits. The first was one inventory of their property that they will move. In the second place, they need the transfer of the ... region car, and then they need to make the transfer of the military conscription. And then when I went to the *presidente del comite de defensa de la revolucion*, the president of the Committee of Defense of the Revolution, the person who must give me the inventory of my property in *Oriente Holguín*, she was a pretty good lady. Of course there was some problem with clear water in the area and we had in the parsonage a very good pump of water. And she was receiving water from my pump but she was a very honest person and so when I said to her I will move from here to *Havana*, she saw me in a special way and ask:

"Pastor, you will move from here?"

And I told her:

"Yes, with the Methodist pastors, we are the same as the military personnel, that they move us wherever they need."

And she said to me:

“Please don’t make me any question but I like to tell you I am sorry because you are moving but I am happy because you are moving. I cannot tell you more than that. But also, Pastor, in this world, there are a lot of bad, bad people.”

And then when I went to the military center for my transfer, military inscription transfer, they look and look and look for my file and they didn’t find it. They said to me come the next week. I went the next week and they didn’t find it. In the end, they give me a letter telling that for some reason, they didn’t find my military experience and so I present to the military in *Havana* this letter. What happened? In this time in the end of June and July of 1965, my military experience was together with all the people that they will bring to the UMAP, the work camp. But, God, I am very grateful to Him, He save me from this experience because I will say I don’t know if my faith will be the same if I was taken to this place.

D: Now in your knowledge, did you talk to people that experienced that and the kind of things that they went through, did they tell you about what went on, was there torture and what kind of bad things happened to them there?

R: In this time, of course, Dr. Angel Fuster was alive and he was our national leader but myself as a pastor, brother to other pastors and other young leaders that were in this camp, I visit them frequently because on Sunday, they can receive visitors. I visit them and I spoke with them, challenge them to be faithful and so and so. I told many of them:

“I suppose that you are having a very, very bad and hard time here but listen, I am sure that in this bad situation, your testimony, your faith, your play of life, your Christian attitude will be the best testimony not only before the other people in the same situation as you but even before the army officials and all the leaders that are doing that bad thing, you are giving the best testimony.”

And this was I am sure in that occasion. Of course, there was very difficult situation. For example, our brother Pastor Aldo Martin, who was the District Superintendent here in Lakeland District, he was pastor in *Santiago de Cuba Oriente* and he was in the UMAP work camp. And in that time, he had two special experiences. One of them was that his father died by a heart attack and then they permit him to went to the funeral of his father. But how? With two soldiers with big arms and then when the people in the little town of *Omaja* where he was born and all the people, even the Communist people knew him a good person, a good young person, they saw Aldo Martin coming to his father’s funeral with two soldiers with big arms, and the people said:

“How Aldo is in this situation, a good person, a good young person? We know that he’s not doing anything bad. Why?”

They ask here. And this was one of the situations. The other experience that he had of course, there were a lot of them with other pastors, but I will tell you the other experience. In that time also, when he was in the work camp, his first child, Aldito, Aldo, Junior, was born. And when he received the news that he was a father, he spoke with the soldier with his, I don’t know how you say, *el fusil y la bayonetta*, the knife, he spoke to him:

“Oh, how happy I am today. I received the news that I am a father. My first son was born.”

And the soldier saw him in a very special way and said to him:

“Well, I will tell you honestly, I don’t know if you have enough motive to be happy.”

“Why?”

“Because if your son will be the same that his father, maybe will be better that he was not born in this world.”

And these are some of the situations that they had, working, working, working, working and working at night and in the day and so. But I need to recognize the continuation that the pastors’ wives in many of these cases what wonderful work they did because many of them, the pastors’ wives in the churches where the pastor was in the work camp, they took the pulpit and they preached every Sunday. And in this occasion, I will tell you that I am very grateful to my dear wife, Alida, because she pay a big price of my ministry. In the first place, she was a primary teacher but she resigned because she liked not to teach the ... lessons that the teacher must teach the children. But in that way, she was at home taking care of our children. We had five children, three daughters and two sons and she was responsible for their education and everything because myself as district superintendent without a training pastor I need to be visiting all the churches in the district in a very frequent time.

Then of course, we had some other natural catastrophe in that time. In October of 1963, we had in *Oriente*, Hurricane Flora that was a hurricane that came to *Oriente* and then as the *Oriente* province is around a lot of mountains, around the province, the hurricane came into this mountain and don’t got out. There was about one week of hurricane. Mainly with rain, the wind was not hard, not so strong, but we had a lot of water. It was raining in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening, at night, all the time for more or less seven days. Of course there were a lot of floods. There were thousands and thousands of people who died.

D: Refugees and people who died?

R: And then we were at home but we have no food and so many people need to go out. And there were people who died when they were finding food. People who go out and up on the trees with children in hand but when there were one, two, three, they in that situation, they were sleeping and the children got down to the water and died. Many other great catastrophe, thousands and thousands of Cuban people in *Oriente* died in that occasion. Of course, the church was giving the message of faith and hope and struggle and victory in this situation. Then there were a lot of difficult situations that we struggled, but with the help of God, we were in victory all the time.

D: In 1965, you were transferred to *Havana*?

R: Yes.

D: How had *Havana* changed since you lived there as a student? I guess you'd gone back and forth a couple of times?

R: Of course.

D: But you left there to live -- the years you lived there before were 1950 --

R: The first time?

D: Yes, the first time you lived in Havana, what was that?

R: That I live in *Havana*?

D: Yes.

R: Well, I leave in *Havana* in 1952, when I went to work in the office of my sugar mill company.

D: Right. So you had not lived there since 1952?

R: Yeah. 1954.

D: How had things changed since 1954 for you?

R: Well, of course, in 1950, I was in *Havana* in the capitalistic period.

D: Exactly.

R: Then there was a very special recognition for people who were living in *Havana*. We had very good transportation system and we have all the opportunity in *Havana*. When I came in 1965, there were six years of socialistic government that this situation changed completely. Then there was not a very good public transportation. There were not a lot of cars in the street and there were some problems to find food. The reality that we have for all the people because when in that situation we were living in the rural area out of big city, we can find some vegetables, some fruit, some milk from the farms in the rural areas. But in *Havana*, you must live only with your quota, the amount of food that you receive as your ration. But, thanks be to God, my wife Alida, she is a very nice administrator of food and of home and our children were growing in a pretty good situation.

D: So how many children did you have at that time?

R: I have in that time four and we had the last one, Otoniel, when we were in *Havana*. I say that my youngest son, Otoniel, was a gift that we received from God when I was elected for the first

time as bishop of Cuba because he was born January 26th of 1968, and I was elected to the Episcopacy in February the 1st in this year, six or seven days after he was born.

D: So were you going to be a superintendent again of the *Havana* district?

R: Yes, I was the district superintendent in that region.

D: Would you say that would be the best post to have as a Methodist superintendent? Would people have wanted to do that, would that have been very highly sought after as far as a post?

R: Of course I was moved or appointed to Marianao because there was some problem with the former pastor there. And I had the record that to be one * *apagafuego*, to lose fear. I don't know how you say it.

D: To be fearless.

R: Yeah.

D: Not afraid.

R: No, but well, there are some big problems.

D: A problem solver.

R: Yeah, a problem solver.

D: I'm sorry, problem solver.

R: And for me and for the people in the *Oriente* district was very hard this change because of course, we were working in a very nice spirit and this change was hard. Of course, I am a Methodist pastor in the Wesleyan tradition and I accepted the change.

D: Well, you were in that area for ten years, correct, roughly ten years?

R: Yeah. For eight years.

D: In that area?

R: Yeah, yeah.

D: So what were some of the new challenges or new circumstances in *Havana* that you had to work with for the first time, you had to address for the first time? What were some of the problems I guess? And how were things different?

R: This was different because in *Oriente* in the last two or three years, I was only in charge of the superintendents. I was district superintendent without pastor appointment. Then in

Marianao, I had the appointment of the *Marianao* and *Havana* congregations and then district superintendent. And what's different because here we didn't have so big responsibility in the other local churches in the district. Why?

D: They supplied the pastors.

R: Yeah. And then we have the seminary students in the *Matanzas Seminary* that was only 100 kilometers from the churches and then we have seminary students to supply different churches.

D: So that made it a little easier then maybe?

R: Easier in that way but the problem was with the local congregation because they love the former pastor who had some trouble and then he didn't see me with goodwill. It was hard for me to work in that way. But with love and constant perseverance we had a pretty well experience in *Marianao*, and in that situation, I was consecrated as bishop in the local churches in that congregation.

But in other place, we were working in the cabinet and of course, I was supporting in the cabinet all the work in *Oriente* district. Of course here in *Havana* we had also a new relationship with the leader of the government. In the capitol and then the district superintendent in *Havana* ... works in as the second person in the leadership of the church. Dr. Angel Fuster was the leader even when he was not then a bishop but he was the leader and myself was the second in the church as the district superintendent in *Havana*.

D: Who in the government was specifically responsible for overseeing or watching the churches?

R: The Church Works.

D: Did you know that person?

R: Of course.

D: And did you have to work with that person pretty often?

R: Of course.

D: And make him happy or make him not angry or whatever?

R: Yeah.

D: And who was that person? There might have been more than one.

R: Yeah. In the first place, the government had two different organizations for the work with the church. In the first place is the Office of Religious Affairs in the Center Committee of the Party in *Havana*. This person was Dr. Jose Felipe Carneado, a lawyer. He was born in *Sagua la*

Grande in the north part of *Las Villas* province where I was born in the south part. He was a lawyer. He was a very good Communist but very intellectual and good to our man. He can speak with you in every aspect of the art, the poetry, in every way of the life. He was a very wise man.

D: Did you know him before the Revolution?

R: No, no. I didn't. I knew him in that way. Then his office, the Religious Affairs Office in the Central Committee of the Party was the office that was in charge of the main political direction of the party with the church. Then also there was second agency or organization that is the *Registro de Asociaciones*, Association Registrar. That was the first time part of the interior ministry. This mean the police land. And then they were in charge to see that the church obey the law. Then the Office in the Center Committee established the direction and they saw for the accomplishment of the law and the religious affairs. Of course, we had different interview with them. But thanks be to God, I, myself, I have a very clear and deep conviction of my faith and my task. What this mean? I was and I am and I will be a servant of God with any other interest, with any other goal. Then I was able to accept all these people responsibility from the government as a person of the government to whom I must be able to negotiate and work with them in the business of the law. And then the New Testament said that we, the Christians and the pastors will be put before government and judged and this will be for testimony before them. This was my conviction. I will not preach then the salvation Jesus Christ but with my life, with my testimony, with my character, I will be maybe the Bible that they can read. Then with that idea, I was free, I was ready to go before them in different level. I had many good and great experiences.

For example, in one occasion, we lost some houses and property in the church and I need to go to the Ministry of Justice in the reform *Havana, Holguín* reform, for work with that occasion. In the very high level, I went to this office every time that was necessary but do you know what? In one occasion when I finish my interview, I was in the hallway to the elevator and then came to me one of the employees there with many secret words:

"Pastor, I like to say to you that I was educate in a Christian school and I have faith, I have Christ in my heart but I don't have one Bible. Will you be able to give me a Bible?"

And I told him:

"Oh, yes. The next time when I will have other interview or appointment here, I will bring you a Bible."

And of course, in the next appointment, I put one Bible in the newspaper and then I bring them. And then when I finish my interview, I make some sign to him and he come to me in the same place and I gave to him this Bible. This reality made me very, very happy because not only I was giving testimony in all the levels, I am the bishop of the Methodist Church, I come here for that interview. This was for me great because I was given the Christian testimony before these people with respect in the former situation. Then knowing that all the people were seeing me as

a Christian leader in the middle of the very difficult atmosphere against the Christians because in that time was not any clear sign about the future and *Fidel* and all the Revolutionary leaders said the church belong to the past. Now the present belong to the intellectual person. The church is part of the social, lack of social of the past. But I was happy to be a servant of God, an ambassador of the Kingdom of God before these people and these realities.

D: Back to the meeting that you had --

R: And this kind of relationship, now, when the years have passed and we know more about the socialistic system, how to work with other people who are not in favor of the Revolution, I asked myself what happened in different situation. For example, in this first time, I was called to some meeting with the *Registro de Asociacion*, Association of Registrar, and I went to the place and somebody told me:

“Oh, the people who arrived to meet you is not here. Please come here to this room and wait for him.”

Was one hour, two hours, and the people don't come. After some time, somebody went to the room and said:

“Well, maybe the person who like to meet you wasn't able to come, please go back and we will call you again.”

But now we understand that this is the system and the way for to put a person in a special room and they put in that room some bad atmosphere that danger the health and the person. Do you know that?

D: In the air, in the filters of the air.

R: Yeah.

D: Did you feel it at the time? Did you think about it?

R: Nothing, nothing. And another thing, they bring me some refreshment of sort but something asked me was there different kind of glass and said, Oh, they don't have the same glass for all people but I don't know if they knew what will be my glass and what they put there. But I rather God save me in all this situation in all the experience. Never in my time in Cuba, I was sick. I didn't have high blood pressure, I didn't have any sickness. I am sure that God save me of any plan that they have for me. Now I am 78 years old and two weeks ago, I was for the first time in the hospital here in Lakeland with some heart problem but in Cuba, and 18 years after that, I didn't have any health problem because God has been faithful and he save me of everything. For that reason, I am very, very grateful to God.

D: We will continue this on the 15th of May, Thursday, okay.

R: Thursday.

D: My name is Mike Denham and I'm once again at the home of Armando Rodriguez. We're here today to resume our oral histories. Today is May 15th. We're actually going to go back a little bit chronologically and cover some material, some time that we've already been through. But we're going to begin with Armando Rodriguez' reflections of the two bishops that he served under in the 1950s in Cuba, the first being Roy Short and the second being Branscomb, John Branscomb. So welcome today.

R: Thank you. Welcome to my home and God bless your life, your work and everything.

D: Could you reflect a little bit about Roy Short and what kind of person he was and how you came to know him and your memories of him and his beginning as bishop in, is it 1952?

R: 1952 to --

D: 1952, was that the first year that you met Reverend Short?

R: Yes, in that occasion. I think that he was bishop of Cuba from 1948 until 1956. Bishop Short and Bishop Branscomb were the two bishops from Florida that at the same time were the bishop of Cuba on that occasion. I had a great memory of them. I can say that their life, their ministry, their love to God and the Methodist Church in Cuba, this was a great challenge to my life at that time, a young person of 22 or 24 years old. Bishop Short made a great contribution to the Methodist Church in the '50s. He helped to build different churches in Cuba. One of them, the San Pablo Methodist Church in *Camaguey* Reverend Victor Rankin was the pastor. Also, he helped to build the Methodist Church very near to the university, we call the university Methodist Church in *Havana*. He helped a lot but more than that --

D: That is the location that's still in use by the Methodist Church.

R: Yeah. And now there is the Central Office of the Bishop in Cuba, in that place. More than that, he organized with Dr. Harry Denman who was the General Secretary of the General Board of Evangelism in that time. He was a layman but a very, very special Christian layman. I will speak a little bit about Dr. Denman. He loved Jesus, he was a layman and was not married. He said that he was the tithe on the reverse, he gave to the church 90 percent of salary. He used for himself the 10 percent. In that way, we had in Cuba many different chapels in different places that he build with his own money.

D: So he was in business there in Cuba?

R: No, not in business. He was only a leader of the General Board of Evangelism.

D: What was his profession?

R: I don't know exactly. But I know that he was a layman and my opinion, he worked full-time as General Secretary of the General Board of Evangelism.

D: Was he an American?

R: Yes, of course. He was an American. And he and Bishop Short, they established the International Evangelical Campaign in Cuba every year. He send more than 100 American Methodist pastors, everyone who was in the different local churches in Cuba, have an Evangelical campaign in every church, in every school and of course, in Cuba. This was a very good impact in the development of our church in Cuba. Also of course through this campaign, International Evangelical Campaign, we had a very good relationship with different churches in the United States and Cuba. This made many, many good things. For example, in one year, we had in the Methodist Church in *Cienfuegos* where I was converted in the Methodist Church in *Cienfuegos*, we had the pastor from Grand Rapids in Michigan. Then when he went back to his local church in Grand Rapids, he spoke about his experience. So there was an American family in his church, the Thomas family, that they asked to have one younger in their home for study high school.

D: I think we covered some of that.

R: Yes, we covered that. Then two of my sisters came to the Thomas home and they started here. So of course there were many, many other spiritual offering cooperation between the churches. So Bishop Short together with Dr. Harry Denman, they establish this wonderful work. His faith, his humbleness, his personality, his character was very, very good and the Cuban Methodist people received him with a lot of love. In the end of the 1950s decade, was a project that was not possible to do. The project was to build a big church in *Santiago de Cuba* in *Oriente* with the name of Roy Short. But as the Revolution take the power in 1959, and so and so, was impossible. But the will of the Methodist Church in Cuba and Florida was to build in his memory a sanctuary in *Santiago de Cuba*. After him in 1956, Bishop John Branscomb was appointed to Cuba and Florida and also he did a great contribution to the development of the Methodist Church in Cuba. He appointed a new group of missionaries to different places in Cuba. He supported the school, clinic and all the social work that the church was doing there. I finish my seminary in 1957, but one year before in 1956, in my last year in the seminary, he approved that I was married because in that way, my wife, Alida, she can come one year in the seminary and study in Christian education and be more prepared to be a pastor's wife in the work. This is a sign how he help every detail of the church in Cuba.

D: How were both Branscomb and Roy Short's personalities different or alike? What were their personalities like? Were they similar or different?

R: No, both of them have the same love of goodwill for the Methodist Church in Cuba. But of course, every one of them was different in their character and so. Bishop Short was a very smart man. He was the director of the *Upper Room* before being elected as the bishop and he was a more theological and intellectual person working in very important aspect or emphasis in the church. Bishop Branscomb's personality was more energy and effort. For that reason, in 1958, at a very, very early age, he died from a heart attack because he was visiting the missionary in Brazil in different country.

D: He had a heart attack?

R: Yeah. Bishop Branscomb was not only a great leader here in Florida and also in the Methodist Church in Cuba, but he visited the missionary in Brazil and many other Latin American countries. For that, great work, very hard work, he died in 1958 from a heart attack. In that situation, Bishop Short, who was the bishop in Louisville, Kentucky Annual Conference, he was appointed by the Council of Bishops in U.S.A., as the bishop of Cuba transitorily. And then I was ordained as deacon in 1957 by John Branscomb and then in 1959, when Bishop Short was transitorily in the Annual Conference of Cuba, he ordained me as elder. I have this as a great privilege to be ordained for this great servant of God.

D: Now we're going to resume our conversations and go back a little bit in time to times that we've already discussed but the new subject we'd like to take a look at is your various incarcerations, your jail experiences, going to jail, both before and after the Revolution.

R: Especially after the Revolution.

D: Would you like to talk about the period after?

R: After the Revolution. This was a very interesting experience because we thought that the Batista Army was very bad and they put in jail the people very easily. But after the Revolution, we had the same experience.

D: Even more so?

R: Yeah.

D: Even worse?

R: Even worse, yeah. Especially my problem was that I was a Methodist pastor, a Methodist leader in Cuba. My first experience in jail was very early in October of 1959. I was pastor of the Methodist Church in *Manzanillo Oriente* in that time and I invited Reverend *Ovedio Amaro*, one of my student colleagues in the seminary to have one evangelistical activity in my church in *Manzanillo* and of course in that year, 1959, less than one year when the Revolution began, one day I bring him to different important place for this Revolution in the *Sierra Maestra* region. We were visiting different places. One of them was the Barrack of *Central Estrada Palma* near to *Yara* where when *Fidel* was in the mountain, he took this barrack with the *Coronel Varela* as chief of the Batista Army in that place. And in that moment, when we were seeing the barrack, the Revolutionary Army put us in jail for some hours because they thought that we were against this Revolution.

D: Do you remember what month that was?

R: This was in October of 1959. This was a great surprise for us because we considered ourselves in favor of the Revolution, in favor of the *Fidel*, but even in that time, they were very hard thinking that any Cuban person can be against them. This was for some hours in the day and when we back to *Manzanillo* I spoke with --

D: I'm sorry, I didn't get the purpose of your visit. What was the purpose of your visit to the Barracks?

R: The purpose of the visit was to show my friend, Pastor *Ovedio Amaro*, the *Estrada Palma* Barrack where *Fidel* took in battle.

D: So you were just trying to show him a place of interest.

R: Yeah.

D: And all of a sudden, you were taken by the authorities and put in jail because they suspected you.

R: Yeah. We didn't take any picture, we were only seeing.

D: Now were you surprised at this?

R: I was very surprised because in that time, I thought that nobody in Cuba had any bad feeling against *Fidel* and against the Revolution. This was a great surprise for me. But this can we see as them were very afraid of anything.

D: We know that personal relationships which you had created, you had been in that area for many years, five years, people knew you, they respected you, so you would have been known to them. So were there any instances of people that you knew who were now part of your captors or part of the guards?

R: Yeah, the chief, the Revolutionary chief in *Estrada Palma* was not from this region.

D: So he didn't know you?

R: He didn't know me. But I explained to him who we are that we were Methodist pastors and I had this visitor and I like to show him the interest places around the region. But they didn't accept my explanation. They say, "No, maybe you are against us and you like to do anything bad against us." But I suppose that he call other superior chief and they said, "No, this is not a bad man." The second experience in jail was in 1960, when I was in the *Havana* Harbor for to take a ferry from *Havana* to West Palm Beach that every day we had ferry bringing to Cuba some food and other things from the States and taking vegetables and many other things from Cuba to bring to the States but they had also a group of passengers. Then I had my ticket for that trip that day and I was in the horrible in the customs and in the police there. Then when I was in line and I had my turn, the soldier asked me, "*Please be in that place.*" Then after he received the other people in line, he asked me "*We have order of detention against you.*" And I asked, "*What happened?*" "*No, no. That is so.*" Then they took me to the little office and several police interview me for one or two hours asking me many, many things. In that time, I was very quiet because I have not problem. During my interview came some other policemen and opened the door of our office and he asked to the police who was interviewing me, "*What do you think?*"

It is or not it is? This is the man or not?” For me, this was nothing but after that, I understood that they asked the police that was interviewing me if he think that I was the person who they were looking for. And then after that, they took me and see all my dress, my circuit and after that, one of the police took me and bring me to the central office of the police, the police station, and he put me in the third or fourth floor and then he went to the records that they have and they come back after one or two hours and asked me, *“Do you have an ID as pastor, who you are?”* I said, *“Yes, I have my pastoral ID of Methodist pastor.”* I begin at 9:00 in the morning and this was maybe 3:00 in the afternoon, and he said, *“Well, I think that you are not the man who I am looking for.”* I said, *“Oh, I am very happy to hear that.”* And then they bring me to the harbor and the ferry of course stayed a long time in the harbor and I was able for me to come to the States in that time.

What was my purpose to come here to Florida? In that time, when the missionary left the country, when many national pastors and leaders left the country and I was ready to be in Cuba, I like to see in Florida how the church was thinking about us, the pastors who remain in Cuba. There was not a pretty good experience here in Miami because I came to West Palm Beach and then traveled to Miami where there were many other friends, pastors and laymen and I stay at home with them. But all of the Cubans in Miami were asking me,

“Oh, Armando, you will return back to Cuba? How you will do that? If you are here, why you don’t stay here and then ask your wife and children to come here because they thought there was not an opportunity to preach in Cuba.”

Of course, they were right because the situation was very, very bad, the relationship between the Revolution and the church was very hard, very difficult. But I thought that God like to have me in Cuba despite the difficult situation. The problem was that my name, Armando Rodriguez, is a very common name in Cuba and after that, I learn that there was other Armando Rodriguez also born in *Las Villas* province where I was born that was traveling to Florida and Cuba and doing things against the Revolution. But in the end, I was free and I traveled to the States and I made all my purpose here in Florida. The first one was more problematic. This was in 1961, when we had the very great campaign with the *Sempre Lore del Evangelio* campaign about one or two hundred young people of our churches in *Oriente* visiting house by house and giving Christian literature that was made for *Alfalit*, a literacy campaign that the leader of the church in Cuba had made before the Revolution.

D: Also if I’m not mistaken in 1961, there was an issue by the Castro government to stamp out illiteracy, too? Is that correct?

R: Yes.

D: So this theoretically would have been in conjunction with the government and you could have worked hand in hand with that.

R: That’s exactly --

D: Ironically this fizzled I guess. This was unfortunate.

R: In reality, but of course the problem was that they liked to have everything in their hands.

D: They wanted to have everything themselves distributed themselves.

R: By their control.

D: By their control.

R: No other people can do anything. Then visiting in the rural area, visiting the poor people, giving to them Christian literature, Bible and so, they don't like that. For that reason, I was visiting the group of young people that were working in the *Baracoa* Mountains. Then I was in the home of some Methodists there and in the morning, the first day, I begin to visit different places, rural places very early in the morning and I come back at home in the evening. Then when we were walking through the mountains and the rural way, when we were returning back to the home, there was a truck that came in front of us and when the truck was very close to us, he stopped and two army members with big arm, they came to us and asked:

"Who is Armando Rodriguez?"

And I say:

"I am."

And they say:

"Well, I have order of detention against you."

They were in the home where I was leaving from the morning until that hour but as they saw that I didn't come back, they was returning back to the barrack but in the way they found me, they take me, the other Methodist was there, he say:

"No, you can't go."

The problem was with me. They took me in the truck but in that bad situation or occasion, I had one *estrategia*, the *estrategia* was to have communication with the sergeant that picked up me. I asked the chief of the two of them:

"Where are you from? Are you from here?"

And in that way, we begin a good conversation and I told him:

"I am a Methodist pastor, I am here visiting the Christian home and supervising the work that the group of young people are doing and so and so and so."

And this make a good personal connection between myself and the chief of the guard that pick up me. And then he told me:

“Oh, I am suffering a lot because I was baptized when I was a child in a Protestant Church but I didn’t go right now to the church but I maintain my faith in God and I had a big problem. My wife has cancer and she is ready to die.”

And then I minister to him. This was a blessing not only for him but also for me. Why? Because when he brought me to the barrack, the political person in the barrack that ordained my detention, was not there in the barrack, in that moment. He was visiting other place with some problem. And then the soldier that picked up me, he said to the other chief that was in the barrack:

“This is the man that ordained me to pick up and he is here but I understand that he is not a bad man.” And when I saw a bad man doing bad things, I am very strong guard but if I saw that there is a good man, I respect him and I like to help him.”

Then the chief in the barrack asked me:

“Who you are, what are you doing here?”

I explained him what. And he asked me:

“What about the boxes that you bring with you?”

They knew everything. I told him:

“Well, these are boxes of Christian literature. And please, if you have any question, any doubt about that, I ask you to be with me and to see what we have. You can be sure that we have not anything bad, only good thing for the people.”

And then he say:

“Okay. You are free.”

The army person invited me to a little restaurant and he pay for my dinner. And he asked me:

“Where you will go?”

And I said:

“I like to go back to the home where I was leaving.”

But he told me:

“Oh, you don’t know the way and it is not recommended for you to be here. Where I can bring you?”

And I tell them the name of other Christian who live very near there. And, thanks be to God, in that moment when we finish our dinner and I was ready to leave, there was other truck who will go in the same way where live other Christian family. The army person asked the driver to pick up me there in that home and then at 9:00 I was in a very good place, in the home of other Christian, sleeping in a very good bed and very happy. And the next morning, the person at home, he work in some office of coffee and *cacao* that was going in the harvest in that area and he asked me:

“I will bring you to the place where the barrack are and in that place, you will be able to take some truck or car for to go to the home where you were.”

But when he bring me to the barrack place, there was the person who ordained my arrest there and then I was in the corner where all the car pass away for to take other car and then he knew that I was the person who he like to have in jail and he passed in my side and he saw me from up to down one or two times and then he come back and saw me other time. In my opinion, they like to put fear in myself and then in the third or fourth occasion when he did that, he asked me:

“Are you Armando Rodriguez?”

And I said:

“Yes, I am. How I can help you?”

He said:

“Oh, the guard last night, he didn’t well the thing because you must be all the night in jail and I need to bring you to the other city.”

But I ask him:

“Why is this?”

“Oh, because we, the Revolutionary people, we like to do many things in favor of our people, our rural agriculture and rural people. And there are a lot of people who are against us and I think that you are against us too.”

I explain to him:

“Oh, no, you are wrong. I am a pastor and my task is to help these same people. And then, for example, our church established the agriculture school in Preston, in Oriente and there we teach many young people from the mountain and the rural area, teach them how to grow different things and how to work the land and so. We like to do also good things for the poor people. But that was in front of a great group of people.”

D: A lot of people gather around and increasingly, more and more people are coming.

R: There was more angry and he told me:

“Oh, you must know that you don’t have security for your life here in this region.”

And I asked:

“Why? I am a Christian, I am a pastor. I am doing good things for the poor people.”

“No, you are not doing anything. You are a Christian and you are telling people many stories that are not true.”

And then a little far from there was the soldier that the day before pick up me and in some moment when the Communist leader was a little quiet, he made a sign to me, asking me to go where he was. And then I go from this group of people to him and he told me:

“Oh, pastor, I am sorry for this situation.”

And he repeat to me:

“I am a soldier and I am against the bad people but when I see a good person as you are, I like to help him. Come with me and I will see what car you can take and go to the home where you were.”

And so I finish this experience.

D: So the leader left after this spectacle, he left and just left you all?

R: No, he was in the group but I left the group.

D: So you were able to leave after this tongue-lashing or warning?

R: Yeah, because in my opinion, he was happy to finish in that way the discussion because he didn’t have any strong argument against me in front of the people. And then in that way, when I left the group, everything was finished and he has not to do anything more. After that, I back to the home where was my suitcase. They had a great concern about me but I told them:

“No, everything has been okay.”

I can tell you my brother that when the soldier pick up me in that rural area in the mountain, in the first place, I need to say to you, I have fear. But after that first moment, I prayed to God by myself, and then God help me. And after that first moment, I felt in my life, the presence of

God, the company of the Holy Spirit and I was not in fear in any way. On the contrary, I thought, "Oh, it's nice to have problem because we are testifying of Jesus and preaching the gospel." And in that spirit, I was in the spirit of victory in all this process I told you. Then the other day, Saturday, this second day, Saturday, I continued visiting places. In one occasion, there was other soldier with big arm with a *canana*, the bullet.

D: A machine gun?

R: Machine gun, and the bullet in his car and he asked me:

"Who are you?"

I told him:

"I am Pastor Armando Rodriguez."

And he told me:

"Oh, yes. I know. You are the pastor with the white card."

I gave in the barrack my card where it said my name, my task as the superintendent of the church in the region:

"I know you are the person who are bishop in this region and we like to tell you that you are not welcome in this region."

And I told him:

"Why? Why are you saying that?"

He said:

"No, because all of you, the Christian people are against this Revolution. And we are sure of the Revolution. Maybe I can tell you that we have not fear of any other army that came to Cuba to bring back against us even when we will be ten Cuban soldiers we can defeat 100 other soldiers."

But after that, he said:

"I don't know what happened because this is our thinking about our struggle but against you, we cannot do nothing because we like you to fight against us but you don't fight against us. We cannot do against you. Please go ahead."

And of course, I was happy to go ahead and continue to visit the people.

D: Just so I understand, all of this, the first time you were picked up and to the present went about three or four days, it was about a three or four-day period?

R: Yeah.

D: Okay. Just so we understand. So this was I guess Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday?

R: Friday, Saturday and Sunday. But in my opinion, this Communist chief that was in charge of the political matter in the region, they spoke to all the armies in the region about myself and they were seeing what I was doing and where I was. On Sunday evening, the Baptist congregation invited me to preach and of course I did it. The sanctuary was full. Many people were inside the window and the door and so I was sure that there was also a pretty good amount of people from the government not in the army dress but as civil dresses seeing me and hearing me what I will be preaching. But my sermon was very strong and I spoke to them, what is our task as Christians in different situations.

When I was in the seminary, the president of the seminary visited some country in Africa and he spoke with the grandson of one African leader that was a cannibal and this cannibal people eat some missionary and preacher in Africa and he was his grandson, but this grandson was a Christian. Then the president of our seminary told us he is a very interesting conversation. How the Christian missionary, the Christian missions changed this bad situation in Africa. I put in my sermon this as an example what the Christian missionary and preacher do in different places of the world where there are difficult situation, even where there was cannibal people. This was my message. The service was finished without any problem. Then I had no more problems. Then the Monday, the day after Sunday, I back to *Holguín*. This was a very interesting experience for me. I was in difficult situation but God helped me, God was with me in any moment and I thought I gave the good testimony before not only the Christian and the people in general, but also before the leader of the Atheistic Revolution, what we as Christians were.

D: What year was this again?

R: This was in the beginning of 1961.

D: Was this before or after the Bay of Pigs?

R: This was before, before the Bay of Pigs. The other experience --

D: So this will be number five coming up?

R: No, this is number four, the number, third.

D: Three?

R: The number three, yeah.

D: All right.

R: The number three was *Baracoa* this is in. Now the number four.

D: Four.

R: Was in *Buey Arriba* a town in *Sierra Maestro* Mountains where we had Reverend John Stroud as missionary and he started a great work in *Buey Arriba*, the name of the town, very close to the *Sierra Maestro* Mountains. And then he buy about 20 or 30 acres of land and he build a parsonage, church. But of course in the 1960s, he need to go back to the States and we appointed Cuban lay preacher to work there. Of course, as they don't have a pretty good theological training in the seminary, I need to go to all these places supervising the work. But in that time, this was in 1965, the government took all our property, the land, the parsonage, the sanctuary, everything.

D: Everywhere?

R: Everywhere. They took it.

D: Now when you say they took it, did they expel the people immediately? Did they expel the residents if there were people living on the property, did they have to leave?

R: Yeah. Permanent residents were ... lay preacher. And they took the property and this to lay preacher must leave the place.

D: And this went on everywhere throughout the island, everywhere?

R: But especially they have a special interest in rural places as the *Sierra Maestro* Mountains, the *Baracoa* Mountains. This was a very special places where they don't like to have any Christian voice.

D: Because they were afraid of potential guerilla activities perhaps like they had participated in. And it was far away from their supervision?

R: That region as their region.

D: And also potentially dangerous for their movement.

R: Yeah. But I have this specific date. In March 13, 1965, a Methodist family in this place, *Buey Arriba*, *Sierra Maestra*, in the *Bayamo* region, they like to have the baptism of one child. And then we didn't have sanctuary, we didn't have property, we don't have any parsonage, but they invite me as pastor to their home and to have the baptism of the child. Of course, when the other members of the congregation knew that I will be in this home, many of them, 60, 80, 90 persons came to that home for the baptism. But of course, in that occasion, when we met with all this wonderful congregation, I had the baptism of the children but we have a normal service except that we didn't pick up an offering. But we read the Bible, we had many Christian songs and so. And I preached and everything was very, very peaceful, very nice. A great happiness

was in the Christian people having this opportunity. When I finished my service, my sermon, somebody told me:

“Oh, there are two soldiers outside of the home that like to speak with you.”

I went to them and they asked:

“Please accompany us to the barrack.”

I would repeat the barrack of the Revolutionary Army was in the parsonage that belonged to the church. I went there and asked them:

“What do you like with me?”

And he said:

“Oh, we had a lot of concern because in your sermon, you said that and that and that. More than that, we are now bringing people from all Cuba to the mountain to pick up coffee and to work and you are coming here to have this other gathering without any important matter for the economy of Cuba.”

And I said:

“Oh, forgive me, but, you know this family asked me to baptize the children and as pastor, I need to do my job.”

And I didn't ask the people to come there. But they were not happy. Then they said:

“Sit down here please.”

After that, there was a group of six or eight officials that asked me to come to the room where they were and make me a great interview.

D: Interrogation?

R: Interrogation, yeah. They asked me:

“Who are you? Where do you live? Where are you doing here?”

But this was different questions from different official in the group talking together. I was a little disappointed. Of course I said for myself:

“I am a good man, I am not doing any bad thing.”

But there are this situation and I answer the question in the best way. After half an hour or so at this meeting, they finished and said:

“Okay. Sit down.”

And so I said:

“Well, I am finishing. They know who I am and so and so.”

But sometime after, maybe 15 or 20 minutes, there was other group and the same amount officials and they ask me to be with them and was the same interrogation.

“Who are you? Where do you live? What are you doing here?”

I said for myself in my mind, *“Oh, I told the other group the same answer of the same question. Why they are asking me this situation but were the same.”* And this was for three times. Three different groups have interrogation to me with the same questions with the same matter. After that, they asked me:

“Sit down here.”

This was in the main room of the house. And in that time, they came with other young person in a very bad struggle. The person was crying:

“Oh, what are you doing with me? You are doing bad thing with me.”

And the soldiers that bring him were very strong taking their hand and so and so. And then he go to the same way that me, a group of officials interrogating him and so and so and so. And in the end, they asked both of us, the other young person who was taken after me and myself, and they put me in a very little room of the house with only one table, one *buro*, official *buro*. And then they close the door and we were alone there. Of course, immediately I thought, *“Oh, I am sure that the army has put some microphone here and they like to hear what we will be talking in this place.”* For that thinking, I was very quiet and I said I need to see what will I speak here. Then when we were in this place after 10 or 15 minutes that we didn't talk one to other, the other person asked me:

“Oh, why are you here? What is your problem?”

And I told him:

“Oh, no. I didn't have any problem. I am a pastor. I was here baptizing children and the soldier put me here. But I don't have any problem.”

And he said to me:

“Oh. I have a big problem. I am in some activity against the Revolution and this day March 13th was the anniversary of the death of Jose Antonio Echevarria, the

leader of the student directory in Havana, who attack the Batista palace and he was dead.”

D: So this was an important anniversary for the Revolution.

R: For the Revolution. And *Fidel* was speaking to all Cuban people about the date and the *Jose Antonio Echevarria*. And then he said that he was speaking against the speech of *Fidel*. And for that reason, the army took him. But I told him:

“Well, please, I will not like to speak of our problem, about your problem.”

“Why?”

“Because we are here together and I like to be very quiet and not speak of any problem.”

I was thinking that our conversation was knowing about the microphone there. But he was quiet a little amount of minutes but after that, he asked me:

“Do you know Raul Escalona and Candido Perez?”

These were other lay preachers of the Methodist church.

“Oh, yes, I know, they are preacher as myself and so I know them.”

He like to put some common situation with me. And then he asked me about another after that:

“What do you think as Christian about the homosexual person?”

And this put me in a very upset situation because for myself I thought maybe this young person is a homosexual and he plan to put together with me in that room and after that to speak anything against my moral. And I was very careful. And I told him:

“Well, the Bible said that not homosexual, not moral people can go to the Kingdom of God but when Jesus Christ was dead on the cross, he pay for all our sins. And even the homosexual, Jesus can change their life and so and so and he can enter in the Kingdom of God if he accepts Jesus Christ as his savior.”

And then I took this way but of course, this was maybe 11:00 or 12:00 at the night and then after that, I asked him, “Oh, we must stay here all the night and I am sleepy. I like to sleep. Please take the side in the room that you like for you and I will take the other side because I like not to be very close to him.” And then he didn’t answer me. But in that occasion, I told him, “Well, I will take this place, the little place.” And then I sit down in the floor and put my head against the *buro* and he say, “Oh, excuse me, but I like to sleep.” He was not quiet and then he began to knock the door very strong.

D: Okay. He began to knock on the door.

R: Yeah. And then come some guard and open the door and he ask:

“Do you have a cigarette for me?”

And he bring the cigarette and was everything okay. After that, I told the guard:

“I like to go to the restroom before sleeping.”

And the guard bring me to the restroom. And I come back and I sit down in the same place. But after some time, maybe at 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning, some guard came to us, open the door and told us:

“Oh, both of you, you can go.”

I had a little concern because I asked myself, “They would like to *aplice* to us the *la ley de fuga*.” This means that they like to us to go out of the barrack and then to kill us because we were leaving the place.

D: Shot while trying to escape?

R: Yeah.

D: Shot while trying to escape.

R: Yeah. And then this was my great concern but I told myself, “*Oh, Armando, you must be very quiet and don’t think any bad thing in your mind.*” And we were together walking for the state and when we were about one or two blocks without any words between us, I told him:

“Oh, do you can see? We didn’t have any problem. We are free.”

And then he told me:

“Well, I must tell you we are free because I spoke.”

And I answer:

“What do you mean you spoke?”

And he explained to me:

“Yes, we are in different line. I am a communist and I was with you for to hear your conversation anything. But I must tell you I saw I you a deep peace in your mind, in your life and for that reason, we knew that you are not a bad person. And then we are ideological in both lines but I like to tell you we have nothing

against the real Christians, the good Christians. You can go and leave and you will not have problem."

D: So did you suspect this might be the case all along?

R: No.

D: Did you ever have any idea this was the case?

R: No, no, no.

D: Because they brought him in to interrogate him just like you.

R: Yeah.

D: And they roughed him up a little bit.

R: Yeah.

D: And then they threw him in the same cell with you.

R: Yeah, but my concern was that he was not a good person and they put us together for to hear by microphone what we thought.

D: Sure.

R: But I never, never thought.

D: So he was a good actor.

R: He was a very good actor. I congratulate him. *"Oh, you did a wonderful job. I didn't think that you were."*

D: Okay. This was March 13, 1965 and this is in what town again?

R: This was in the town called *Buey Arriba*. The translation will be cow up, you know, because this was in the mountain, up in the mountains in the region of *Bayamo Oriente, Sierra Maestro*.

D: So this is in 1965, March. Were you in *Havana* then or were you still located in --

R: No, this was in March and I was in *Holguín* as district superintendent. I was moved to *Havana* in June and I move in July of 1965. This was my last experience in *Oriente*.

D: Okay.

R: What was the five and the end of my experience? This was in February of 1967. I was living in *Havana* but as I told you, in January 5, 1967, Dr. Angel Fuster, our Methodist leader, he was participating in some gathering, worldwide Methodist gathering, the World Council of Methodist Churches in Ireland, and after that, he came to the States because there was some gathering working for the Union of the UBS, the United Evangelical Brethren with the Methodist Church and he participate in that gathering. He had in that time, their son and daughter in Miami, and after that meeting that was in Chicago or other big city here in the States, he came to Lakeland and Miami was visiting their children before going back to Cuba. But in January 5, 1967, he was traveling from Lakeland to Miami through the 27 Highway. In that time, the 27 Highway had only one light in each direction. Reverend Geraldo Martinez was driving the car and he was with him in the car. Reverend Martinez had an accident on the Highway 27 to Miami. Then they went to the hospital in some little town and then Fuster was one of the persons who don't have apparently any bad injury. Geraldo broke one of his feet and so. But all of them went to the hospital and then they receive medical care there and they stay at night in that hospital. But at night, Dr. Fuster died. I thought was that he had some internal injuries and then he had some heart problem and he died.

This was a very hard situation because was one important loss for the Cuban Methodist people. We lost all the American missionary, we lost many of the pastors, many of the leaders, we lost the school and scholars, we lost many social work. Then he left with a very bad situation for Cuba on that occasion. Of course, in February, one month later, we planned to have a memorial service in the Church of *Santa Clara*, where he was pastor for many years. Then all the community in *Santa Clara*, of course love Angel Fuster and when we call in one Sunday night, in the time of the regular service, we had the memorial service for him and I was the preacher and we had a lot of other visitors. But when we were beginning this service with a big amount of people, the sanctuary was completely full and there were many other persons in the street, by the window and door, etc., because they cannot have the opportunity to say goodbye to him. When we were beginning the service about 10 or 20 policemen come to the church, finish the service and take all of us who were in the platform and put in jail. They took to the center station of the police and they make one interrogation of each one of us and at midnight, they put us in jail and we spend the night in jail. Then they told us that we can be free by giving money, however you call, bail, and they agree to put free one of them. It was other pastor that was pastor in *Santa Clara* and their own people and then he go out of the jail and put together the money. Then the other morning, he gave me money for all of us and we were put out of the jail. One week after, we had a trial and we were in front of some judge and I was who to speak to the judge. We answer their question and we told him we were having a normal service and the time of the service, the day of week on Sunday, we did not anything against the law because in Cuba, if you like to have a meeting, any kind of meeting, in other day or other time, we must have permission. But we were having this regular service, of course, in that service, we like to remember the life of Dr. Angel Fuster, who was pastor for many years in *Santa Clara* and all the people, even the authority knew him and so. For that reason, there was a big amount of people, but the Methodist Church will undo anything politically and then against the Revolution and you can hear of the Methodist Church in Germany, in Czechoslovakia, in many other communist countries and we are Methodist, we are not politician. We are Christian and only worship the gospel. Then in the end, the judge said, "Okay, you are free." But this was a new kind of experience. But this was a new experience for my life.

D: Also, we'd like to talk today about a gathering in *Buenos Aires* that you attended in 1962?

R: Yes. This was a very important gathering. They called this gathering *Viva la Mision de la Iglesia Metodista in America Latina*, Life and Mission of the Methodist Church in Latin America. This was a meeting organized by the Board of Missions and there were delegations from all the Latin American Methodist Churches. Also there was in that time the bishop here in Florida and officially the bishop of Cuba was the Bishop James W. Henley. Then he was in that meeting and we had a Cuban delegation from two sides. Two or three Cuban Methodist people who lived in Miami, and three of us, myself, Reverend Junior Gomez, and *Dr. Endrika Suelo*, a layman from Cuba, and we were in there representing the other side, the Methodist Cubans that were living in Cuba. This was a great experience for me because this was the first international Methodist gathering that I participate in and I learned a lot about the Methodist Church in different places. And I heard the goal, this challenge and saw that the churches around all Latin America had and we hear some confidence from Methodist people from Europe, India and other areas. This was a great, great blessing experience for me. But what happened when the conference was finished, in that time, we had jet commercial flight between Miami and *Havana*. The Pam American flew in that occasion. Of course, we like to go to *Buenos Aires* through Miami because there was more communication between Miami and all Latin America and also because I like to prophet the occasion to greet other friends and Cuban Methodists. Then we came to Miami and then from Miami to *Buenos Aires* and went back from *Buenos Aires* to Miami but when I was ready to go back to Cuba, the Revolutionary government start one new law, any Cuban citizen who left the country, he need a special permission for to back to Cuba. This was new in the time when I was out of the country. But of course, there were many other pastors and evangelic leaders in the same situation that myself then the leader of the Cuban Council of Evangelical Church in Cuba present one least of all the pastors and leaders of the different churches that were out of Cuba asking for the permission for to back. After two or three days, when they back to the office and receive the answer, the answer was that all of these can have permission for to come but this one not. This was myself. I can tell you that this was the more sad time in all my 78 years. Why? Because I was in Miami and all the other friends, Methodist pastors, laymen were asking me:

“Oh, Armando, you must prophet this occasion, ask your wife and children to come here and be here.”

D: This is your chance to leave. All the way.

R: This is my chance to leave. But I don't think so because I have not only my wife and my children that they can come and unite with me, but I have about 25 or 30 young lay preacher in charge of different churches and so.

D: That you've been working with.

R: I say, *“Oh, God, I don't like to be out, I like to go back.”* But this was about one month and a half. That has been the only occasion that I took some medicine for my nerves.

D: So this was one and a half months that you were stuck in Miami?

R: In Miami. And then waiting for the permits and I call the leader of the country:

“What happened?”

And they said:

“Oh, no, Armando. We will talk about and we will if you like to stay in Miami it’s okay with us but if you like to come back, we will make other application.”

And so:

“Yes, please. Make everything for my permission.”

But the time was going, going. Thanks be to God, in that occasion, in *Costa Rica*, there was Eulalia Cook, one of our great American missionary that work in *Alfalit* in Cuba. When they left Cuba, she and Dr. *Justo Gonzales* and his wife, *Luisa Garcia de Gonzales*, they put in central office in *Alajuela, Costa Rica* and then they began to work the literacy program in all the other Latin American countries, they invite me to go there and I went to *Costa Rica* in the middle of this time and I spend a wonderful week with them speaking about how we distributed the literature all around the rural area of Cuba and I learn all their plan. And then after one week, I came to Miami. Because in that time, I had my passport, one American Visa for four or six years. Then I can come back from the States without any difficulty. But my goal was to go back to Cuba.

There are many experiences in that situation. For example, *Dr. Carlos Perez*, that I will speak about him in some struggle of power, he was the treasurer and the official person from the Board of Mission in Cuba, he live in *Havana* and he visit *Holguín* and he asked to my wife,

“Oh, Alida, what are you thinking about? You must prepare everything with your children and prepare to leave Cuba and went to Miami with your husband.”

But she said:

“No, my husband said that he like to come back and continue the work.”

D: How easy was it to communicate between Miami and your wife at that time?

R: In that time, was very easy.

D: Could you just call them on the phone?

R: Yeah, we call on the phone.

D: So she knew what was going on?

R: Yeah. Three or four times a week, I spoke with her. And so of course, the mail was also very, very good. In one week, we can receive and send letter. But then *Dr. Carlos Perez* met with the 25, 30 young preachers and he told them:

“Well, Armando is in Miami. He will not come back and every one of you must make your circuit and back to your home.”

But all the young people said to him:

“No, Armando told me that he is working for back and we will wait for him here.”

He didn't have any success in his task. Why? My brother, because I will speak about that in the future, but he was only thinking not in the necessity of the Methodist Church in Cuba, he was thinking how to manage the business and to go other place out of Cuba. But my vision and the vision that I put in the life of these young people was different. We like to stay in Cuba, we like to pay the price of our testimony and so and so. We like to remain in Cuba until the last moment. Don't think that we will be martyrs but thinking God will pick up us in the last moment. This was our faith. Then what happened after four or five, six weeks calling to the leader, I told them:

“Oh, please, make other application for my permits, back permits.”

Then they went to this office and they spoke my good wish to back to Cuba. And then they said:

“Well, do you know what happened? There are one person with the name of Armando Rodriguez that we are looking for him because he is doing very bad thing against this Revolution.”

D: Again, the same person that you thought before if they mistook you for?

R: Yeah. But this was the great occasion. They then told the government official:

“Well, we are sure that this is not the man that you are looking for but maybe we are wrong and you are right. But how will you lost this opportunity if you are looking for this person and he like to come back to Cuba, please give to him the back permit and then you can take him back”

D: Now you are back in Cuba

R: Yeah

D: And you are able to get back.

R: I was able to go back and I knew that many government persons were very interested on me and I knew that they interrogated other Methodists asking about myself and what was my work and such. I'd like to speak also...

D: Now, let me ask you one more thing before we move on. So this was after the Bay of Pigs, this event that you are talking about, this would have been after the Bay of Pigs and before the Cuban Missile Crises, correct?

R: Of course, yes

D: So it was that time between the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crises in October of 1962 so that way we can get the time, the context...

R: And of course this meant that this was a very, very hard situation...

D: They were worried, scared...

R: Yeah, of course

D: As you were too...

R: Yeah

D: OK

R: I'd like to speak about other situation inside of the life of the church in Cuba in this time from 1950 to 1962 including this time. We had some trouble of power inside in the Methodist Church. There were two different leaders: one of them was Dr. Angel Fuster whom Bishop Henley had appointed as his Auxiliary Administrator and President of the Cuban Methodist Cabinet, and as I told you, he was a great person and he loved the church and he liked to work for the good of the church. But there was also other pastor, Dr. Carlos Perez, who had been the president of Candler College, a very great and big Methodist college in Havana, and when the government took all the schools and colleges, he was the District Superintendent in Havana, Dr. Fuster was the District Superintendent in Santa Clara, I was the District Superintendent in Oriente, Jose Reyes Monzón was the District Superintendent in Camagüey, Reynaldo Toledo was the District Superintendent in Matanzas District and Dr. Jorge A. León was the District Superintendent in Havana and Pinar del Río. But there was a pretty good struggle of power between Angel Fuster, the Auxiliary Administrator of Bishop Henley and Dr. Carlos Perez, the treasurer and the one in charge of representation to the Board of Mission. Of course, Carlos Perez was thinking in a way of business, the business of the church; Dr. Fuster was thinking in the preaching of the gospel...

D: Spiritual?

R: The spiritual emphasis and so. But we met in Cabinet and every time we had some...

D: Conflict?

R: ...conflict between both of them; and I was suffering because I was in Oriente, very far from Havana and over there we like to go with the church and so, and there was a... a very... difficult time for me, but at least every time I had their permission to do everything that we like in

Oriente. But they said that I was crazy and all the young people that were working with me without money, without any...

D: support?

R: support, they were all a group of crazy people. This was their thing and so, and so, but when I participated in the meetings I was very disappointed, but when I was back in Holguín meeting with our lay leaders, visiting churches and so, there was other spirit and I was very, very happy to be there, very far from Havana and the other situation. Even Carlos Perez, when I was here in Miami waiting for my permission, he sent a message to me: Armando, don't come to Cuba because I received some visitor from the secret police of the Revolution and they asked me about you and what was this group of young people that you have in Oriente. They are very concerned about you and your work and so on; for your safety, don't come back to Cuba.

But of course, I was sure that the will of God was that, and thanks be to Him, I went back to Cuba. Then there was other important event in that period of time: in December of 1963 we had an extraordinary session of the Cuban Annual Conference in Santa Clara. The only matter that we discussed was the application to the general Conference of the Methodist Church in the States that would met in March or April of the following year, 1964, asking to the General Conference of the Methodist Church in the USA to grant us the permission to organize our church in Cuba as an Autonomous Church. Of course, this petition was approved by 99% of our Cuban and lay members of the Annual Conference and we sent this petition to the General Conference in some city here in the States where it was being held in 1964. When Bishop Henley in the name of the Cuban Church presented to the General Conference our application, in that time, Carlos Perez was here in the States--she came before that—and he asked to the General Conference the opportunity to speak against this petition and somebody told me that he said: in this time the Cubans are asking for many thing. The Cuban Revolution leaders are asking to the United States that they leave the Guantanamo base to them and now you have other petition. The Cuban... people, Methodist people in Cuba are asking to grant the permission for the autonomy, and this is not good, because this will be the separation from the Methodist Church in Cuba and the Methodist Church in Florida and you must be loyal to the American missionaries and so, and so, and so... But Bishop Henley answered and said: This was the will of the 99% of the Methodist pastors and layman living in Cuba and I support their application. And then the General Conference approved the permission for us in Cuba to organize as a Methodist Church. After that, we worked very hard writing the Constitution, the ... points of Faith of our Methodist church, and so, and our Discipline and organization as the Autonomous church. Of course, Dr. Angel Fuster did a great work in that way and a group of us contributed in that way and we were working ready to have the Autonomy conference. But, as I told you, in January 5th, 1967 when Dr. Fuster was here he died in an automobile accident in Florida. This was a great impact but we in Cuba, we said: well, if God is with us, even with this great loss we will go ahead in our Church.

D: OK, two questions: one is: by 1963, how much money was coming in from the Unites States still in the way that had been going before? Was that shut off already?

R: This... we received without any difficulty month by month 60% of our budget, but this was until June 1963.

D: OK, so you were receiving money after that point. So this really meant something... this really meant that after that you would not receive any money..., any more voluntarily.

R: Exactamente... exactly. And more than that, we didn't have a Bishop for the ordination of our Cuban pastors.

D: So the Bishops ah... Dr. Short and the others, were not coming any more... they were not able to come any more...

R: No. The last Annual Conference that was presided for an American Bishop was Roy Short in the second term in the Annual conference of 1959. Eh... I would say 1960. 1959 was in Santa Clara when approved the advance plan...

D: Right...

R: and then, in June 1960, was the last Annual Conference that Bishop Short presided in Marianao church, and then, after that, from 1960, well... let me see, I think that after the election of James Henley as Bishop of the Florida conference and Cuban Conference was..., I think in 19... in the end of 1963, he and Dr. Eugene Stubwell, the secretary for Cuba from the Board of Missions, they were able to come to Cuba for a visit and he traveled around Cuba and he had ordination in 1963, but after that we didn't have any other Bishop. For that reason there was a great need to have officially a Bishop in Cuba for the ordination. Of course, after the death of Angel Fuster, Bishop James Henley appointed me as his Executive Administrator for the Cuban Church and President of the Cuban Cabinet, and we were working organized. I must tell you, and be on record, that I am very proud for the Wesleyan organization and the way of work of the Methodist Church. I can tell you that the way of work of the Methodist Church works even in the difficult times. For example, when we had... we needed to appoint a new pastor, the Executive Administrator of the Bishop had the authority to appoint a new pastor, and then in that way, the Methodist Church, even in the very hard situation as was in Cuba, we didn't have any a cephalous organization... we are able to appoint a successor in every...

D: So you were able to..., to carry on...

R: To carry on the work...

D: Now, in this 1963 event, and is it Bishop Henley, challenged Perez and said this is the will of 99% of the Methodist people in Cuba, so that did go forward?

R: Yeah, this was in 1964 in the General Conference.

D: I'm sorry, I'm sorry, 64?

R: 64

D: Now at that time...

R: But in that time Carlos Perez was here in the States without any idea to go back to Cuba...

D: OK, so he was not going back... by that time...

R: No, no, but he liked to have the power even outside Cuba and he liked, he was this, his personality. And every one of us, we have good things and bad things in our life. I am not criticizing him in any way, but, this was the reality. He thought that he had the power even outside Cuba, but Bishop Henley did a great job telling the General Conference: This is the will of the Cuban pastors and lay delegates in Cuba and they are in charge of all the work in Cuba and we must obey their will and they like to be autonomous. And this was a reality.

D: So at that time, I guess everything went to Fuster. He was obviously by that time, with that break, even more recognized as the leader of the church. Would you call him a Bishop?

R: Well, we didn't call him Bishop, but for us...

D: Everybody...

R: ...he was our great...

D: ...your leader...

R: ...Bishop, our great leader... even in February of 1968, when we, after his death in January 1967, when the Autonomous Conference was gathered in Havana, the first action that they took was to elect posthumally...

D: Posthumously...

R: Dr. Angel Fuster as the first Cuban Bishop, and after that they elected me as the first active Bishop of the Methodist Church in Cuba. This was a very great honor in recognition of his great leadership and his faithful life. And then, after that, Dr. Carlos Perez was outside, was here in the States, and he wrote to me a letter telling me, Oh, I don't agree with this election, because if you will, you must be the first Bishop. Why? Because he was still, because he said, the person with whom he had struggle of power, he was recognized and he didn't ...

D: He was jealous. Even in death with recognition to his rival

R: But these are the realities that we had and we must understand, even in the church that is founded by human beings, in the same way that the mother of two of Jesus' disciples

D: Brothers

R: Brothers, asked to be the first one, the human

D: instinct

R: instinct works in that way. Even myself, I need to be very careful, because in some way, my human instinct must put me in the same way. For that reason I mention that but I don't criticize, because this is the human reality in the life.

Ok, eh, (voice in the background)

D: OK we're, we are back on now.

R: OK. Well, we are finishing our recording this time, but before the end, I would like to share with you some of my philosophy, my principles in my life as leader of the church in a very difficult political and philosophical situation in Cuba. Of course, I participated in Cuban politics in the time before, with the Orthodox party with Eduardo Chivás, and this was a very good experience for me, because I was clear that my task was not philosophical, political, economical, or any other aspect of the life. God called me to be His servant. God called me to be an ambassador of the kingdom of God in Cuba, and for that reason from the beginning I had 3 clear ideas about what I will not do. In the first place, I said to myself: I don't like to do anything that will not be in accord with the Bible and with God and his faith; second, not only I will not do anything that was not approved by the will of God, but I don't like to say anything that was not approved by God's will, and the Holy Spirit. But more than that, I don't like to do, I don't like to say, but I don't like to think anything that will not be in accordance with the will of God and with the word of God. Why? Because I like to maintain my mind, my spirit, my thinking only concentrated in the spiritual matters, in the Bible message, in the prayer spirit and all that was agreeable before that. I thank God for that principle, because in that way I feel free to be in conferences, in meetings with the government leaders, I was free to do my task of reconciliation between the divided families that we had in Cuba, some members of the family were in favor of the Revolution, other members were against the Revolution, but we go to them without any, eh... being in any side

D: With any, without bias

R: Yeah, only to be an instrument of reconciliation and love and understanding. And for that reality, thanks be to God, in all my time as leader of the church, we had a monolithical and united Methodist people in Cuba.

D: Monolithical?

R: Monolithical. Yeah. Because we received as pastors, as members of the church, people, in spite of their political or philosophical thinking. If they like to be Methodist, Christian Methodist, and to work for the extension of the kingdom of God in Cuba, without any political personal position, they were welcome to our churches, and so, and in my cabinet, with all my time as Bishop, I had some representation of all the positions and the different opinions in the church. Because we liked to have one united church with the contribution of all persons, no

matter what was their personal position philosophical, or ideological position. We only saw their faith and their decision to work from the extension of the kingdom of God in Cuba.

D: OK then, we'll conclude with that and we'll pick up with this next time.

R: OK. Thanks.